Book review: Getting the Most Out of a Trade Show from Successful Boothmanship and Booth Design

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1. INTRODUCTION
Klaus Solberg Søilen is Associate Professor at Halmstad University, Sweden. Regarding exhibition marketing, the author has been working in the field since 1996, when he first started with KPMG, a professional service company.

Trade shows are a field which is not that well investigated as other marketing fields, therefore a book review of this newly presented course book is necessary. The book review aims to investigate the findings and relevance in the author’s result and statements. It investigates the influence of Boothmanship and Booth Design on trade shows presented by the author. The book supports the readers or those who are interested in the field of trade show to have an initial feeling of the content of the book as well as the quality of the book. It can also contribute to the phase of literature review of researchers within the field. The book review is organized as follows, first, an overview of the book with summary of main content as well as of each chapter is presented. Secondly, the quality of the book in terms of scientific attributes is discussed. In the end an overall evaluation of the book is presented.

2. GENERAL SUMMARY
The sophistication and complexity of trade shows have increased over the last 20 years. Trade shows can be considered as an industry, not only as a marketing tool. It can work to serve the purpose of information gathering and analysis, i.e. marketing intelligence. Built on the exhibitor’s perspective, the book’s main focus is exhibition behavior of the participants. The purposes of the book were to show how to achieve successful boothmanship and booth design at trade shows (i.e. the art of selling) and surveys the research literature in the field. The book provides options for how to organize the exhibition as well as the booth and how to make it efficiently and successfully by presenting managerial challenges and sales behaviour required.

The book is produced in order to fit an international audience rather than any specific market and points out cultural elements as well as citing examples from trade shows around the world. It is mainly set up to work as a university textbook for students with specialization in the field of event marketing or especially in the subject of exhibition marketing. The book might even be of interest for those who are active in the field of trade shows. It provides the reader with a lot of guidance on what to do and what to avoid, but it differs from existing theoretical literature. In general, the ultimate advice of the author is planning, in terms of knowing who the customers are in order to know how to go after them; knowing what to say
at the trade show, i.e. the objectives; and how to communicate what needs to be offered with customers, in order to achieve trade show success.

3. BRIEF SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Introduction
At the beginning of the book, the author gives a general introduction about trade shows, which is a function, studied under the heading of exhibition marketing. Trade show intelligence is an aspect of exhibition marketing focusing on information gathering and analysis, which is seen as the consequence of the information age and need to take full advantage of the information. Newly established perspective of trade shows suggests that it should not only be viewed as a marketing activity for exchanging information between exhibitors and visitors or personal selling but also as an information edge leading to sales increase and greater profit margin. Effectively gathering and managing information connected to pre-, at- and post-tradeshow, i.e. trade show intelligence, and becomes important for marketing investment in the long run. Nowadays, organizations have paid more attentions and higher evaluations for tradeshows and more investment followed. Some comparison between trade show and other forms of media or marketing activities, such as exhibitions, fairs, expos, consumer shows, association shows are also made and make the definition, function and differentiation of trade show stand out. Especially, the important role of technology in the development of trade show is stated as a complementary means for trade show instead of replacement, making contribution to art-show selling. The trend of using more technical solution in trade show is presented, such as virtual trade shows, or hybrid events, combining real and virtual solutions, raising new problems, how to stimulate human behaviour using virtual solutions and how to manage effectively such combinations in order to achieve efficiency and highest value/benefits from trade shows.

In the introduction, history of trade show development is briefly summarized, i.e. the establishment of first modern trade fair, different kind of fairs throughout the history, a drift of trade show from goods transactions to information and communication, the benefits and true values of trade show, the emergence of trade show intelligence gathering. Current status, fluctuation and trend of trade show in terms of growth and focused areas, exhibition centres and major players within this industry in comparison with the previous decades are also briefly presented. New challenges for trade show industry as well as importance of effective management of trade shows as a new approach of sales and marketing and powerful marketing tool are emphasized. From a macro perspective, trade shows are a major concentration of businesses, media, and customers, all taking place at particular place and time. “They have also become indicators of seasonal trends and a barometer for industrial and economic activity” (P. xxxvii). Trade show costs are in general good investments. Budget for trade show can also indicate the expectation for economic growth. The author’s hope is that even trade show is seen as not suited for university-level of course, because of lack of theory and rigour and hence been neglected by the study of marketing in the past, this book will place some persuasion on sceptical readers.

Chapter 1 – Integrated marketing communications IMC
In chapter one, the author points out the need to have an exhibition marketing plan or trade show plan as a part of advertising and sales and marketing strategy, since a trade show can be a good laboratory for marketing research and important part of product development stage, facilitating the test and modification (if necessary) of the product before its first launch in the market. Exhibition management or exhibition marketing can be regarded as part of the study
of marketing and sales. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the benefit of combining both functions of trade show, entertainment and professional marketing, which helps organizations make progress in the art and science of successful trade show participation; the influence of analysis of collected data on the future strategic planning. The main content of this chapter also includes: return on trade show investments, basing on the concept of ROI (return on investment); the three phases of trade show (i.e. pre-show, at-show and post-show), each with its own objectives, specific requirements and strategies; as well as exhibition management, which is a larger and broader topic than exhibition marketing, including legal issues and risk management, contracts. The main focus of having a trade show plan is continued by the author with the planning documents: marketing plan, exhibition marketing plan, exhibition schedule and exhibition manual, what should be included in such documents. The chapter presents the connection between trade shows and marketing which is integrated marketing communications (IMC) since the company needs to be sure that the exhibition is thoroughly integrated with the rest of our marketing activities and exhibition is one of the milestones stated in the marketing plan, along with other things.

Chapter 2 – Booth staff behaviour

In chapter two the author presents different kinds of trade show participants and their behaviour at the trade show. The chapter presents useful options for appropriate and professional booth staff behaviour, since the skills of people at the booth are an area of exhibition management. Lack of preparation or practice for booth staff might result in boothmanship failures. Trade shows is a performance, where booth staffs have to practise two kinds of behaviour, selling and non-selling/promotional. The chapter stresses the importance of building relationship in doing business, from the perspective of Nordic school of marketing compared with Anglo-Saxon school of marketing. Social event can be used to build relationship and there are a number of types of social event to choose from. The chapter presents a number of advices to have in mind when organizing social events.

Small details are important to evaluate at trade shows, such as dress codes can be of great impact. Small things can create unnecessary confusion or misled interpretation. Successful planning can help with the stressful environment in trade show. A trade show consists of various participants, including exhibitors, visitors, suppliers, show organizers and people of influence. Different visitors will play different roles which can exert different influence on the decision making process of a purchase. It is important for exhibitors to identify and evaluate different kinds of visitors. In this chapter, the author relates to some of the matters relevant to boothmanship, such as product lifecycles and giveaways, technological aids, complaints and stress at trade show and international boothmanship. In some cases complaints and stress arise at a trade show, this should be handled in a calm way and there is no need to attract more focus to a disappointed visitor. Some tips are given to energize visitors again or reduce their weariness. Trade shows are highly stressful environments so booth staffs should know how to adapt to and reduce the visitor’s stress level. It is also important to know all the staff members as well as co-workers in order for everything to be as smooth as possible.

The rules of communication are strait forwards. Exhibition manager is the company’s representative at trade show, reporting back about the outcome of the exhibition to senior management. Exhibitors not only need to have basic trade show knowledge but also to have resolved their own personal problems so as to be able to give the other person our full attention. Best salespeople are the ones who can show most empathy, feeling what the other person is feeling, that they truly liked the customers. The author also presents key success
factors for international professional conference today as well as key success factors for marketing of international academic conferences, which can be part of trade show. Timetable for staffs should be filled with various activities as chances to break free and enjoy a change of pace.

The second chapter provides a lot of relevant rules and tips for the exhibitor manager, and exhibition staff in order to succeed at a trade show. It also reveals guidance in specific areas and present tips on how to handle certain situations that can arise during the stages of a trade show. It covers behaviours from everyone participating or that may participate in a trade show and how to deal with different things regarding specific participants, and shows the great importance on how important it actually is to be aware of these things. Booth staff is referred to as the software side of a trade show.

Chapter 3 - Booth design and marketing materials
In chapter three the author presents booth design and marketing materials, which is the hardware side of a trade show. The booth design is essential in order to capture visitor’s interest, the design can determine whether visitors will enter your booth or a competitor's booth. Each booth only got a short amount of time to attract visitors otherwise they will just pass to the next one. In order to draw attention, the booth should be unique, the five senses should be included to maximize the visitors experience. The design is regulated by rules from the trade show, which do not give the designers completely free hands, as well as the location. Publishing your location can increase the number of visitors as well as keeping good contact to the organizers in order to upgrade the location.

It is a good idea to let visitors try out the company’s products if it is possible or present them visually on a screen or similar. If the booth can be used to different activities it is a good idea in order to decrease costs. The author also states that marketing materials can be used to support the sales of a product or service it is a good idea to combine with information regarding the company. To plan some kind of competition for visitors can increase their experience of your booth and attract more visitors as well as make you stand out from other exhibitors.

Chapter 4 – Pre-show planning
In chapter four the most important parts before attending a trade show are presented by the author. Everything needs to be planned before the trade show, since there is no possibility for changes when it starts. This part is the most essential one for the whole trade show, it creates the base for how well the company will succeed with the show. Here companies focus on which show or shows they should attend, common is to choose a trade show with narrowly targeted visitors. The budget comes from the marketing budget for most companies but it is good to establish a budget for each trade show anyway, which can build on previous years’ numbers modified to changes in general price level. In order to be well prepared a checklist make sure that everything is done and in time.

Before the show the staff needs to be trained, which takes about four to six months, some gifts and materials needs to be ordered and decided as well. Important to have in mind is that information must be adjusted to different visitors.

Chapter 5 – Post-show follow-up
After the show some follow-up activities, which can be divided into follow-up and assessment, are suggested according to the author in chapter five. At this stage companies should make sales calls and get in contact with customers from the trade show. Everyone does
not like these calls and some even get sales calls anxiety. But these feelings can be overcome. It is also time for putting together a post show report for managers, colleagues and show staff as well. The management will also want a post show evaluation. These things can be used to evaluate the current year and prepare for next year. The time after a trade show is often hectic and a shock for the participants, therefore it can be hard to get started.

Chapter 6 – Trade show intelligence

In the last chapter of the book the author presents trade show intelligence since trade shows are an activity of knowledge sharing. At the shows companies have the opportunity to gather intelligence, what is needed to know, about competitors. This information can be used in order to improve the competitive intelligence. Larger companies have the possibility of getting a press pass for their journalists which will provide them with more interesting things at the show. There is also a possibility for staff at the trade show to observe competitors booths, this will provide estimated knowledge about how competitors believe new products will result and which competition we can expect. Focus groups can be used in order to compare the staffs’ experiences from the trade show, better quality of the analysis will provide a better value from the conclusions.

The company might want to know what the visitors thought of the exhibit, a questionnaire is a good way to collect this information. The information from visitors can be used in order to investigate if something needs to or can be changed until next trade show. Managers want knowledge from the trade show, not information, in order to affect the company’s strategy.

4. BOOK REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The book provides the reader with important do’s and don’ts for a successful boothmanship and booth design as well as how to structure the work before and after a trade show, and evidence presented gives the reader a clear structure on the conclusion of the book. The author employs different perspective from different schools of thought, such as Nordic school of marketing, Anglo-Saxon school of marketing, old school of trade-show marketing versus new approach, exhibitor’s perspective, macro perspective versus micro perspective, historical perspective, different theory, etc. to distinguish, contrast and support his argument, to secure the validity or reliability of his argument.

The purpose of the book was to explain how to achieve successful boothmanship and booth design at a trade show from the perspective of marketing exhibition and the author succeeds with presenting relevant points. Søilen presents important factors in boothmanship as well as booth design combined with other variables that may impact the result of a trade show.

Introduction

At the beginning of the book, the author clearly defines a research problem, stating that there is little research on trade show available, even if marketing is a investigated subject. Also, few studies are carried out by academics, interest groups have carried out the majority of current studies on trade shows with personal opinions influencing the result. Furthermore, trade show organizers also face a number of current challenges, for example, globalization tends to favour virtual solutions, or the trade shows’ value or benefits returned to investment has been questioned. Challenges raise new problems, how to stimulate human behaviour, especially with presence of virtual solutions and how to manage trade shows effectively in order to
achieve efficiency and highest value/benefits from trade shows. The author presents the existing research gap within the field, stating that Kotler for example only mentioned a few words of the topic in the book *Principles of Marketing*, and in the same time trade shows has expanded and shown to be highly significant.

Then the author clearly states that the objectives of the book are to survey the research literature in the field and to point out how successful boothmanship and booth design can be achieved. Also the author aims to write a course book for students worldwide who intends to specialize in event marketing, particularly exhibition marketing, as well as a guide for those who have it as their profession. In this way, the author gives the readers a clear direction as well as what expectation they can have before reading the book.

While arguing for his opinion, Søilen employs literature review to make comparison or contrast which helps make the argument outstanding and persuasive. For example, good arguments are backup with a relevant theory framework, such as the importance in long term of tradeshow as suggested by other authors: Gopalakrishna, Lilien, Williams, and Sequeira (1995), Sharland and Balogh (1996), or the need of intelligence gathering by O’Hara (1993). However, since there is limitation of articles or theoretical references by academics, as he stated, results and findings of researches carried out by interest groups were used as well.

**Methodology**

The methodology is clearly described in the preface of the book, here the author presents the method behind the book, so as participating in a number of trade shows and studying existing theories. The limitations of the study is clearly stated, since there are a little amount of studies available in the field even if marketing as itself is very investigated. Trade shows have been paid more attention from organizations and others that put their own personal points into the subject.

The author uses books and articles of the field as reference as well as support for the arguments. Søilen also use statistics or data from trusted sources such as trade show interest groups, Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI), Association of the German Trade Fair Industry (AUMA), which have been having high credibility and great contribution in the field. Several mini case studies are presented, such as “Booths That Make Visitors Even More Weary” of Sam Sung South Korea, at CES Trade show. Result of survey research from trusted sources is utilized to back up his arguments, such as Centre for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), besides UFI and AUMA. Søilen’s own observation from working as a consultant at various trade shows, supports statements and/or suggestions as well. Experience of taking part in a number of different international trade shows with dozens of companies for over a decade, initially with smaller IT companies and with Swedish furniture Manufacturers have been serving as a fruitful source of evidence. Observations of trade shows around the world, including many the largest exhibitions, such as Salone Internazionale del Mobile, and the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) at Las Vegas, make the study result transferable since it is applicable internationally which gives the sample size a high validity and reliability.

**Theoretical validity**

The theoretical function of the book consists of validity and relevance since others have cited the book as for example Proszowska (2015) and Singh, Shukla and Kalafatis (2017). This proves that the findings still is relevant and conclusions are still valid for the field. The book
is quite new so its relevance can change if the habit of trade show cultures change but for now it seems to be relevant compared to newer studies.

The author makes arguments basing on different perspectives within different schools of thought, different approaches which have been widely acknowledged, such as instrumental and relational approach to marketing. The author still approaches the conventional perspective to marketing on which he bases to address the problem, starts arguments and then employs new perspective to further develop arguments. The Nordic school of thought suggests unconventional view about marketing, which were heavily based on Anglo-Saxon school of thought (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Later researchers, such as Grönroos, Kosdull and Gummerus (2015) and Kowalkowski (2015), investigating Nordic school stills confirm that Nordic School thinking emphasizes on interactions in relationships and networks, and relationship marketing has been recognized as one of the key focuses discussed within the Nordic School of marketing thought. Among the others, these could be the indications that the theoretical validity of the book is still of high extent, and so as of his findings regarding relationship building in trade show in particular.

**Results**

The book provides students in the field of exhibition marketing with knowledge since it gives an overview of important aspects for trade shows. It also teaches how to prepare for a trade show and which the main important things to keep in mind are. The results fulfill the purpose of the book and give evidences on how to succeed in trade shows. Some evidences are still accurate and valid till now. However, there are some statements or numbers need to be updated with new facts and new statistics. For example, regarding ranking of the world’s largest exhibition centres, or the statistics of trade show growth in particular area, which can differ from years to year, can be updated. Since a lot of the data is from real life experiences it presents a great validity of the book. Real experiences are reliable in this area since it is proven to work for companies at trade shows.

**Discussion**

The author presents differentiation between findings and the suggestions of the prior research. In terms of communication with visitors, for example, anyone who comes to our booth is a potential ambassador and the booth staffs should classify them and adjust communication accordingly. Non-buyer, or people of influence, a class of visitor at trade show should not be neglected or ignored and booth staff should have appropriate communication with them. This is in line with the new approach of trade show marketing, which is different from the old school of trade show marketing suggesting that non-buyers are just wasting time of the booth staffs, which indicates that no attention should be paid to this group. Building relationship at trade show is also doing business or selling, which is different from the perspective of Instrumental approach to marketing: associated with Philip Kotler and the Anglo-Saxon school of marketing. Rather his suggestion aligns with relational approach, associated with Evert Gummesson and the Nordic school. The best way of selling a product is not to seem to be selling at all, by building relationship, the organization is going to sell more in long term since building relationship is building trust and it is understandable that “We buy from them because we like them”. Social event can employ to build relationship and by selling the social event, the organization is also selling their products, as proposed by the author.

According to the author, tactical goals tend to dominate managers’ thinking instead of long term thinking. However, that does not seem to be true with all small and medium size companies as the author proposes. According to Network theory, for smaller organizations,
their development particularly tends to be dependent on relationships with others (Larson, 1991; Axelsson & Easton, 1992). Future strategic options or managerial decision making are influenced and often dictated by the nature of relationships built with others in the market (Axelsson & Easton, 1992). Entrepreneurial companies are often small in size and the entrepreneurs often go to trade show to build relationships with other players in the market, with potential customers, etc. in order to explore and exploit market opportunities as well as use such network as key competitive capability (Johanson and Vahlne, 2003; Gibson, III & Buckley, 2014; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Coviello & Munro, 1993; Coviello & Munro, 1995). Therefore, the tactic goals at trade show may be very much and very well integrated in the long-term strategic goal of their company, especially when competition increases. And for entrepreneurs, even sales tactic goals at short term do not seem to dominate the long term strategic goals. In other words, entrepreneurial small and medium size enterprises often seem to prioritize trade shows rather than focus on sales. At this point, the writers of the review are not aligned with the saying of the author.

At the end of the book, the author implies possible future study areas. Being aware that today the technology is developing rapidly and used successfully and the presence of virtual shows threatens the fate of trade shows in the future, further research may be needed. Also, the author states that trade shows are preferred in industries where the impact of a specific market is important, e.g. in telecoms, and it becomes more and more important in B2B marketing rather than B2C. Accordingly, it can be indicated that further research can have focus on the development or trend of trade show in such industry or area of marketing. Since the field of trade show is still little studied, the author encourages further studies to contribute to get an overview of the industry.

According to the author, what still holds true in the future is that planning plays important part in the success of trade shows. In general, the lesson is an organization and its people should know their customers to know what they should go after, what they want to say in trade show and what to do to communicate their offer with customers, to achieve success. By suggesting this, Søilen gives the book some extra credibility by giving all these advices and not only stating a handful of them.

Regarding the language use and structure of the book, from the standpoint of students or those who intends to enter the field for professional career, the book is easy to read thanks to concise but simple language use. The author presented key words in italic, which makes it easier for the reader to know what is important and also exam, him or her self on how much they know, this is a clever approach to present essential things from the book. However, the structure may needs reconsideration since Chapter two is quite much longer than the other ones, even though it discusses the focus of the book. For example, the trade show participants and behaviours related directly to them can be put in one chapter. The other indirectly related matters such as complaints and stress at trade show, international boothmanship, can be in another chapter. This gives a better look of the structure and avoids the tiredness of readers. The book contains a lot of useful advice in order to manage and achieve appropriate behaviours of the booth staffs in regard to different trade show participants as well as related matters happening at trade show, which to a high extent facilitate the reader’s’ process knowledge retrieving and management of trade show industry. International readers also may recognize the differences in terms of culture, language, communication approach, etc. present in trade show and acknowledge the respective recommendation for behaviours at trade show.

5. CONCLUSION
To conclude, the book shows the importance of boothmanship and booth design as key success factor of a trade show. Overall, the book is one of the high-quality publications in marketing category, in terms of practical aspect, such as useful advice for behaviours of booth staffs at trade show in order to have a high return on trade show investment, as well as surveying the research literature in the field. It can serve as a handbook for those who sit at university or at work. It also can be stimulation for academic book writing in the field of trade show industry. The structure of the book is presented in an order that is easy for the reader to follow.

We, as authors of this review, agree with the findings and result by Søilen. The author presents information regarding exhibition marketing, trade show intelligence as well as booth design and boothmanship that is of high relevance and makes good contributions to university learnings and trade show practice. The authors of this review believe that this book can to a great extent facilitate to achieve success of trade show for a company that study and adapt the key findings and believes if this works. Eventually, companies will be able to have high return on trade show investment and turn trade show to a valuable asset. Mostly we argue for that this book can bring advantages if it is applied and seriously taken into practice compared to competitors that do not possess knowledge presented in this book.

6. References


