An Analysis of the Selected Aspects of Exhibitors’ Preparations for Participation in Trade Fair Based on Surveys of the Enterprises Taking Part in Krakow Fair Events

Summary

The paper presents the results of questionnaire surveys carried out among exhibitors participating in trade events in Krakow, concerning the selected areas of their preparation process for taking part in trade fairs. A review of the literature dealing with the description of the pre-show activities’ role in the management process of trade fair participation was the starting point for the surveys. Empirical studies allowed for defining the trade fair goals of the exhibitors and establishing the ways of preparing the personnel of the stand for the attainment of these objectives. In the summing up section, suggestions for improving the examined areas were presented.

Key words: trade fairs, exhibitors, pre-show activities.

JEL codes: D22, L29, M39

Introduction

Nowadays, customers’ approach to buying is changing. In the past, the very purchase of a product was most important, while today the experience accompanying the purchase is growing in importance, also with regard to the manufactured goods market (Proszowska 2015; Rinallo, Borghini, Golhetto 2010). This change entails the necessity of developing the sales offer and the associated of marketing communication tools, including, inter alia, participation in trade shows.

The aim of the paper is to analyse selected preparation areas of exhibitors participating in trade fairs in Krakow and to establish the correlations between these areas. The paper presents the results of the surveys of 570 exhibitors from trade fairs taking place in Krakow in the years 2015-2016. The research was intentionally limited to one trade fairs centre which is not a leading one in Poland in order to be able to analyse the process of managing the trade fairs participation in the context of an event of an average reach, and not in the case of most popular trade fairs in Poland. This study was of an exploratory nature and was done to organize the image of trade shows. The obtained results were used to form suggestions for ways of improving the preparation process for the participation in trade fairs in order to facilitate the achievement of the assumed objectives.
Process of exhibitors’ preparation for trade fairs

The process of managing one’s participation in trade fairs includes an analysis of the situation, defining the trade fairs goals, determining the trade fairs strategy, planning the marketing tools used during the trade shows, the execution of the planned activities as well as the control and evaluation of the participation in the trade fairs (Kirchgeorg, Springer, & Kästner 2009). In the time-based approach, the process of participation in trade shows consists of three stages: pre-show activities, activities during the show and the post-show period (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995; Seringhaus & Rossom 1998). Each of these stages is directly relevant for the results of the trade fairs participation; hence, the aim should be to optimize all these areas of exhibitors’ activity. Most frequently, within the framework of the pre-show activities, the following can be distinguished: defining trade fairs goals, pre-show promotion and training (preparation) of the personnel for the trade event (Çobanoğlu & Turaeva 2014). It is equally crucial that these activities are consistent and that they enable the achievement of the assumed goals connected with the participation in the trade event as well. Particular activities and trade-show costs are frequently substitutable (e.g. a larger personnel can be substituted with a smaller group provided that its members are sufficiently well-trained). Generally, the exhibitor delegating personnel to work at trade shows needs to make sure that the selected group is best prepared for the execution of the defined objectives. Depending on these objectives, a verification of sales, marketing, technical and other competencies has to be carried out (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995).

The main exhibitors’ goals realized through a trade fairs stand are as follows (Rinallo et al. 2010): product presentation (as a rule, exhibitors devote approximately 60% of the rented space to this aim), professional interaction of the personnel with attendees (up to 34% of the stand area) and socializing with other participants of the trade shows (about 6% of the stand area). All these activities require the members of the team responsible for the realization of the trade shows objectives to display relationship-building skills, the capability of adequately presenting the exhibitor’s offer and being more persuasive when encouraging the customer to purchase the goods or services on offer than usually in the course of the daily operations of a given enterprise, because visitors can directly compare how these activities are executed by competing exhibitors. An effective personnel member must be fully aware of the goals the personnel is expected to achieve, must be able to use the relevant tools and must be willing to engage in working at the stand (Engblom 2014, pp. 28-30). The stand personnel is also expected to be able to make decisions acting under the pressure of time and of the volatile character of the trade event (Yuksel & Voola 2010).

1 In the past, trade fairs results were assessed on the basis of two dimensions, i.e. as the sales- and non-sales-oriented (Shoham 1992). New categories for assessment were systematised by (Hansen 1999), who proposed the following dimensions of evaluation: sales related, information-gathering, image-building, motivation, and relationship-building activities. These categories were later verified and developed by other researchers (Çobanoğlu, Turaeva 2014; Skallerud 2010).
Research method and the analysed group

The research was conducted during trade events organised in Krakow\(^2\) in the period from October 2015 to June 2016. When selecting the sample, exhibitors of trade shows featuring typical consumer goods were excluded as the mass character of such events makes it impossible to carry out questionnaire surveys. Moreover, in the literature, the prevailing opinion is that trade fairs play a more significant role with regard to the marketing communication of industrial establishments (Golfetto & Rinallo 2015, p. 42). The research examined 570 exhibitors, whose opinions were collected by means of distributing direct questionnaires among them during trade events (the questionnaire surveys were also accompanied by interviews with the respondents). Selected aspects of the process of exhibitors’ preparation for trade fairs held in Krakow as well as the trade fairs objectives assumed by the exhibitors were analysed, assuming that these objectives were oriented at the activities strictly connected with the presentation at the trade fairs.

The examined enterprises were mostly rather small-sized\(^3\) and, on average, they employed from 3 to 4 persons at the stand (the variable “number of the stand crew members”; \(m_e = 3, \; Q_3 = 4\) persons). The surveyed entities were mostly founded around 1999\(^4\), and their first participation in trade fairs was dated in 2005 on average (2004, 947; \(m_e = 2008, \; Q_1 = 1999, \; Q_3 = 2013\)). The number of trade shows in which the surveyed entities had taken part as exhibitors in the year preceding the research was 5 (5.233; \(m_e = 3, \; Q_1 = 2, \; Q_3 = 6\)). The average stand rented by the examined subjects covered the area of nearly 18 m\(^2\) (17.82 m\(^2\)), but the distribution of this variable also is not symmetrical (\(m_e = 12\) m\(^2\) whereas \(Q_1 = 8\) m\(^2\) and \(Q_3 = 18\) m\(^2\)) as most stands were small and employed small teams.

A weak correlation was observed between the time of the first participation in trade fairs and the overall number of the trade fairs in which a given company had participated as an exhibitor in the preceding year (the Pearson’s coefficient of linear correlation was \(r = -0.218584\), significant with \(p < 0.05\)), which suggests that a proportion of companies participating in trade shows in the subsequent years reduce the number of the shows they take part in. One of the possible reasons might be that companies more carefully verify the usefulness of their participation in particular types of trade shows with regard to the realization of their business objectives.

Results of research of the exhibitor preparation for the participation in trade fairs

In the research process concerned, the following areas of the preparation of enterprises for the participation in trade fairs were distinguished: defining the trade objectives, sources of information on potential opportunities to present one’s offer at trade fairs, criteria for the

\(^{1}\) These were the following trade shows: SyMas 2015, Maintenance 2015, KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2015, 4INSULATION 2015, Energy Efficiency in Industry EFE, Mobile-IT 2016, Krakdent 2016, EuroTab 2016.

\(^{2}\) For the variable “the number of the company’s employees” \(m_e = 21\) employees, and \(Q_1 = 50\).

\(^{3}\) For the variable “the year the company was founded” \(m_e = 1999\), and \(Q_3 = 2008\).
selection of the stand crew members for trade fairs and the methods of preparing the stand crew for trade shows. The aim of the research was to establish the degree to which these efforts are optimal considering the attainment of the assumed trade fairs goals of the examined exhibitors. The expected trade fairs goals most frequently assumed by the surveyed exhibitors were: an increase in the sales volume (indicated by 384 respondents) and looking for new contractors (346) (Table 1).

### Table 1

**Key trade fairs goals of the surveyed exhibitors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most frequently declared trade fairs objectives</th>
<th>Number of exhibitors declaring a particular trade fairs objective*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>increase in the sales volume following the trade fairs</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking for new contractors: suppliers or customers</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation of new products or technologies</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase in the market share</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improving the company’s image in the market</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship building with customers</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>products sale at the trade fairs</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (multiple choice question)

Source: own research.

A proper choice of trade shows is essential for the subsequent achievement of the trade fairs objectives, and therefore the respondents were asked to answer the question (Figure 1) concerning the sources of information they utilize when analysing the possibilities of taking part in trade fairs.

The surveyed exhibitors indicated their own experience of participating in trade fairs and invitations from trade fairs organisers as the main information source of the opportunity to participate in trade fairs. In view of a limited experience of the respondents related to their trade fairs participation (for the variable “time of the first participation in trade fairs”, \( m_e = 2008, Q_3 = 2013 \)), it can be doubted if they are able to make the optimal decision with regard to it. Moreover, trade fairs organisers’ invitations which are not verified on the basis of other market information sources might result in random choices of the trade shows venue. What should be recommended is paying more attention to customers’ opinions as well as to the actions undertaken by other entrepreneurs within a given branch of industry, especially taking into account the expected trade fairs objectives which assume relationships with the existing and potential customers, business competitors and other stakeholders.

The selection of information sources can influence the opinions of potential exhibitors about their participation in particular trade shows. Exhibitors operating in more developed
markets indicate (Yuksel & Voola 2010) that one of the most significant criteria for their choice of a trade event is its reputation in the market. It seems that respondents make use of so scarce information when making their choices about trade events to participate in that they are not able to properly assess the reputation of the assessed exhibition venues.

Figure 1
Information sources concerning the opportunity to participate in trade fairs utilised by the examined exhibitors* (response rate)

![Information sources chart]

* (multiple choice question)
Source: own research.

On the basis of investigating the relationship between the level of exhibition activity of the exhibitors and particular elements of their preparation for trade shows, it can be concluded that trade fairs experience of the exhibitors enables them to streamline the pre-show procedures. The relationship between the time of their first participation in a trade event and the utilization of information sources about a trade event, such as intensive Internet browsing (Spearman’s coefficient; \( r_s = 0.288536 \)) and own experience (\( r_s = 0.152410 \)), is one of the factors confirming this opinion. From these results it can be inferred that those companies which have been participating in trade events for a longer period of time not only use their own experience or other basic information sources as communication tools but also look for additional ones.

Among the trade fairs objectives indicated by the exhibitors, the tasks connected with the consecutive stages of the sales process seem to prevail. The effective performance of

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1. All the mentioned correlation coefficients are statistically significant at \( p < 0.05 \).
2. Some measurement scales of the analysed variables are nominal scales.
these tasks requires proper preparation and specific competencies of the stand personnel. An analysis of the methods of preparing employees for the participation in trade fairs (including trainings) and of the criteria for the selection of the stand crew members from among all the employees of a given enterprise indicates a limited interest of the exhibitors in a proper preparation of employees for the realization of the trade fairs objectives.

The exhibitors regarded the “technical know-how of the product” (Table 2) to be the most significant personnel selection criterion, which is fully understandable, considering the technological complexity of most products the exhibitors’ business activity is based on. Still, the observed lack of attention to networking skills or employees’ knowledge of sales techniques is rather surprising in terms of the objectives to be achieved as a result of particular trade shows. Moreover, more than one fifth of the exhibitors admitted to not using any particular criteria for the selection of the trade fairs personnel, justifying this fact by mentioning the small size of their company and limited total number of employees, which, indeed, might have resulted in the lack of choice.

Table 2
Basic criteria for the selection of the trade fairs personnel used by the examined exhibitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for the selection of the fair trade personnel</th>
<th>Declared number of exhibitors using these criteria*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number of cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical know-how of the product</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship-building skills</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of sales techniques</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of marketing issues</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extremely attractive appearance</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of concrete selection criteria</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(multiple choice question)
Source: as in Table 1.

Over 40% of the examined respondents state that they do not organise any additional trainings for those employees who will work at a trade fairs stand and the highest popularity is enjoyed by trainings related to the technical know-how of a given product. Obviously, it can be assumed that the employees of the examined subjects are highly qualified, and therefore they do not need such trainings, but it raises doubts as to if this result is not the outcome of neglecting the role of the personnel during trade events. The achievement of goals like “looking for new contractors.” (in close proximity to the competitors) requires prior preparation and a number of different competencies. A lack of exhibitors’ attention to training employees who represent the company at trade fairs is likely to result in a low level of the achievement of trade fairs goals.
Table 3

Trainings for the trade fairs personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of training</th>
<th>Exhibitors’ statements*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number of cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related to the know-how of the product</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related to sales techniques</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related to self-presentation techniques</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of special preparation in the form of trainings</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(multiple choice question)
Source: as in Table 1.

The conducted analysis proved the existence of a correlation between the trade shows objectives defined as “improving the company’s image in the market” and the personnel selection criterion defined as “extremely attractive appearance” (Spearman’s coefficient; \( r_s = 0.135656 \)) and between the trade shows objective defined as “presentation of new products or technologies” and the personnel selection criterion defined as “technical know-how of the product” \( (r_s = 0.188076) \). A similar level of correlation was observed between the latter objective and the training concerning the knowledge of the product \( (r_s = 0.194350) \). Low values of these coefficients confirm the weak correlation between the trade fairs objectives of the exhibitors and the methods of preparing the relevant personnel.

Conclusions

Foreign authors strongly emphasize the significance of the pre-show activities and precise matching of the kind of preparations to the particular trade fairs objectives and the stand personnel’s responsibilities during a trade event. Nevertheless, as the results of the presented research show, exhibitors taking part in trade events held in Krakow pay relatively little attention to activities connected with the proper preparation of the trade fairs stand personnel. One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for justifying the low level of the activity in this area is the small size of the exhibiting companies and their limited organisational capacity resulting from it. Obviously, neither of these factors can be ignored, but maintaining the existing approach leads to having limited possibilities of the optimal utilisation of the exhibitor’s participation in the trade fairs, and the overall outcome of the trade fairs participation may not be satisfactory from the exhibitors’ point of view.

When defining their fair trade objectives, exhibitors should pay more attention to information sources about trade fairs so that the participation in a given event can allow for making the best possible use of the really existing opportunities resulting from the participation in particular trade events.

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1 Some measurement scales of the analysed variables are nominal scales.
2 All the below mentioned correlation coefficients are statistically significant at \( p < 0.05 \).
fairs. Moreover, the preparation of the stand personnel and the stand itself should be performed in the way that would facilitate the achievement of the fair trade objectives. Especially in the sector of investment goods, the role of individual relationships and the quality of the stand personnel will be important for both the selling and the non-selling trade fairs objectives.

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Analiza wybranych obszarów przygotowań wystawców do udziału w targach na podstawie badań przedsiębiorstw uczestniczących w krakowskich imprezach targowych

Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań ankietowych wystawców biorących udział w krakowskich imprezach targowych dotyczące wybranych obszarów proce-
su ich przygotowań do udziału w targach. Punkt wyjścia opracowania stanowi przegląd literatury obejmujący opis roli działań przedtargowych w procesie zarządzania udziałem w targach. Badania empiryczne pozwoliły na ustalenie celów targowych wystawców i sposobów przygotowania personelu stoiska do ich realizacji. W podsumowaniu zaproponowano kierunki udoskonalenia badanych działań.

Słowa kluczowe: targi gospodarcze, wystawcy, działania przedtargowe.

Kody JEL: D22, L29, M39

Анализ избранных сфер подготовки экспонентов к участию в ярмарке на основе обследования предприятий, принимающих участие в краковских ярмарочных мероприятиях

Резюме

В статье представили результаты опросов экспонентов, принимающих участие в краковских ярмарочных мероприятиях, касающиеся избранных сфер процесса их подготовки к участию в ярмарке. Отправной точкой разработки является обзор литературы, включающий в себя описание роли действий, предшествующих ярмарке, в процессе управления участием в ярмарке. Эмпирические обследования позволили выявить ярмарочные цели экспонентов и способы подготовки персонала стенда к их достижению. В подведении итогов предложили направления совершенствования изучаемых действий.

Ключевые слова: хозяйственная ярмарка; экспоненты; действия, предшествующие ярмарке.

Коды JEL: D22, L29, M39

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Afiliacja:
dr inż. Anita Proszowska
AGH Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza
Wydział Zarządzania
Katedra Zarządzania Przedsiębiorstwem
al. A. Mickiewicza 30
30-059 Kraków
e-mail: aproszow@zarz.agh.edu.pl