More Effective Trade Shows – What Visitors Are Attracted By

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is to investigate how investments in trade shows can be made more effective. The method was a descriptive study builds on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were collected in an anonymous survey where 204 respondents were asked about their experience of trade shows and what attracts them. The secondary sources were collected from previous research collected from scientific articles. The theory indicated that more effective investments in trade shows could be made upon what the visitor requires and attracts of. The implication of the paper was that inspiration is the primary factor to visit trade shows and that a spectacular stand and dedicated and inviting people in the stand are the factors that attract the visitors. Therefore exhibitors ought to prioritise their resources to improve these factors. Plans and targets are important tools to following up the outputs from trade shows. It is also about making a consideration of focus between visitors that already have interest and the visitors that just looking. The exhibitors have to think about if they value profits in short or/and in long run. The consideration is also about how they handling giveaways and gift in the most effective way. Another significant factor is to develop the company’s Internet approach in a strategic way pre- and post-show. Above all, that the exhibitor chooses trade shows within their industry.

Keywords: trade show, exhibit marketing, effective.

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Introduction

Trade shows can be identified by scheduled events where exhibitors show their products and taking orders (Ponzurick, 1996). The subject area of exhibition marketing includes trade shows (Solberg Søilen, 2013). Trade shows originate from the earliest ancient ways of selling at market places, but today it is about so much more than just selling (Cavanaugh, 1976). They are created to display products and promote sales (Stevens, 2005), and equally build and maintain relationships (Blythe, 2002; Stevens, 2005). Naturally all the sales do not comes under the show, instead there are recurring peoples that place an order after visiting the show (Solberg Søilen, 2013).

The process of sales and marketing within business-to-business are important parts for success. Trade shows provides opportunities to be efficient in this contact, by face-to-face between customers and stakeholders. In addition trade shows provide introduce to potential stakeholders, publicity, accelerate the process of sales, make possibilities to entry new markets, launch of new products (Solberg Søilen, 2013; Stevens, 2005). Additionally trade shows have a specific duration (Stevens, 2005) and are the most expensive marketing activity (Solberg Søilen, 2013).

2010, it was stated that the trend of trade shows has flattened out a bit. However there was an interpretation that importance to trade shows have increased and the prospect for an up going curve is good. It was also stated that the reason for that could possible be because of the developed technology, increased use of Internet but also because of the tough economic years that have been on-going (Solberg Søilen, 2010).

Under these circumstances it is interesting to investigate how trade shows can keep place and importance. To achieve that it is about making them more effective. Therefor this study are going to focus on how investments in trade shows can be made more effective, which leads to the problem definition: How can trade shows be made more effective by analyse what visitors are attracted by?

Review of Previous Research

Trade shows and effectiveness

Trade shows are a good way to nurture confidence in brands and to build, develop and maintain loyalty to customers. Not conversely to boost the levels of awareness. If that can be realised more effective trade shows can be fulfilled, but they need to be complemented in connection with targets (Kirchgeorg, Springer & Kästner, 2009).

In consumer trade shows visitors consist of individual consumers, instead in business-to-business trade shows visitors consist of representatives from companies (Walker, Cobb, Weinberg & Trebbi (1996). There are three types of visitors at trade shows, “the lookers”, “the prospects” that have a need for the products but do not have enough knowledge and still
make comparisons, and “the serious prospects” that have a need for the product and have knowledge about the specific product and are in the final stage of buying (Horn, 2002).

It seems to be important to take the communication tool serious if trade shows are acting as a communication platform, especially if it is combined with other multiple objectives, as it often is. There is of importance to use several communication tools if the aim is to increase awareness but also sales. In the next step it is a great significance if the trade show manager is aware of the tools and aims to handle the scattered objectives to get optimised outcomes from them (Kirchgeorg, Springer & Kästner, 2009).

Naturally clear and defined targets make planning of the trade show budget easier. If targets not are implemented clear and defined in the budget it providing the trade show as a deficient and ineffective tool (Kirchgeorg, Springer & Kästner, 2009).

To make trade shows efficient and successful it is important to focus on how to arrange the stand and also have in mind the managerial challenges and sales behaviour. Nowadays there are more resources and time investigating to prepare stuff for trade shows. To be effective and profitable it is also about handle information serious. By being committed pre-show, under the show and post-show with visitors, competitors and stakeholders, to receive as much as possible useful information. The right Internet approach is an important tool to use pre-show and post-show, for inviting and continuing relationship. It can almost seem to be the golden ingredient for successful trade shows participation and a way of making worthwhile return on marketing investment. Trade shows have been more sophisticated and complex, which had lead to more developed studies of marketing, and nowadays higher expectations on the exhibitor and the way of how they behave and perform. Overall, trade shows will continue to be important mainly because people like to meet the people they do business with, and this especially in business-to-business (Solberg Søilen, 2013).

The booth design
Exhibitors try to attract the visitors to their booth, but there is lack of design advice to create the most appropriate. There are individual factors that set the base of booth design and construction to get the opportunities for competitive. The factors depend on their targets, incentives to attending, and possibilities for designing the booth. If the exhibitor can afford large booth and efforts they have a good prerequisites to achieve several or all of their set targets. In comparison it is better for a smaller player to invest and focus in one or few targets (Gilliam, 2015).

There are some similarities between the atmosphere that are desirable in retails and trade shows (Gilliam, 2015). It is about the way of create a feeling and make it inviting. Important factors are for example atmospheric, general interior, layout, decoration variables but also human variables (Turley & Milliam, 2000).

Giveaways
It is common visitors get giveaways from exhibitors, and these giveaways consist of unnecessary things that will not be estimated. Even worse, visitors will not even have any idea of the companies operations or products. It is a challenge to attract people that are potential buyers or interesting for the company in other ways. A better way of giveaways is to make them to
gifts instead. The difference is that giveaways are for everyone and gifts are for special people. To get as much as possible out of trade shows and gifts there are three tips of how to do it. First inform possible visitors to visit their stand. Second, make an effort, happening or attraction if they attending to your activity. Third, post-show contact visitors and make them know they have been noticed at the trade show, as a way of maintain the relationship (Horn, 2002).

Disagreements to positive affects to trade shows
When exhibitors have been participate trade shows with a great feeling there is some factors that put a spanner in the works. These factors are:

- The unconscionability of effectiveness of activities and efforts. Hard to identify return of money of the trade show.
- Difficult to measure efficiency, for example how effective trade shows are compared to other tools of marketing.
- The costs of participation in trade shows are high.
- Preconception and reputation that trade shows are an unserious way for managers to indulge themselves.

There are little agreements because of these existing problems. There is not a serious focus of what the trade shows leads to e.g. return of the money (Bonoma, 1983).

Methodology
This is a descriptive study built on primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources were the first step in the process, and included previous research that consists of relevant scientific articles from Halmstad University’s database via e.g. the database Emerald and Summon. Also Google Scholar was used to find some of the scientific articles. The keywords “trade show”, “exhibit marketing” and “effective” were used, shaped from the given title and the question of matter. The literature was reviewed, compared, and examined. When collecting data and information the definitions successful and efficient were sometimes involved, they were used with caution to the similar definition effective that is in focus in this research. When successful and efficient were fitting in context together with the word effective they were used.

When collecting primary sources by creating a survey it can be made qualitative or quantitative (Jacobsen, 2002). In this case it exist of basic information and previous research within the area. Therefore the author made a decision of a quantitative method to gain wider insights about the issue. The next step was to create a digital survey by Google-survey form. All the questions formulated as excluding, exhaustive and transparent, in the cause to achieve a sense of reality. The formulated questionnaire consisted of seven questions. Question 1 and 2 was basic questions about their gender and age. The following questions (3-7) were formulated with deeper connection to the question of matter. The survey was created so the respondents were anonymous, and in combination with an online survey the answers can be expected to be
reliable as they participate voluntary and individually. Figure 4-7 implies the respondents to choose the most appropriate alternative. This results in the respondents most strongly opinions. On the other hand the second and third reason to the questions will not be presented, so a consideration was made.

The survey was posted on Facebook in mixed public groups. The occasion of using the social media platform Facebook was to receive as many respondents as possible, independent of their background and preconditions. Under these circumstances both Google-survey form and Facebook are free and accessible for everyone so the survey could be done by parsimony. Trade shows are based of the visitors and are dependent of the way of attracting them. Therefore a determination was made to ask the public people that could be possible visitors to trade shows. By using these digital channels there are a wide part of the total representing group that have been reached. As can be expected nowadays people have mobile phone and computers, and many people are members of Facebook. Therefore a quick survey on Facebook was an effective way to get answers from the representing group. The representing group was the average citizen and in deeper meaning, which also implies that the survey targeted to people that have some possible insight of trade shows. Even if the meaning of that will be preconceptions or experienced visits. All the answers between these statements are important to get reflected indications to the problem definition of this study.

When enough answers were received they were compiled and connect in figures and diagrams in the section “Empirical Findings”. In the next section, “Results and analysis”, the empirical findings were connected to previous research and a wider analysis was made. The final part “Conclusion” presented the most strongly implications and future studies.

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**Empirical Findings**

The survey consisted of seven questions, started with two basic questions about the respondent followed by in-depth questions connected to the focus of the study. The survey was launched with the line “The purpose of this survey is to make investments in trade shows more effective by asking what visitors request”. The questionnaire and survey is showed in Table 1.
Table 1. Questionnaire to the study of how trade shows can be made more effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your experience of trade shows?</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your main reason to visit trade shows in general?</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your main reason to visit a specific trade show?</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you notice that a trade show to take place?</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the main reason why you stop at a stand?</td>
<td>202</td>
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Table 1 shows that there are 204 respondents that have answered the survey. There is a small loss of answers at some of the questions. These are showed as the numbers of “missing” answers at the affected questions. The missing answers have no significant impact in the whole of result in the survey.

Figure 1 presents gender diversity between the respondents. The question “Gender?” resulted in 75 men and 129 women, and constitutes of 100% of the participants.
Figure 2 shows that the age diversity among the respondents. The question “Age?” resulted in no respondents between 0-15 years old (0%). Turning to the greatest group representing 111 respondents between 16-30 years old (54.4%). The age group between 31-45 years represented 50 respondents (24.5%), 46-60 years old represented 31 respondents (15.2%), 61-75 years old represented 9 respondents (4.4%) and people over 76 years old represented 3 respondents (1.5%). This question was answered of all participators.

Figure 3 presents the question “What is your experience of trade shows?” and the respondents had the opportunity to choose several alternatives. It was 161 respondents (78,9%) that answered that they had been a “visitor as a private person”. The second alternative “visitor in job context” implicated 91 respondents (44,6%) and the third alternative “visitor in school context” implicated 86 respondents (42,2%). The last option “no experience” was answered by 7 respondents (3,4%). To sum up all respondents were answering this question.
Figure 4 shows the answers of the question “What is your main reason to visit trade shows in general?”. In this question the respondents could just choose one alternative, the one that was the most appropriate. The outcome resulted in 93 answers (45.8%) for “inspiration”, 32 answers (15.8%) for “information exchange”, 25 answers (12.3%) for “buy/sales”, 23 answers (11.3%) for “leisure activity”, 13 answers (6.4%) for “do not visit trade shows”, 11 answers (5.4%) for “new relationships” and 3 answers (1.5%) for the exhaustive alternative “other”. This question misses one answer from one respondent.

In figure 5 the question “What is your main reason to visit a specific trade show?” and respondents could just choose one alternative, the one that was the most appropriate. The outcome led to a majority of the respondents chooses the alternative “the trade show’s theme” with 156 respondent answers (77.2%). Otherwise “the trade show’s exhibitors” represented of 33 respondent answers (16.3%) and “presentations and workshops” represented of a group of 11 respondent answers (5.4%) followed by the exhaustive alternative “other” represented 2 respondent answers (1%). Additionally this question misses two answers.
Figure 6. Present answers how the respondent notice a trade show to take place.

Figure 6 shows the question “How do you notice that a trade show to take place?” and its answers. In this question the respondents could just choose one alternative, the one that was the most appropriate. 84 people (41,6%) answered “social media”, 57 people (28,2%) answered “general marketing (e.g. TV, radio, advertising pillars)”, 31 people (15,3%) answered “personal marketing (e.g. via e-mail, mail)”, 25 people (12,4%) answered “contacts”, and 5 people (2,5%) answered the exhaustive alternative “other”. Additionally this question misses two answers.

Figure 7. Present answers from the reason of stop by a stand.

Figure 7 present the answers to the question “What is the main reason why you stop at a stand?” and the respondents could also just choose one alternative, the one that was the most appropriate. Two answers are missing from the 204 respondents. The most popular alternative to choose was “spectacular stand” with 74 answers (36,6%) followed by 61 answers (30,2%) to “dedicated and inviting people”, 24 answers (11,9%) to “planned visit”, 18 answers (8,9%) to both “exciting activity (e.g. competition or game)” and “Giveaways and sweets”. The alternative “other” exhausted the remaining 7 answers (3,5%).
Results and Analysis

Respondents

The first basic questions (figure 1 and 2) in the survey indicates the majority of the respondents are women and in the years between 16-30. The gender diversity was approximately 37% men and 63% women. The age-groups was most represented of 16-60 years old, which can be appropriate because it can be assumed it is these age-groups that are visiting trade shows most often.

Respondents’ experiences of trade shows

The question “What is your experience of trade shows?” (figure 3) gave a clear indication of experience of trade shows in several ways. Because of the question allowed several answers, it resulted in a total number of 345 answers which is a proof of that the respondents have a couple of experiences to relate to in the followed questionnaire. Almost 80% had experience from private purposes, which will means they have been to a customer trade show (Walker, et al., 1996). Approximately 40%/40% of the respondents had experience of trade shows in school and job context. The visits in job contexts are therefor likely to be at business-to-business trade shows (Walker, et al., 1996). This indicates that most people have private experience and in addition either experience from school or job context. 7 respondents (3,4%) answered the option “no experience” which indicates it is a small percentage of the respondents that have no experience of trade shows. That also proves that the following questions in the survey gave convincingly statements from representing people. It means that 96,6% of the respondents actually have experience from trade shows in one or another way. That will imply that trade shows are widely accepted and implemented today, at least the people keep their minds of experience of trade shows. Regardless of the experience that respondents have they have an overall general experience of trade shows. It will mean that Solberg Søilen (2010) had some kind of right when he was hinting that trade shows have possibilities for an up going curve in the future stated from 2010. Overall we get a general and wide understanding about the average respondents’ experiences. They are at least aware of their experiences from trade shows, which had to be positive.

The result of their visit experience will also indicate that the most of the answers probably are in mind of trade shows in private purposes in relation to their second experience. That seems to be logical when looking at the answers from figure 4, what people’s main reason of visiting a trade show in general are, where almost 46% answered inspiration. The definition inspiration means that the respondent wants to do a kind of benchmark and take part of the wide supply from a specific industry or community. In general if a person are open for inspiration they will also have interest within the industry or community. It will not have to end up here as Horns (2002) “lookers” because trade shows have similarities with retails (Gilliam, 2015). That means when a exhibitor have get attention from a visitor it could mean that they have been noticed, even if the do not buy on the spot, which Solberg Søilen (2013) stated,
they will possibly place an order after the trade show. So even if the visitor does not have requires during the show they will possibly create require of it when thinking about it or when they in another situation requires the exhibitor’s product, they will first think about them and higher presumably buy from this seller.

Information exchange, buy/sales and leisure activity was answered of around 11-16% of the respondents, which are significantly smaller reasoning than inspiration.

Could the majority of answers from figures 3 and 4 possibly connect to each other? The first majority of answers “Visitor as private person” and the second majority in figure 4 by answers “Inspiration”. An indication could mean that when people visit trade shows as a private person they do it because they looking for inspiration? It is one possible connection from the number of answers in these questions. Leisure activity would also have the same connection as reason of visitor as a private person because it is logical that it could not be the reason for visitors in job and school context. Leisure time will naturally only occur when people are their “private person”.

Giveaways/gifts

In the knowledge that the most people visit trade shows because of gaining inspiration, there is a disagreement to the idea of giveaways. As Horn (2002) stated that “the (serious) prospects” are the ones that the exhibitors can obtain advantages of, and in the next step receive effectiveness. Those people who are “the lookers” are in this case just wasting time and money, and make trade shows ineffective for the exhibitors. Therefore from this idea the exhibitors need to have a deliberate thought with their giveaways/gifts so they can use their resources on the most possible buyers.

In comparison it is obviously “the lookers” that have interest of the industry and community and if an exhibitor in one way or another could be noticed it would probably be good for their brand reputation. Even if it not will give profit during the trade show it will possibly do in the future. People get increased knowledge that the exhibitor exists and a good first impression of them. If the visitor in the future have demand of the exhibitors product they will as in retail (Gilliam, 2015) already get their brand in mind when looking for their product, and get start advantage compared to other competitors. Additionally, the visitor’s knowledge will also be spread to friends and family if it comes up and are relevant.

Reasons for visiting

Apparently the trade shows theme is the most important reason to visit a specific trade show. A significant smaller group had the opinion of the trade show’s exhibitors as the main reason for visiting. The difference between these groups will presumably be the cause of experience the trade show as a whole, in comparison of experience and exchange with specific exhibitors that are known and noticed.

Above all, it seems to be logical when thinking about the point of organising trade shows, a constitution of a whole industry or community, to get an over-all event where the most representatives attending. Otherwise it seems to be easier and more effective to visit the ex-
hibitor or company directly where they operate. The respondents’ answers also show that because the theme of the trade show is overrepresented with a majority of 77.2% (156 respondents of total 202 answers).

The way of notice trade shows are going to take place

To notice that a trade show will take place it is according to the empirical findings social media that attracts the most attention. This will in the next step indicate that the theory of Solberg Søilen (2013) can be useful in the way of reach possible prospects and visitors via social media pre-show and post-show as successful marketing channels. Therefore the exhibitors will make efforts to perform an appropriate Internet approach (Solberg Søilen, 2013) at social media platforms to reach the wider group of people that visit trade shows.

A possible outcome from the high answers of notice trade shows through social media will possible be because of the respondent group was contacted via social media. It will probably be a little bit of over-representing here, but it is still a trustworthy source since it is a common platform for the general population. The answers also presented answers for other way of notice that trade shows will take place.

The increasing technology and more developed tool of filters at Internet will possibly be a way of distinguishes Horns (2002) different type of visitors already before visit the trade shows. Could it possible be a way of distinguishes their manners and lifestyles to attract Horns (2002) prospects and serious prospects to the shows and start or maintain their relationship? The filters could preferably be used to promote specific trade shows by apply them on sites for these industries and communities. A possible way is to use gifts as an effective tool (Horn, 2002) by inform prospects about them beforehand and smart enough create a win-win relation. The general marketing is also representing a high proportion of how to notice a trade show to take place, and could possibly be a complementary way of remind people or reach out to these that have not been reached through social media.

Attraction to stands

The empirical findings match the theory about what attract attention to a stand. There are a spectacular stand and dedicated and inviting people that make the most respondents attentive and interested. Solberg Søilen (2013) and Turley & William (2000) stated that the organisation of an attractive and inviting stand are the way of the stuffs behavioural, which are one key findings to efficient and successful trade shows.

Solberg Søilen (2013) stated that there is more focus nowadays to prepare and use the most appropriate staff in the stand, which ties up with the empirical findings of what respondents pay attention to for stop by a stand. Therefore investments in stuff are a good way to create better possibilities for more effective trade shows.
Connections between a planned visit and buy

The answers from the survey indicated a possible connection. It was 25 answers (12.3%) of buy/sell in the reason of visiting trade shows in general and 24 answers (11.9%) of what the main reason of stop by a stand are because planned visit. The connection could possibly be linked to the “serious prospects” that have need for the product, have knowledge about the specific product and are in the final stage of buying (Horn, 2002). They are in the final stage of buy and are planning the visit to the trade sow for this reason, which indicates and can be identified by a serious prospect.

Effective or ineffective

Obviously and to summarise there are hard to identify if a trade show was effective or not, and especially on which level. There will be a marketing activity that is expensive but in the same way it boost brands and relationships and create awareness of existing on the market and espionage on competitors. These factors will be true if the setups are made after targets, plans and the prospects in mind. In the same way it must be the prerequisites to evaluate the level of effectiveness. If the exhibitor do not set up targets and plans with their prospects in mind it will be hard for them to compare with the outcome from the trade show. For example if the exhibitor set up targets and plans for the trade show they can measure the result and outcome to the preconditions and the situation before. Or if they get prospects to place orders, they can compare number of orders relative to participation as a guideline to a specific trade show. That comparison will be made in some kind of awareness, because the participation in a long life will maybe be the start for a long and successful relationship that was met at the show.

The participation to several trade shows will together get surprisingly high effectiveness, but it is hard to prove. This will be a connection to the way Bonomas (1983) set disagreements to positive affects to trade shows. It is hard to identify the return of money after attending to a trade show. The sales are hard to connect to a specific reason, and if the participation seems to be positive it must be one of the reasons for sales. As Bonoma (1983) stated it is about making unconsciousness of effectiveness of activities and efforts the most efficient as possible. That will be made in the way of offering the products and efforts in an attractive way but in the same way use resources with awareness. It will be smart to have them in mind but also to be urgent to break them. It will be an effort for now and the future even if it will be hard to identify the multiple positive outcomes. At the time when the cost of participation will be paid it can be hard to identify the positive outcomes in comparison to these high costs, but here it is important to have the long run in mind and try to be realistic at the same time.
Conclusion

Implications

The way of make investments in trade shows more effective was to ask the people that are possible prospects and visitors to trade shows. If exhibitors can meet their needs they can win their own benefits of effective investments.

The survey included a representing group of people that had multiple experiences of them, which also gave several views of the way they notice, attracts and acts to them. It turned out that the majority of the respondents had experience of trade shows as visitors in private purposes, but additionally also experience from either trade shows in job or school context. The group of people that participated the survey was therefor representative for the questions.

Mostly the respondents wanted inspiration but they also requested opportunities for information exchange, buy/sales and leisure activity. Accordingly to these factors, the exhibitors have to aim to offer a combination of them, with a main focus in inspiration. Inspiration can therefore be the first step to sales and new successful relationships. The visitors attracts of primary of spectacular stands and dedicated and inviting people. Therefor investments should be done in the stand and stuff to receive most effectiveness from trade shows.

It is a consideration for the exhibitors to focus on the (serious) prospects or to prioritise attention to be noticed by lookers. It has a significant impact of their focus and the way of handle giveaways and gifts. Giveaways are a way to get attention and possibly be noticed, whereas gifts are to more selected and special visitors. It is important that the exhibitors are aware of their targets and focus in the same way. It was also stated that trade shows could be made more effective if plans and targets are set.

To acquire successful and effective ways of trade shows it will also be a way of adapting the increasing technology and Internet use. The majority of answers from the respondents resulted in social media as the way of notice a trade show. The theories also handling the way of have contact with the prospects and visitors before and after the show to attract and exploit the relationship with all types of possible stakeholders to the company. Successful ways of make the investments in trade shows effective are therefor to work on the company’s Internet approach and use it strategic.

Another important view is to think through which trade shows to exhibit, because the respondents mean they visit trade shows because of their theme in greater degree than the exhibitors. So it is about choose the most suitable type of trade shows and the one that their prospects are planning to visit.

In conclusion it is hard to measure the level of effectiveness of investments in trade shows, but obviously the preconceptions have to be removed. If the exhibitors “simply” focus on offer what people require and attracts of they will be more effective in their investments.
Future Studies

This study was limited in the way of asking people of their experiences of trade shows. Possibly the respondents are not completely aware of what attracts them or what makes them visit trade shows. Furthermore a study of the visitors acting at trade shows would be interesting; for example study where they look, go and stop, who they talk with and other way of acting.

Further studies could also be to try to measure the way of effectiveness, it would probably be complex but it would be interesting to compare different type of acting to their output, both in short and long perspective.

References


