

Expert Insights

Trade Fairs: Costly Show or Strategic Gateway?

Are You Choosing the Right Global Platforms to Meet Real Buyers?

Many exporters treat trade fairs as a must-do without questioning their fit. The result? Eye-catching stalls, high bills, and little to no business. With the right selection and preparation, trade fairs can open global doors—but without it, they become a costly distraction. The key is to match the market, event, and buyer profile before investing.

Scroll down to discover a proven trade fair selection and execution framework that saves money while boosting lead quality.

Knowledge Source

Wadhwani Foundation Expert Session | Feb 27

This session was designed to help MSMEs identify the right international trade fairs, plan phased market entry, and prepare for high-impact participation that brings qualified buyers and measurable ROI.

About the Expert: Ankit Majmudar

Ankit Majmudar is the founder of Global Business Solutions, with over 20 years of experience in international business development across industries like heavy machinery, agro products, nutraceuticals, and chemicals. He guides companies through market research, feasibility studies, entry strategies, and export-import logistics. Having successfully assisted SMEs in identifying global markets and managing export ecosystems, he has managed trade fairs and exhibitions across multiple countries and trained over 3,500 professionals. Ankit also serves as guest faculty with AMA, MSME, and MBA institutes, offering actionable strategies for global trade and market penetration.

> Session Summary Ankit explained how to strategically phase entry into international markets, select fairs that align with buyer needs, manage budgets effectively, and improve stall visibility. He stressed pre-event buyer outreach as a game-changer for lead quality and conversions.

Case Scenario & Where It Fell Short

Priya, founder of an organic snacks brand, decided to debut at a leading European food trade fair. She booked a large, expensive stall without researching buyer profiles or assessing competitor presence.

During the event, she realised most visitors were from retail chains not interested in importing, and her team had no pre-scheduled meetings. Despite heavy investment, the leads collected were few and unrelated to her export goals.

Where It Fell Short:

1. **No phased market approach:**

   Started with a distant, highly competitive market.

2. **Event misalignment:**

   The fair catered to domestic retail buyers, not importers.

3. **Unbalanced spending:**

   Overspent on stall build, underfunded pre-event promotion.

4. **Suboptimal location:**

   Stall placed in a low-traffic corner.

5. **No targeted outreach:**

   Relied entirely on passersby.

ⓘ Founder and brand details anonymized to protect privacy.

Root Cause Breakdown

Below are the common mistakes and their consequences that restricted the brand's trade fair success:

Common Mistakes	Consequences
No phased market approach	Faced high costs and lower chances of quick market traction
Event misalignment	Met wrong buyer segment, reducing export opportunities
Unbalanced spending	Neglected areas that could boost actual sales outcomes
Poor stall placement	Missed spontaneous interest from high-traffic areas
No targeted outreach	Failed to secure quality leads before the event started

Recommended Solution

To help exporters turn trade fairs into profitable ventures, the expert recommended:

Step 1: Phase Your Market Entry

Why It Matters: Early wins in easier markets build capability for tougher regions.

How to Execute:

- Begin with culturally similar or geographically closer markets
- Use trade portals and export data to shortlist markets
- Scale to more competitive destinations once traction is visible

Sample Prompt to Try: "Suggest a phased export entry plan for an organic snack brand from India."

Modify the above prompt: Replace the product type with your own and adjust the target regions as per budget and readiness.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A 1–3 year entry sequence with target countries and focus points.

Step 2: Match Event to Buyer Profile

Why It Matters: Only relevant fairs bring export-ready leads.

How to Execute:

- Check exhibitor and visitor profiles from previous years
- Confirm importer presence with organisers
- Compare multiple events for fit

Sample Prompt to Try: "List 5 international food trade fairs with strong importer presence for packaged snacks."

Modify the above prompt: Change product and region to fit your business.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A shortlist of fairs with maximum buyer-product alignment.

Step 3: Balance Budget Allocation

Why It Matters: Prevents over-investment in low-return areas.

How to Execute:

- Allocate fixed percentages for stall, travel, outreach, and logistics
- Avoid spending more than 30% on stall design
- Dedicate at least 20% to pre-event promotion

Sample Prompt to Try: "Create a ₹12 lakh trade fair budget with breakdowns for space, design, travel, logistics, and promotion."

Modify the above prompt: Change budget and categories as per event requirements.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A spending plan that covers all event success factors.

Step 4: Secure Prime Stall Placement

Why It Matters: High-traffic spots naturally increase visitor numbers.

How to Execute:

- Request locations near entry points, cafes, or industry leaders
- Opt for stalls open on 2–3 sides
- Avoid areas near service zones or dead ends

Sample Prompt to Try: "Suggest optimal stall locations for a high-visibility food product display at a trade fair."

Modify the above prompt: Add event type and target audience details.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Options that maximise spontaneous visitor engagement.

Step 5: Launch Pre-Event Buyer Outreach

Why It Matters: Increases quality of leads before the fair starts.

How to Execute:

- Collect potential buyer contacts from organiser lists
- Connect via LinkedIn and email campaigns
- Offer meeting slots during the event

Sample Prompt to Try: "Write a personalised invite for potential buyers to visit our stall at an upcoming trade fair."

Modify the above prompt: Change fair name, product, and offer as per your case.

Try the above prompt in the free version of the below AI platforms:

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Ready-to-send messages to secure advance appointments.

Expected Result

By following these steps, MSMEs can expect:

Smarter Market Entry

Build strength in easier markets first.

Higher Buyer Relevance

Engage with fairs that attract your exact target audience.

Efficient Spending

Budgets aligned to sales impact.

More Visitors

Prime locations ensure higher stall traffic.

Qualified Leads

Pre-scheduled meetings improve conversion odds.



Insight

> **"Every founder dreams of a busy stall—but only the strategic turn visitors into customers."**

A trade fair is not about how big your stall is—it's about how precisely it connects you to the right buyers, at the right time, with the right preparation.

Founders Please Check

Before your next trade fair, ask yourself:

Have I planned my market entry in phases?

Avoid diving into the toughest markets first.

Is this event aligned with my buyer profile?

The right audience matters more than the size of the fair.

Is my budget balanced?

Design doesn't close deals; relationships do.

Have I secured a prime location?

High visibility equals high opportunity.

Have I invited buyers in advance?

Don't wait for them to find you.

Learn more

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