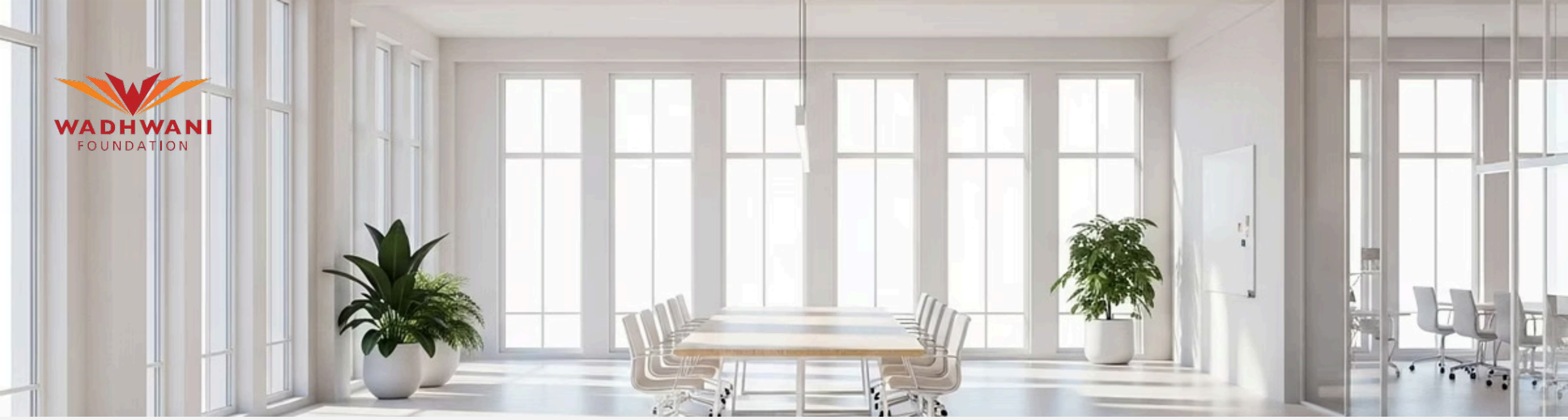


Expert Insights

Trade Fairs: Investment or Expense Trap?

Are You Choosing the Right Markets and Events for Export Growth?

Many founders jump into international trade fairs without a plan—booking stalls that look impressive but deliver little business. The reality? Poor market research, irrelevant exhibitions, and uncontrolled costs can sink your ROI. The good news—when you match the right market with the right event, trade fairs can unlock multi-year buyer pipelines.

Scroll down to learn the proven event selection and market-entry tactics that help MSMEs get global buyers—without burning budgets.

Knowledge Source

Wadhwani Foundation Expert Session | Feb 28

This expert session was conducted to help MSME exporters strategically identify target markets, choose the right international trade fairs, and optimize participation for maximum returns. The focus was on phased market entry, cost control, and building long-term buyer relationships through well-planned event engagement.

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 specializes in market research, feasibility studies, entry strategies, and export-import logistics. Ankit has guided SMEs in identifying global markets, managed trade fairs and exhibitions in more than 20 countries, and streamlined pre- and post-shipment processes. He has trained over 3,500 professionals in international business and serves as guest faculty at AMA, MSME, and MBA institutes.

> "Session Summary In this session, Ankit shared a practical roadmap for MSMEs to phase their market entry—starting with accessible, high-potential regions before moving into competitive destinations. He explained how to vet trade fairs by exhibitor profile, manage budgets across space, design, and logistics, and prepare for meaningful buyer engagement before the event. Real-world examples showed how small tweaks in planning—like choosing a 3-side open stall at a strategic location—can significantly improve visibility and lead flow."

Case Scenario & Where It Fell Short

Ramesh, founder of a mid-size packaged foods company, decided to "go global" by exhibiting at a large Middle East food expo. Without checking the exhibitor list or buyer profile, he booked a premium stall in a corner and spent heavily on booth design.

The event had over 500 exhibitors but only a handful in his product category. Most visitors were distributors from unrelated sectors. His team returned with minimal leads, a drained budget, and no immediate sales to justify the spend.

Where It Fell Short

1. **No market-entry phasing:**

   Jumped into competitive, high-cost markets first.

2. **No trade fair relevance check:**

   Did not validate exhibitor and visitor fit.

3. **Unplanned budget allocation:**

   Over-invested in design, under-invested in pre-event outreach.

4. **Weak stall positioning:**

   Poor location reduced footfall.

5. **No structured buyer outreach:**

   Relied solely on walk-ins during the event.

ⓘ Founder and brand details anonymized to protect privacy

Root Cause Breakdown

Below are key trade fair missteps and their consequences that held the company back from converting opportunities into export sales:

Common Mistakes	Consequences
No phased market entry	Faced high costs and low ROI in unfamiliar, competitive markets
Ignoring trade fair relevance	Exhibited at events with low buyer-product alignment
Unplanned budget split	Overspent on design, neglected logistics and marketing
Poor stall location choice	Missed visibility and organic visitor flow
No pre-event buyer targeting	Depended on random foot traffic, limiting quality leads

Recommended Solution

To help exporters maximize trade fair ROI, the expert advised these focused actions:

Step 1: Plan Phased Market Entry

Why It Matters: Starting in accessible markets builds experience and reduces risk.

How to Execute:

- Year 1: Select closer, culturally aligned markets
- Year 2–3: Expand to high-potential, high-competition regions
- Use trade data + embassy support to shortlist markets

Sample Prompt to Try: "Suggest a phased export market entry plan for a packaged food brand from India."

Modify the above prompt: Replace "packaged food" with your product category and adjust regions based on your budget and readiness.

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

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A step-by-step country entry plan with priority order.

Step 2: Validate Trade Fair Fit Before Booking

Why It Matters: Relevant events give higher buyer alignment and ROI.

How to Execute:

- Study exhibitor and visitor profiles from past events
- Contact organisers for category-specific stats
- Compare multiple fairs before deciding

Sample Prompt to Try: "List the top 5 international food trade fairs with exhibitor and visitor profile fit for spice exporters."

Modify the above prompt: Change product type and location to suit your industry.

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

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A filtered list of events most likely to connect you with real buyers.

Step 3: Allocate Budget Smartly

Why It Matters: Balanced spending ensures all critical areas are covered.

How to Execute:

- Break budget into space, design, travel, logistics, and promotions
- Set caps for each to avoid overspending
- Reserve funds for pre-event marketing

Sample Prompt to Try: "Create a trade fair budget template for a ₹10 lakh allocation, covering space, design, travel, and outreach."

Modify the above prompt: Adjust total budget and percentage allocation as per your market.

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

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: A ready budget sheet for better financial control.

Step 4: Choose Strategic Stall Locations

Why It Matters: Placement impacts footfall and buyer engagement.

How to Execute:

- Prioritize near entrances, exits, and food courts
- Select 2- or 3-side open stalls for better visibility
- Avoid dead corners and service areas

Sample Prompt to Try: "Suggest the best stall positioning for maximum visibility in a trade fair floor plan."

Modify the above prompt: Add details like event type and target audience for tailored advice.

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

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Location options that maximize visitor interaction.

Step 5: Run Pre-Event Buyer Outreach

Why It Matters: Direct invitations improve lead quality before the event.

How to Execute:

- Use exhibitor lists, LinkedIn, and industry directories
- Send personalised invites with your stall details
- Schedule meetings in advance

Sample Prompt to Try: "Draft a pre-event invite message for potential buyers to visit our stall at Gulfood 2025."

Modify the above prompt: Change event name, product, and offer details for your business.

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

ChatGPT | Gemini | Perplexity

You Will Get: Customised messages to secure meetings before the event.

Expected Result

By applying these actions, exporters can expect:

Lower Risk Market Entry

Entering markets in stages builds confidence and reduces losses.

Better Event ROI

Exhibiting only where buyers match your category.

Controlled Budgets

Spending aligned with revenue potential.

Higher Footfall

Strategic stall placement drives visibility.

Qualified Leads

Pre-scheduled buyer meetings lead to faster conversions.



Insight

> **"Every founder dreams of a packed stall—but only the prepared get buyers, not browsers."**

Trade fairs are not about showing up—they're about showing up where your buyers already are, with a clear plan to engage them before they even walk through the doors.

Founders Please Check

Before your next trade fair, ask yourself:

Have I planned my market entry in phases?

Avoid jumping into costly, unknown markets first.

Is this event truly relevant to my buyers?

Check profiles before booking.

Is my budget balanced across essentials?

Design alone doesn't close deals.

Have I chosen a high-visibility stall?

Location shapes visitor flow.

Have I contacted potential buyers before the event?

Don't rely only on walk-ins.

Learn more

Click to share your feedback