

## **Actually participating in the trade fair**

### **Introduction**

Finally the day arrives when you actually have to take part in the exhibition. This is what all of the weeks and months of preparation have been about. The next few days will be a busy, intense time during which you live and breath the exhibition. There are a number of tasks that lie before you and we discuss them below, but perhaps the most important task is ensuring that you bring everything with you when you leave your office in South Africa. There is nothing worse then arrive in a foreign country with important documents, addresses, contact numbers and forms missing. Before you depart South Africa, make sure that you:

- Have all of your important documents with you (including your tickets, passport, money, etc.)
- Have a list of all of the important contact details of the people you will be dealing with overseas
- Have enough business cards and all your promotional material with you
- Have your stand contract with you, as well as any other relevant contractual documents
- Have samples with you, if you plan to take them with you
- If you're taking samples with you, ensure that you have your ATA Carnet documents at the ready to clear your samples through customs in the target country
- If you are bringing your stand structure with you (yes, it is possible to carry the stand with you; modern stand structures are often fully collapsible and very light-weight), have these ready and packed

### **Arriving overseas**

Step one is to get to your hotel and to check in. It is always best to have an established base from which to work - a place that you can call home for the next few days of the exhibition. Unpack, settle in and get yourself organised. Have a quick nap if you can. Once you are settled in and more refreshed and give your attention to other tasks.

Hopefully you were able to arrive a day or more ahead of schedule with stand assembling taking place in the next day or two. This will give you time to visit the exhibition hall and to orientate yourself as to where everything is. It will also give you time to make contact with the people that you will be working with. It would be wise to call these individuals as soon as possible to ensure that there are no misunderstandings and that they will be ready for you as originally agreed. If there is a problem, then you still have day or so to sort things out.

### **Stand assembly**

Make sure that you are at the exhibition hall early. You don't want to arrive late and find that they are assembling your stand incorrectly. Instead be ready and waiting. Be careful not to interfere too much with the stand designer/assembler - they are the experts after all, but the

stand should meet your requirements. Do not get into a fight or be too overbearing. The last thing you need is for the assembly team to go on strike! Instead work with them and communicate your expectations clearly and in a friendly manner.

If you are doing the assembly yourself, get down to it and prepare the exhibition area with space for promotion (banners, brochure stands, display walls and multimedia facilities) and meeting space; an area where you can sit down and discuss matters with potential clients. Try and keep the design simple, attractive and professional.

### **The exhibition itself**

Your stand has been assembled, your promotional materials are in place and the exhibition has started. This doesn't mean that you can sit around waiting for potential customers to arrive. There is nothing less attractive than a stand with the staff sitting in the corner looking bored and disinterested. You now need to begin "pulling" customers in. Customer interaction is critical. Smile as visitors walk past. Show interest; hand out brochures. Invite them to take a business card. Ask a brief question or two, but don't become over-bearing or "pushy" - this will just chase customers away. Don't rush out and try and hijack visitors walking by; this comes across as very threatening. A good ploy is to ask visitors to leave their business card for a draw for some or other prize at the end of the exhibition - make it worth while. A few thousand rands in prize material will encourage visitors to voluntarily give you their business card. These cards serve as excellent leads for the future.

### **Take time to walk around**

Remember, that although you want to get customers to come to your stand, your competitors are also on display and it would be very beneficial to walk around and to get some idea of what the other companies are offering. Also look at their stands and supporting material for future reference; maybe they are doing something that you could copy. Do not walk around in the busiest time - this is when you need to be available at your stand. Walk around very early on or late in the day when most visitors are not yet there or have already gone home.

### **Writing up your notes**

You will almost certainly not remember what was said between yourself and the many customers that visit your stand. For this reason, you need to keep notes! The best way to do this is to prepare a discussion sheet that you can write on, and that lists the issues you need to raise and/or get clarity on. Make sure you get a business card and staple the business card to this sheet, otherwise jot down the person's contact details. Be careful of using a digital recorder or video cam to record sessions as this may be viewed as an intrusion of privacy and may chase visitors away.

### **Ensuring that the stand is properly dismantled**

At the end of the fair, the organisers normally allow you limited time to dismantle your stand. Get down to this immediately - the longer you take, the more frustrating the exercise

becomes. Be careful with security, this is often the time when most valuables are stolen as you wander from the stand to the truck where you will be loading your materials for transportation back to South Africa. The organisers will expect you to ensure that your stand is fully dismantled and is clean - if they do not provide for the clean afterwards, it may be an expense that you need to arrange and account for.

### **Ensuring that materials are returned to South Africa**

If the shell materials, samples, promotional material, etc. are to be returned to South Africa, then you will need to arrange this. You will almost certainly have arranged this with your freight forwarder in South Africa beforehand. They will provide you with a contact person and company name usually in the city you are located in and this firm will come and collect your goods to be returned to South Africa. Make sure that you give them a call a day or two ahead of time to ensure that they do not forget and that they will be there on the day you dismantle your stand. If they speak another language or you experience any problems, then call your freight forwarder in South Africa and ask them to deal with their representative. After all, you will most probably be paying the South African forwarder for the full service and so it is up to them to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

### **Prepare your follow up**

Prepare a plan of action on how you will follow up on the enquires you have received. Some of these enquiries may only require a courtesy e-mail, asking if they want to pursue the matter. Others may be more serious and may require you sending more information. If you plan to still appoint an import agent or similar representative, then there may be more information you require from the firm (background information, company history, credit information, etc.).