

## Exhibitions are Key in Times of Economic Downturn – Industry Comment from ITTFA

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“Face to face communication is the most successful form of selling – in today’s digital world, the exhibition is one of the rare occasions where this is possible,” states Maria Badakh, Event and Sales Director, ITE Exhibitions Travel Division, a comment that sums up the importance of exhibitions in these times of economic downturn. Members of ITTFA, International Tourism Trade Fairs Association, of which ITE is one, are collectively focusing on the positive aspects of the current global crisis and advocating the advantages of maintaining market visibility.

For many companies facing difficulties, the first area to be trimmed is marketing, advertising and promotional events such as exhibitions, but how do potential customers learn about products and services if there is nothing visible in the market? Maintaining a presence in advertising and trade shows is critical to a company’s growth and success.

“Exhibitions and events are one of the most effective ways to meet and do business,” adds Johan F Lundberg, Business Manager TUR Gothenburg. “Focusing on and developing personal interaction is the way to secure business in such tough times.” One of the main reasons for exhibitors to take part in a trade show is that it is the most efficient way to make multiple customer contacts in a short period of time. There is no substitute for face to face contact nor a better way of viewing the competition on offer and gleaning new ideas. Exhibitions provide a great stimulus for new ideas as well as regenerating and refreshing old ones, which is a useful cost effective technique when budgets are tight.

Exhibitions also provide an overall sales experience that is not on offer during a normal sales call. Interactive experiences using multi-sensory mechanisms, appealing to customers on all levels, as well as unlimited print material, are on offer, with plenty of space to work in and often several highly trained staff on hand to swiftly answer questions.

Research by the Centre for Exhibition Research in Dallas, USA, shows that two thirds (63%) of attendees at exhibitions make purchase decisions while 31% actually purchased products or engaged in services while at a show.

Companies can also utilise an economic downturn to their advantage. While their competition is cutting marketing expenses, more astute operators can utilize their sales teams, advertising and trade show dollars to gain market share by increasing visibility and emphasizing their stability with current and potential clients.

Bart Strijker Project Manager of ITTFA Member show Vakantiebeurs emphasizes that "in times like these, it is important to be a market leader and that personal contact is the key in securing deals. We invest a lot in our databases, aiming to generate leads all year round for our clients."

The CEIR, in its January 2009 report *The Effect of Economic Recessions on Exhibitions*, goes on to say that even though attendance and exhibit space may decrease in recessionary periods, key buyers continue to attend each year and the percentage of attendees that actually have plans to purchase remains high. Companies may send only a couple of people but these will be *the* decision makers. An even more favourable marketing opportunity is created as show attendees, on both the exhibitor and visitor side, will be more focused, holding key positions within their industry sector.

Fortunes follow the brave, as they say; companies courageous enough to stay in the fight and stand out when others are in retreat can maintain an edge and forge a change in their market position. The message therefore is not to cancel your exhibition plans but instead to gain maximum value from the cost involved and take the opportunity to maximum exposure.

ITTFA's full Calendar of Events for 2009/10 can be found on their website, [www.ittfa.org](http://www.ittfa.org). All member exhibitions are dedicated to creating a unique marketplace for that sector's products and services, giving exhibitors unparalleled opportunities to meet key buyers and suppliers in a focused and professional environment.

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For further information please contact:

Sara Armitage Evans, ITTFA Secretariat , [info@ittfa.org](mailto:info@ittfa.org)