Returning to Trade Fairs: Guidebook

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BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

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Thinking House

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Introduction

This guide has been created to support Irish food, drink and horticulture companies in their preparation and return to in-person trade fairs. Trade fairs are vital for driving company sales by connecting with customers, meeting new potential customers, as well as new buyers who are unhappy with their current offering / supplier.

"71% of SMEs have won business using face-to-face networking. For companies who don't have large marketing budgets, networking events such as trade fairs are essential". (*Source: Display Wizard SME survey*)

COVID-19 has changed the playing field. Entry requirements into countries vary and you will need to check the market's status on vaccination, negative tests and passenger locater forms before travelling. Trade fairs have their own policies in relation to masks, social distancing and sampling.

For a successful return to trade fairs, you need to consider the following three phases:

1. Preparation | **2. Participation** | **3. Post-Event Follow Up**

- **Timely Preparation**: Once you have decided and booked to participate don't leave it until the last minute to start looking at the market, potential customer meetings and stand design.

- **Active Participation**: Trade fairs can be exhausting but with the right preparation, it will make it all worthwhile when you meet the right customers at the event. Ad hoc meetings may also be fruitful so look engaged and positive at all times during the event.

- **Timely Follow Up:** During the customer meetings, agree on who is doing what in terms of follow up and by when and fulfil that. You have invested ***a lot*** of time and budget into this trade fair – make sure you conclude whether it was worthwhile or not by evaluating the SMART objectives that you set at the beginning.

Trade Fair Summary Checklist

		Timeline to event
☐	**Planning:** Review your export strategy and decide if this is the trade fair for you. Book through Bord Bia or directly with fair organisers.	6 – 12 months out
☐	**Logistics:** Decide what staff will travel, book hotel (to get best rates and location) and flights in time. Check travel requirements to the country (vaccination / negative tests / locator forms) and the trade fair's health & safety rules.	3 months
☐	**Stand Size and Design:** Finalise with Bord Bia or your stand designer. Book transport to and from the trade fair for your perishable products. Ensure your details are correct on the trade fair website and event app	2 months
☐	**Planning:** Identify SMART objectives that you want to achieve. Work on your customer and elevator pitch with your team	6 weeks out
☐	**Planning:** If available from the organiser, look at attendee list and decide who you would like to meet. Send meeting invites, including stand number and offer complimentary event pass if available. Tell people that you are going to be at the trade fair too.	2 months out
☐	**Travel:** Reconfirm travel requirements and health and safety rules.	1 week
☐	**Logistics:** Arrive full of energy a day before the trade fair, set up and test equipment. Work out staffing rota for the stand for the duration of the trade (you will always need a minimum of two people).	1 day
☐	**Meeting Follow Up:** Divide follow up amongst team using a prioritisation matrix to ensure that you focus on the best opportunities first. Do it immediately when you return.	At event
☐	**Evaluation:** Revisit SMART objectives and evaluate how the trade fair went and what your likely ROI will be.	Immediately post event. ROI should be ongoing for 6-12 months post trade fair.

Phase One: Preparation

Trade fairs cost money and it's estimated that companies spend 32% of their marketing budget on trade fairs, yet only 70% of companies set objectives before they attend (Source: Exponents Insta). Therefore, make sure it is the right trade fair for you and don't underestimate the amount of preparation required to make it a worthwhile investment.

There are three key questions you need to ask yourself when considering if you should exhibit at a trade fair:

1. Where does this trade fair fit into our export strategy?
2. Is it a new / existing market (s)?
3. Do we know enough about the market to justify the investment?

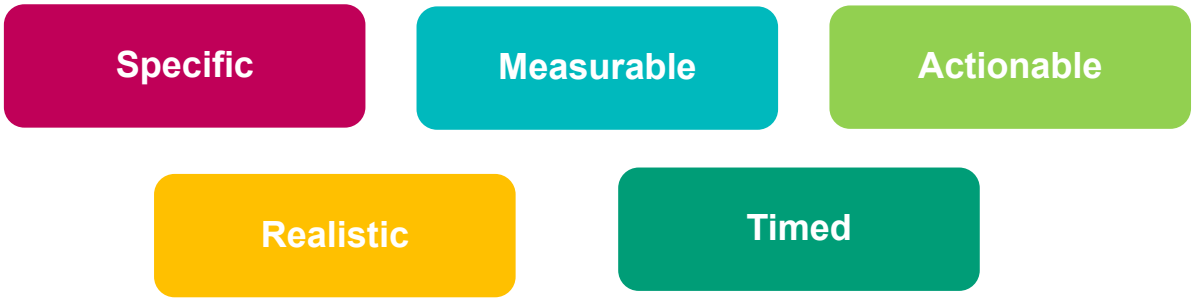
Exporting is an expensive business and a complex one, so without knowing exactly what your objective is and where you're going, it has the potential to suck up a huge amount of time and resource.

- What is your export vision?
- What are your export business objectives?

Business Objectives:

A quantifiable goal of what you will need to achieve to deliver your vision

Your business objectives should be:



Our first recommendation is that you take time to write down or review your existing export vision. Is it still relevant – are you being overly ambitious, or not ambitious enough? How you bring this vision to life is through a set of ***SMART business objectives.*** All your activity around trade fairs or customer events should be laddering up to an overarching set of objectives. If they aren't linked, you'll reduce the impact of both.

Once you are happy with your export vision and have defined your export objectives, move to understanding and preparing (with time) for the trade fair.

Below is a summary of the tasks involved in Phase One, along with estimated timelines by when they should be completed:

Six months out	Two months out	One week – 10 days before trade fair
Review export strategy to confirm this is the right trade fair for you.	Sign off stand design with Bord Bia / your own appointed stand designer	Organise staffing rota
Book your stand either independently or with Bord Bia	Confirm SMART objectives for trade fair, how will you evaluate its success?	Check travel requirements and trade fair's health and safety guidelines
Three months out: Book flights & accommodation for staff travelling (min 2 people on stand required at any one time)	Check trade fair's website to confirm your company details are correct	Confirm translator (if required)
	Organise delivery of perishable product	Send meeting requests to companies that you would like to meet (include trade fair pass)
	From this or last year's attendee list, identify companies that you would like to meet (from event website)	Check Bord Bia's media section to see if there is a release to accompany the trade fair. Consider linking to it from your own social media
	Implement your digital strategy with email outreach to current customers and connections	Test content development (focus on video) ideas and practice in event recording and posting.
	Deliver brand awareness campaign through paid social channels	

	One month out: Gather merchandise and sampling material to be brought to trade fair.	

Developing your Customer Presentations and Elevator Pitch

Trade fairs are busy and serve many purposes - whether it is reconnecting with an existing customer, meeting a potentially new customer for the first time, or updating an existing contact about new innovations and developments. You need to have all bases covered and tailored for.

In all cases, the starting point for the content is your understanding of the ***customer need/opportunity*** and your business or product's role as an answer to that need. To do that effectively, it is important to have clarity on your USP (Unique Selling Proposition) and CVP (Customer Value Proposition) and to bring these to life in an engaging way for customers during the meeting.

If you do have pre-scheduled meetings with identified customers, it is good practice to focus on customer understanding in advance of these meetings. Aim to collect information on their strategy, the environment in which they compete, their supply chain and how they operate. This will inform the type of business needs they have, and questions they need answered from a new supplier such as you. The Bord Bia Library is a great place to gather information on prospective leads. It has access to a large selection of databases which can provide background on specific customers or markets. Bord Bia's global Consumer Lifestyle Trends is a useful too here as not all trade fairs will be specific to one market. You will have a specific, tailored deck for them with their company logo and understanding of their specific needs and challenges. Make the presentation engaging using questions, stories and insightful content to connect and create standout.

In advance of the trade fair, make sure all the staff know your elevator pitch….

What is an Elevator Pitch?

"It's a 30 second memorable description of what you do and/or what you sell. The goal is to earn a second conversation, not to convince the person you're talking to that they should buy your solution" (SOURCE: The Tradeshow Network Marketing Group)

You have **30 seconds** to earn that second conversation.

"Earn" is a great way to think about it. What lasting memory do you want to leave with your potential customer to ensure there is follow up on both sides?

You will also need to prepare for passing visitors

Although the ideal is to have prescheduled, fully prepared meeting with customers, you will also have passers-by who are interested in your company too. You have 10 seconds to make an impression with them. Talk to them about their needs and issues. This may convert into ad hoc meetings that you may schedule in for later in the day or the following day. If you only have a short notice of an upcoming customer meeting, you should still make time to refresh your understanding of them, their business and any currently challenges or opportunities by:

- Online search – LinkedIn posts, media reports and features, performance updates.
- Visit their website or their store / foodservice outlet / business.
- Prepare key questions in advance – ask them in advance or during the meeting to help you understand their need.

Finally, avoid getting side-lined by passing people at trade fairs that won't be of interest to your company. It is important to have a strategy to deal with such incidences. Greet them, ask where they are from and a qualifying question or two. If you don't see potential, politely cut the conversation short and move on to the next person.

Support your attendance with digital brand awareness

In advance of the trade fair, it is important to support your attendance with building awareness with the right customers. Digital is a great channel to achieve this as it provides as cost effective and a fast way of generating and targeting specific needs. There are two ways to build awareness through this channel:

- **Organic content** can reach users that follow you on social. If those followers decide to engage with your content, their followers in turn might see your content organically. You are relying on the quality of your content, and the appropriateness of your message to engage with your audience of warm leads.
- **Paid content** is when we use a specific budget to reach users outside of our following or inside a specific group of users. LinkedIn & Twitter are primarily the best methods of identifying and connecting with a new audience with your message. Both have excellent targeting options to build an audience based around their organisation, role, location or interests. All of which should align to your trade fair presence.

Digital Brand Awareness Tips
Utilise trade fair & Bord Bia collateral in your email signature, website and social media indicating stand number and information on how to connect.
Use trade fair hashtags and make sure you tag appropriate partners, customers, colleagues in your messaging to improve reach of message.
Develop a content calendar with your colleagues to be shared through personal LinkedIn pages and email outreaches.
Ensure your website is up to date and consider investing in localised landing pages with translated information (depending on your markets of focus). Buyers will use social media and your website to validate and to see if a company is active.
Consider investing in a paid LinkedIn & Twitter campaign with clear call to actions for event attendance.
Ensure your elevator pitch and a reason to meet is clearly communicated in all communications, paid or organic.
Develop QR codes for attendees to easily collect company and product information. It is also a way for you to generate leads on clicks.
Utilise short form video clips (max. 30 seconds) on social channels to ensure a higher engagement rate for followers. (In event, it is important to continue this strategy, using event hashtags).

Above all, understand where your customers are coming from, their issues and find solutions for them. Make their life easier.

Phase Two: Participation at the Trade Fair

You will be advised of the Bord Bia stand representative in advance of the trade fair in a briefing document. On arrival, make contact the Bord Bia Stand Manager. They are responsible for the smooth running of the stand and will be your primary contact during the fair. You should also collect the exhibitor badges if you have not already done so and familiarise yourself with exits, toilets and parking.

Allow plenty of time to set up and test equipment. Arrive on site the afternoon before the trade fair opens to make sure your stand is ready with product displays, equipment and anything else you may need. The stand will have been completed by stand builders, with furniture, graphics and other equipment installed. Make sure all the equipment is working on the stand and that you know how to work ovens, warmers and AV equipment. At the event itself, you need to prepare for the following:

- **Showcasing your business on stand.**
- **On-stand etiquette in a changing world.**
- **Delivering your elevator pitch to on-stand visitors.**

Top Tips for Showcasing your Business on Stand:

If you are part of the Bord Bia stand, our Events team will guide you with all the necessary elements. Here are some points to note regarding stand design:

- ***Design:***
  - Use clean, high quality, company visuals. Ensure that you are aligning your stand design with your customer value proposition.
  - Incorporate video / moving content as it will always attract attention
  - Consider QR codes which are connected to a virtual business card system on your stand which will bring the attendee direct to your website and contact details. Some trade fairs are no longer permitting physical material such as brochures, so you need to make sure that potential customers can access more information about your company.
  - Do you require meeting space on the stand? If so, do you need to allow social distancing? Or if you think you require separate meeting space away from the stand, speak with the event organisers or the Bord Bia contact when booking the space.
  - Charging sockets / phone charger – by doing someone a favour in charging their phone, you may strike up a useful conversation with them.
  - Stand sanitisers are usually provided but you should still bring your own individual supply

- ***Business Cards:*** In Europe, less and less business cards are being distributed, with companies favouring download of contacts via the trade fair app or NTC (near technology contact). However, they are still very much the norm in certain markets in some parts of Asia so check with Bord Bia in advance.

- ***Display:*** Don't overstock the fridges and displays as it can look cluttered and unprofessional. At night-time, photograph, and dismantle displays of high value materials e.g. alcohol and reinstate the displays in the morning. Alternatively use dummy or empty bottles. Make sure you have stand storage for any standby stock that you may have brought over.

- ***Equipment:*** Don't leave equipment unattended during the trade fair and at night-time, secure it either by taking it away with you or locking it in a secure storage overnight.

- Don't leave the stand early on the last day as it leaves a bad impression of the company. Ensure you have staff on duty until the fair closes. Some exhibition centres do penalise companies who leave the stand early. At the end of the trade fair, organise transport of your perishable products back home. Non-perishable items will be transported back by the stand contractor.

On Stand Etiquette in a Changing World

- Close Contact: Everyone is different when it comes to comfort level and levels of anxiety. Don't assume people are happy with close contact. In terms of greetings, it is an individual's decision whether to offer or reciprocate handshakes. Many attendees are happy to continue to offer elbow greetings. Let the visitor to your stand take the lead and offer hand or elbow greeting and return what you are comfortable with.

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- "Open for Business": The usual rules apply: smile at exhibitors (even from behind a mask), maintain eye contact, avoid crossed arms, don't be scrolling on your phone / laptop, chatting amongst the staff and keep your hands out of your pockets. Ensure your staff create a positive image of your company.

- Natural Distancing: You could build in some natural distance or zoning on your stand with a product display or demo area which could put passers-by and visitors at ease.

- Sampling Rules: Some trade fairs are not permitting food or drink consumption within the centre. If sampling is permitted, you will no longer be able to offer buffet style and would have to offer individual samples. This may preclude you from sampling due to cost depending on the product. If you are able to sample make sure you bring all necessary items such as napkins, cocktail sticks, plastic knives etc. as there may not be supermarkets close by.

Delivering your Elevator Pitch:

In **Phase One: Preparation**, you will have identified potential customers that you would like to meet and will have ideally set up individual meetings with them at the stand. You will also have your elevator pitch completed and ready to go. Bear in mind that English may not be the native language for your meeting attendees, so speak slowly and clearly. If you scheduled meetings on the stand, ensure that there is staff to man the stand while you are engaged as you must give your full attention to the meeting.



Remember things can go wrong with technology. If you are relying on PowerPoint and your laptop, have a backup plan for your meeting.

- **Observe Competitors:** You should use the trade fair to learn more about your competitors, noting their exhibit displays, graphics and stand design from a distance. Watch their videos and exhibits. Observe their marketing and sales presentations and how they interact with visitors to the stand.

- **PR**: During the trade fair, make sure to use social media to remind people that you are there and what your stand number is. Bord Bia may have a photographer at the trade fair. You should consider recirculating these images on your own social media platforms along with using Bord Bia and trade fair hashtags.

Phase Three: Post-Meeting Follow-Up

A buyer wants to work with suppliers who are professional, reliable and who deliver on their promises. If you can't get the initial follow-up right, they may question how reliable you will be long-term and they can't afford to take risks here. No matter how likely you feel the opportunity is to convert to business, deliver what you committed to. Even if it doesn't bear fruit now you will ***leave a positive impression*** that may evolve into something down the line.

It's a mistake to view follow-up as simply 'what you do after a meeting'. To get follow-up right, you need to factor it in from the start. It should inform your meeting planning so that you find out from the customer everything you need to get your follow-up tasks and actions right.

- Think long-term when planning your meeting and have next steps in mind when you meet them: you need to ensure that you ask the right questions in the meeting to enable timely follow up.
- What do you need to know to be able to follow-up in a professional manner? Asking the right questions will allow you to follow-up in a way that responds directly to customer needs. It will also enable you to make informed choices for your business.
- It can be a good idea to capture agreed actions during the meeting so that you both decide on the route ahead and next steps. Within your own company, agree immediately who is taking responsibility for what area, to ensure it gets done in good time.

Immediately after the meeting: send thanks for their time and remind them of your agreed actions and follow-up times, giving them a chance to clarify anything if required. A photo of you, your company logo and the trade fair name at which you met will help their recall of your meeting.

It's a good idea to establish straight away who in your company is going to take responsibility for various follow-up actions required after the meeting, to ensure it all gets done in good time. It may be too much for one person, so share the agreed actions and timelines internally after the meeting and make sure each is covered.

Next, it's as simple as **doing what you agreed to do**, to prove that you are true to your word.

If there is a genuine reason that you can't deliver on something you agreed to, then simply advise the customer, explain why and when you can complete it.

Once you have completed your feedback to the companies you met, start evaluating how you feel the trade fair went for you. Don't forget, go back to your SMART objectives that you set in **Phase One: Preparation,** three month, six months and even a year, as it's difficult to gauge the success of a trade fair immediately and may require several sales cycles to see the benefit of your investment.

Evaluating the Trade Fair	Feedback (Yes/ No)
Logistics: Location of your accommodation and ease of travel to the trade fair.	
Stand Design: Were you happy with set up, equipment, graphics, meeting space.	
Staffing: Was your own team adequate to cover demand from trade fair? Did you all professionally represent the company?	
Attendees: Do you feel that it was the right fit for you to target?	
Product Sampling: Were you permitted to do it? How did it work? Did you have the right equipment?	
SMART Objectives and ROI – Ongoing evaluation over 6-12 months**.**	

Conclusion

Remember for a successful return to physical trade fairs, you need to consider and activate the following three phases:

1. Preparation

2. Participation

3. Post-Event Follow Up

Trade fairs can be hugely beneficial if you put the time and effort into the three phases that we have outlined in this guide. The Bord Bia Events team, your Sector Manager and the Client Capability Team are all there to help you along the way.

Best of luck and enjoy the return to in person trade fairs!

Sources

Reports

- Bord Bia – Connecting Virtually with your Customer – March 2021
- Bord Bia's Learning Hub – Trade Fair participation and follow up
- Bord Bia's Learning Hub – Preparing for Trade Fairs

Reference Articles

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Useful Websites

- Bord Bia Consumer Lifestyle Trends https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/insights/consumer-lifestyle-trends/
- Bord Bia's Learning Zone https://bordbia.learnupon.com/users/sign_in
- Bord Bia's Library https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/grow-your-business/library/
- QR code generator https://www.qr-code-generator.com/

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