

## Trade Shows 101: A Guide

### Overview

Whether you're planning on exhibiting at a trade show for the first time or you're a seasoned exhibitor, trade shows can be daunting. With numerous stakeholders playing different roles and various location-based rules and regulations, planning your exhibit activation can be a challenge. This guideline provides the basics to help you navigate the trade show landscape.



### What is a Trade Show?

A trade show is an industry-specific exhibition or event at which companies promote their products and services, and exhibitors and attendees learn about new industry developments, attend continuing education courses, and network with their peers. It provides an excellent platform for marketing, networking, and learning about the latest trends.

A trade show typically is held at a convention center, which is a large venue designed to host large-scale events and conferences. Convention centers offer ample space, infrastructure, and amenities to accommodate exhibitors and attendees. Examples of well known convention centers are the Javits Center in New York, the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, and the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

### The Key Players

There are many companies, organizations, and people who collaborate to make trade shows happen.

#### 1 Exhibitors

Companies or individuals who showcase, or exhibit, their products and services at a trade show.

#### 2 Attendees

People who attend the trade show. Some trade shows are open to the public, while others are open only to industry professionals.

### 3 The Association/Show Producer

Also commonly referred to as “show management” or the “show organizer,” this is the organization that puts on the trade show. The show producer is responsible for leasing the exhibition facility, hiring the contractors, and promoting the show.

### 5 Exhibitor Approved Contractors

Called EAC's for short, these are companies hired by exhibitors to handle all or part of their exhibit activation experience. This can be a full-service exhibit agency like Gilbert that provides turnkey trade show solutions such as design, construction, event services coordination, shipping, installation/dismantle, and warehousing, that exhibitors opt to use for their trade show needs.

### 4 Official Show Contractor/General Contractor

The general contractor of the trade show is responsible for managing the event and providing logistical and operational services. Some of the general contractor's responsibilities include:

- Floor plan
- Venue setup such as aisle signage, flooring, and other infrastructure
- Oversight of show move-in and move-out
- Exhibitor services and utilities such as electricity and internet
- Freight storage, loading, and unloading (drayage)
- Vendor management
- Health & safety compliance
- On-site support

Two well known general contractors are Freeman and GES.

## How to Exhibit at a Trade Show

When you've decided you want to exhibit at a trade show, the first place to start is determining which trade show you should attend. Virtually every industry has trade shows across the globe, and many industries have multiple shows multiple times per year. Here are some steps to get you started:

- 1 **Find the show that's right for you.** Do your research and find the show that aligns with your marketing goals.
- 2 **Create your plan.** Determine your goals for the show, target audience, exhibit budget, and the team you'll need.
- 3 **Secure your space.** Go on the show's website and contact the association to secure the space for your exhibit on the show floor plan. Pricing for exhibit spaces varies based on size and location.
- 4 **Choose the right partner.** Find the right partner to help you achieve your trade show goals. Depending on your needs and budget, a company (EAC) who can design, construct, and manage your trade show program for you can be a critical partner to help make your trade show experience a success and allow you to focus on promoting your products and services.  
  
If you need to design a new exhibit, you should start this process 5-6 months before the event. The right partner can also help you navigate the rules and regulations for exhibiting at a show.
- 5 **Know the details.** Study the show's website and take note of the show schedules, contractors, and rules and regulations.

## Rules & Regulations

There are multiple rules and regulations that apply to trade shows that vary by state, city, and venue. It's crucial to be aware of these rules and regulations to ensure a successful and painless trade show experience. Fortunately, most of these rules can be found in the official show manual, which is typically posted on the show's website.

### Display Rules & Regulations

Display rules and regulations dictate what exhibitors can and cannot do with their exhibit space. The display rules typically outline restrictions and limitations related to height, construction, graphics and copy, as well as how your exhibit space must be finished and how your exhibit interacts with those of your neighbors.

### City/State Labor Rules

Most convention centers operate in states or cities with labor union agreements. This means that the show contractor and the subcontractors it hires must have union labor per those agreements. This is why labor rates and minimum work time spans can vary by location. This is also why exhibitors may be prohibited from doing certain work themselves, such as setting up electrical equipment.

### Venue Rules

In addition to the city and state, each venue has its own rules for how exhibitors operate within its walls. The Venetian Expo in Las Vegas may provide different services and have different regulations than the Javits Center in New York. If you have questions about what you can or cannot do, you can always ask the association, the general contractor, or your EAC.

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## About Gilbert

Founded in 1986, Gilbert is a design, experiential marketing, and construction firm based in New York. Learn more about our [services](#) and contact an expert consultant [here](#).

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