

Trade Show Booth Planning Checklist

A practical step-by-step guide for international exhibitors preparing for a U.S. trade show

PLAN EARLIER. CONTROL COSTS. ARRIVE SHOW-READY.

Use this checklist from booth selection through dismantling. Mark each item, assign an owner, and confirm every deadline in your official exhibitor manual.

SHOW NAME	_____	SHOW DATES	_____
CITY / VENUE	_____	BOOTH SIZE	_____
PROJECT OWNER	_____	TARGET BUDGET	_____

Designed for exhibitors traveling to trade shows across the United States

Start With the Show Date

Exact deadlines vary by show. Always use the current exhibitor manual and service-provider forms as the final authority.

	Reserve booth space; define objectives; establish a working budget; select a U.S. booth partner; identify import, visa, and product-demo requirements.
	Approve the design direction; confirm booth type, dimensions, height limits, utilities, meeting needs, storage, displays, AV, furniture, and graphics.
	Approve final drawings and artwork; submit required plans; order electrical, internet, rigging, plumbing, material handling, labor, and furnishings.
	Confirm fabrication, freight route, labels, advance-warehouse dates, installation schedule, staff travel, lead capture, and promotional materials.
	Review production photos or pre-build; confirm tracking and contacts; brief booth staff; prepare emergency files and opening-day checklist.
	Supervise dismantling; reconcile outbound freight; inspect returned assets; review invoices; follow up with leads; document improvements for the next show.

Deadline rule

Order show services before the advance-rate deadline whenever possible. Late orders, overtime work, and missed warehouse windows can significantly increase cost.

Define What the Booth Must Achieve

A successful design begins with measurable goals and a clear visitor journey - not just appearance.

- ☐ Choose the primary objective: lead generation, product launch, sales meetings, demonstrations, brand awareness, recruiting, or distributor support.
- ☐ Set measurable targets for qualified leads, booked meetings, demos, samples, scans, or on-site sales.
- ☐ Identify priority audiences and the action each visitor should take before leaving.
- ☐ List every product, sample, machine, screen, demo, and marketing item that must fit inside the booth.
- ☐ Estimate peak visitors and staff so aisles, counters, seating, and work areas remain functional.
- ☐ Define must-have elements, preferred elements, and optional upgrades before design begins.

Visitor journey

From aisle attraction to welcome, discovery, demonstration, conversation, lead capture, and exit - decide how people should move.

Brand priorities

Provide current logos, brand guidelines, colors, fonts, approved claims, product imagery, and required legal notices.

Operational needs

Plan storage, staff belongings, waste, literature, refreshments, charging, private meetings, and accessible circulation.

Reuse plan

Tell your builder if the booth must adapt to different sizes or travel to multiple U.S. shows.

Notes / success metrics

Check the Rules Before Final Design

U.S. shows can have venue, organizer, fire-safety, accessibility, labor, and union requirements. Design decisions should reflect them early.

- ☐ Download the current exhibitor manual and distribute relevant sections to the project team.
- ☐ Confirm booth configuration: inline, corner, peninsula, split-island, or island.
- ☐ Verify exact dimensions, open sides, neighboring booths, columns, floor ports, ceiling height, and sightlines.
- ☐ Confirm maximum structure and signage heights, setbacks, line-of-sight rules, and hanging-sign restrictions.
- ☐ Check fire-retardancy documentation, covered-area rules, exits, enclosed rooms, batteries, vehicles, cooking, gases, and special demonstrations.
- ☐ Confirm accessibility requirements, including entry widths, ramps, counters, and circulation where applicable.
- ☐ Identify required plan submissions, stamped drawings, permits, insurance certificates, and approval deadlines.
- ☐ Verify which services are exclusive to the venue or official contractors.

APPROVAL	OWNER	DUE	STATUS
Booth design / renderings	_____	_____	_____
Engineering / structural	_____	_____	_____
Fire / safety / special use	_____	_____	_____
Graphics / content	_____	_____	_____

Build the Total Show Budget

Do not judge a booth only by the structure price. Separate production, show services, logistics, labor, travel, and contingency.

COST CATEGORY	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL	NOTES
Design and project management	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Rental or custom fabrication	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Graphics and signage	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Flooring and furnishings	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Lighting, AV, internet, electrical	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Freight and material handling / drayage	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Installation and dismantling labor	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Rigging, plumbing, cleaning, security	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Storage and return freight	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Travel, samples, promotions, lead capture	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
Contingency (recommended: 10-15%)	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____
TOTAL	\$ _____	\$ _____	_____

Common budget surprises

Material handling, electrical labor, internet, rigging, overtime, special handling, empty-container storage, cleaning, waste removal, last-minute graphics, and late-order fees.

Move From Approved Design to Show Floor

Assign one owner for every deliverable and keep the booth builder, freight carrier, general contractor, and exhibitor team aligned.

Production & graphics

- ☐ Approve final drawings and finishes
- ☐ Confirm artwork sizes and bleed
- ☐ Proof colors and spelling
- ☐ Test lighting, screens, and demos
- ☐ Request pre-build photos or inspection
- ☐ Back up media and artwork files

Freight & material handling

- ☐ Choose advance warehouse or direct-to-show
- ☐ Confirm shipping labels and deadlines
- ☐ Create packing list and piece count
- ☐ Document dimensions and weights
- ☐ Identify special handling items
- ☐ Prepare outbound shipping plan

- ☐ Confirm installation and dismantling dates, target times, crew size, minimum call, overtime periods, and supervision.
- ☐ Order power based on a complete electrical plan and equipment load list.
- ☐ Confirm internet bandwidth, wired connections, network security, and offline backup for demos.
- ☐ Provide on-site contact details and an escalation list for move-in, show days, and move-out.
- ☐ Carry digital copies of service orders, approved plans, insurance, tracking, packing lists, invoices, and contacts.

International exhibitor note

Confirm U.S. customs, temporary import, commercial invoice, product certification, and carrier responsibilities early. Do not ship restricted or time-sensitive goods without specialist advice.

Final Checks Before the Show Opens

Walk the booth as a visitor, a staff member, and a safety reviewer. Correct issues before the aisles open.

- ☐ Structure is complete, stable, clean, undamaged, and matches the approved design.
- ☐ Graphics are correct, level, well lit, and free of visible damage or spelling errors.
- ☐ Flooring is clean and all edges, transitions, and ramps are secure.
- ☐ Lighting, outlets, chargers, screens, audio, internet, apps, and demonstrations are tested.
- ☐ Furniture, counters, products, literature, samples, giveaways, and storage are organized.
- ☐ Emergency exits, extinguishers, electrical panels, and required access points remain clear.
- ☐ Staff knows the message, visitor qualification questions, demo flow, lead-capture process, and daily schedule.
- ☐ Team has key phone numbers and knows who can approve urgent costs or changes.
- ☐ Booth is photographed before opening and again before dismantling.
- ☐ Outbound labels, carrier details, bill of lading process, and move-out responsibilities are confirmed.

OPEN ISSUE	OWNER	DEADLINE	RESOLVED
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐

Booth Builder Brief

Send this information with your inquiry to receive a faster, more accurate recommendation and estimate.

- ☐ Show name, city, venue, show dates, move-in dates, and booth number
- ☐ Booth dimensions, configuration, floor plan, and exhibitor manual
- ☐ Budget range and what the budget should include
- ☐ Brand guidelines, logo files, product images, and inspiration references
- ☐ Objectives, target visitors, required visitor actions, and success metrics
- ☐ Products, demonstrations, machinery, samples, screens, and utility needs
- ☐ Meeting, reception, storage, hospitality, and staff requirements
- ☐ Rental, custom, modular, or reuse preferences
- ☐ Required deliverables and internal approval deadlines
- ☐ Primary decision-maker and day-to-day project contact

Planning a U.S. Trade Show?

Exhibitsmax provides booth design, fabrication, graphics, logistics, installation, dismantling, and project coordination from our Las Vegas base.

REQUEST A FREE 3D BOOTH DESIGN & QUOTE

Visit exhibitsmax.com to start your project

This checklist is a general planning aid. Show rules, venue requirements, labor practices, costs, and deadlines vary. Confirm all details with the current show organizer, venue, official contractors, and qualified service providers.