

Special Report:

Nine Things You Need to Know Before Buying a Custom Tradeshow Exhibit

Summary:

Before making a commitment to purchasing a new custom designed and fabricated exhibit, as a tradeshow manager you need to know the pros and cons of the decision. With all the facts in hand, your decision can be made knowing it's the best choice for your company. Learn how your company's budget, logistics and staff will be impacted by choosing to create a custom tradeshow exhibit.

The Upside of Owning a Custom Tradeshow Exhibit

Are you considering a **custom tradeshow exhibit**?

There are a number of pros and cons to weight before purchasing a custom tradeshow exhibit vs. a modular or manufactured exhibit.

1: Uniqueness. A custom tradeshow exhibit means that your company will have a unique, one-of-a-kind presentation. No one else will look like you. You'll stand out in a crowd! Your design team is really starting with a blank slate. A good tradeshow designer will start by asking questions - a lot of questions! So many in fact that you'll probably wish they would stop! Actually, it's all good - it means they care about creating the booth that you really want. A booth that works for your company from many angles: the 'look and feel,' the functionality and the branding.

2: Flexibility. A custom booth can be designed and fabricated from the outset to accommodate a variety of needs and intended usages. For

instance, if you have an exhibition schedule that demands you exhibit in a 10' x 20' space in one show, and a 20' x 20' space in another show, and a 10' x 10' space in yet another show, the components of the custom tradeshow exhibit can be easily designed to accommodate those needs.



3. Pride of Ownership from CEO to front line workers: A custom tradeshow exhibit will give you those intangibles: pride of ownership, unique corporate identity and a feeling that really can't be beat!

Owning a Typical Exhibit – What Are Your Options?

4: Custom vs. other options

Of course you do have other options, including a small **pop-up** or **flat-panel, or fabric** type exhibit. These are the very common types, as are the **custom hybrids**, which are just as the description implies: a hybrid between manufactured modular pieces and a custom design to give you something unique. There are advantages to a custom hybrid, but you are still approaching the total overall comparable cost of a built-from-scratch custom exhibit.

So what are the pros and cons of owning a **custom** vs. a **pop-up or modular-type** exhibit?

Item	Custom Booth	Pop up or Modular exhibit
Initial Cost	Moderate to high	Low to moderate
Storage	More room, higher cost	Less room, lower cost
Drayage	Higher	Low or non-existent
Uniqueness factor	High	Low
Clearly represents your brand	VERY HIGH	Moderate; tends to blend in with other booths

Some other considerations of owning a custom booth:

5. Drayage and Shipping: With fuel costs continuing to rise, exhibitors are doing all they can to cut down on the cost of shipping and in turn, the amount of exhibitry that must be moved from the receiving area to the booth space (drayage).

Just a couple of years ago a survey of exhibitors revealed that budgets for freight were being cut by as much as one-third, and budgets for show services were being cut by as much as 30%.



So where does that leave the company that wants to continue to go to tradeshow and feature a custom exhibit?

Many companies are moving to lighter materials which still give a great look but are not the typical metal and wood construction. Fabrics over metal frames or smaller booths augmented by lightweight banner stands can still fill an area with impact.

Aluminum truss systems are also becoming popular because they're relatively easy to set up, can fill a space wall, and are well-suited for hanging graphics, fabrics and other materials.

All of these materials – aluminum, fabric, lightweight banner stands and graphics – can contribute to keeping your weight down, which will cut on your shipping and drayage bills.

"You want a booth that is custom designed to fit the brand and presentation of your company. It must reflect your public representation of your brand as well as your company's culture."

6. Custom Look, Function and Branding: The main reason you're buying a custom booth, though, has got to boil down to the conclusion that you really want a booth that no one else has.

If your company handcrafts potato chips, uses biodiesel fuel in your trucks, donates to charitable causes, mitigates wetlands on the site of a new factory and works at staying 'green' with solar power arrays on the factory roof, you probably have a pretty specific idea of how you want your exhibit to reflect those values – it's all part of your company's brand.

No matter if you're making potato chips or microchips, your company's image is important, and you'll want to work with a design that is able to accurately portray the 'look and feel' of your company.



7. Design / Fabrication.

Is it important to have the same company that designs your booth fabricate it? We get that question frequently and our answer is that in our experience, if the design and fabrication are done by the same shop,

there are some inherent cost savings. It comes mostly from the ability to communicate back and forth between the shop and the design room to make sure the client gets what they ordered.

Another consideration (also based on experience) is that many designers will gladly come up with a terrific-looking exhibit that is guaranteed to wow your audience. However, they may not have considered what materials or special fabrication might be required to bring that design to life. When a designer must create a design that sticks to a specific budget, it helps to have an experienced fabrication foreman answer the questions that come up in ensuring the design can actually be built for the proposed budget.

"Confirm that the independent designer is capable of creating a design that can be fabricated in the real world."

So if you're looking at having a design firm create the design for your booth and then having a separate fabrication firm build the booth, be sure to ask the designer what kind of experience they have designing to a specific budget. Ask about their specific knowledge regarding the material and labor costs for the various elements of the design they're creating. And ask about 'before and after' samples – take a look at the initial design and see how it actually looked when built.

8. What about pricing?

Since your budget is perhaps the most critical issue with your new booth, let's address it like this: in almost all cases, you can purchase an 'off-the-shelf' tradeshow booth that will cost less than a custom booth. But that doesn't mean your custom tradeshow exhibit has to cost an arm and a leg.



By approaching the design and fabrication process carefully, it's not that hard to create a custom exhibit for about the same price you would pay for a modular or custom-hybrid exhibit of the same size. Perhaps less.

Briefly, the process would unfold like this:

- Discussion of needs and priorities and your specific tradeshow objectives
- Budgeting
- Design and feedback
- Design approval
- Fabrication

Of course there are other considerations, such as graphic design and production, time schedule, shipping logistics, and more. But in a nutshell that's the process.

Stepping UP!

9. A New Custom Booth May Give People the Impression That You're Now a Real "PLAYER": Many companies that move into a custom exhibit from smaller, 'pop-up' type exhibits face a steep learning curve. They're spending more money, they're moving into areas of exhibit that they hadn't normally had to deal with, such as higher shipping costs, more logistical maneuvering, hiring show services or an independent crew to set up the exhibit – not to mention that their inside tradeshow staff had to adjust to doing things on a bigger scale.

Clients we've worked with who stepped up in scale to custom exhibiting unanimously report that it was well worth it. Their partners, clients, prospects and industry peers saw them as bigger players in the industry, worthy of an unspoken higher respect and cachet. The pride that goes with the ownership of the 'newer model,' is imprinted on everyone from owners and management down to the 'front-line' folks working the trenches and meeting and greeting people at the tradeshow.

Conclusion

There are pros and cons to making the move to a larger, custom designed and fabricated tradeshow booth. When you're aware of the various elements and how they'll affect your company you can make a decision that is well-suited to your company. The decision to purchase a custom tradeshow booth will touch many areas of your marketing. It involves a serious commitment to change and appropriate allocation of resources from senior management.

There is a tremendous benefit to your company when your tradeshow marketing moves to higher level. Tradeshow marketing is by far one of the most cost-effective, highly targeted methods of reaching your potential customers and maintaining strong relations with your current clients.

About Interpretive Exhibits, Inc.:

We were founded in 1989, and spent the first several years of our business life creating exhibits for museums, visitor centers and other (mostly) government projects.

Our dedicated staff of designers and fabricators loves what they do – and where they do it: here in Salem, Oregon. Because we are not in a ‘large market’ we’re able to offer lower shop and design rates for our world-class design and fabrication.

Our client list reads like a who’s who of government agencies, and a growing list of enthusiastic commercial and tradeshow exhibitors. For a more complete list of who we’ve designed work for, please take a look at our website at www.interpexhibits.com.

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