

## Trade Shows are not a substitute for Market Research

*By Doug Bennett*

Manufacturers that are considering exporting to a Country they do not currently serve often exhibit at, or at least attend, one or more selected Trade Shows in the target Country. Indeed, this is generally a good way to acquire a “feel” for the prevailing business conditions, to “brush elbows” with possible future competitors, prospects, distributors, and to see what products are generating a “buzz”. Unfortunately, (and all too often if the results are positive), companies and managers that are anxious to launch in a new Country make the mistake of relying entirely on the input provided by the Trade Show(s); not perhaps realizing how unreliable impressions from this source can be.

Yet when one considers that visitors to the Exhibition Hall and others one might talk with at a Trade Show may or may not be knowledgeable, that those manning the Exhibits themselves are often regional sales representatives in full-blown selling mode, and that key players in the market may not even be attending the Trade Show; it is little wonder that impressions may be misleading. Indeed, the best that can be said of input from Trade Shows is that it is a good source of qualitative information. And unless such factors as those enumerated above are given due consideration, even the reliability of the qualitative information gleaned can be suspect.

A Market Research Study, on the other hand, can provide solid quantitative information better suited for decision-making. How big is the market? What is its growth rate? Who are the competitors? What are their respective market shares? What are their strengths & weaknesses? What are the features & benefits of the leading competitive products? What about pricing? Are there any regulatory obstacles? What are the primary distribution channels?

Would-be exporters to a new market need the answers to these questions before they can make a reasoned decision as to how best to approach the new market, let alone properly make the ultimate decision to the ultimate question: Is there any reason to believe we should abandon our aspirations of exporting to this market?

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