Guideline: Successfully plan an exhibition at a trade show

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Abstract

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The objective for this product-oriented thesis was to create a guideline for the company ‘Company X’. This guideline contains detailed information on how to plan an exhibition at a tradeshow.

The theoretical framework is divided into two chapters and was written according to the zipper method: The first part contains data collected from books and articles, before discussing data collected from the company. The first chapter is all about trade shows and provides background information on the specific trade fairs that are referred to in the next chapter.

The second chapter of the theoretical part explains the different phases to event planning: Planning, organisation and preparation, implementation, and aftercare, and how all these phases are approached by Company X when exhibiting at a trade fair.

All data has been carefully analysed to develop the basis of the guideline and to figure out what the essential information was before the production process could start. The next chapters of the thesis include a project plan and the details regarding product development.

The final product consists of all the information needed for the company to plan an exhibition at a trade fair. It has been divided into all the different preparation phases and includes instructions on how to keep track of deadlines, shipment arrangements and stand layout orders. The guideline is enhanced with illustrations and practical tips.

The guideline is given to the company as both a PDF file and a Word document. The latter is provided so that the product can be edited if anything in the process changes. Moreover, as all copyrights belong to the author and the company, the final product will not be publicized.

Keywords
Trade show, Trade fair, exhibitor guideline, event planning.

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1 Introduction

A little over a year ago I started to work for a small Dutch company, called ‘Company X’. During my time with the company, I have had the pleasure to plan and exhibit at several international trade shows: PLMA 2019 and 2020 in Amsterdam, NL, Anuga 2019 in Düsseldorf, DE and Gulfood 2020 in Dubai, UAE. Furthermore, I have done, or are in the process of, the planning for several other trade shows.

When I attended my first trade show (PLMA 2019), I had only just started working for the company and was not yet involved in the planning. However, with meetings industry as my major, I was very eager to take on this opportunity and to learn more about it. Soon after I was suddenly in charge of applying for trade shows, and arranging everything involving these events: accommodation, transport, exhibitor passes, sample selection and shipment thereof.

While I was trying to figure out the whole process for each trade show, I realized that it would be more practical to have all the steps and a checklist in one format, as to have a clear overview. Thus, the idea for this thesis was born, and I asked my thesis advisor if I could still switch topics.

This thesis is divided into several chapters and subchapters, and I will answer questions such as: How does X choose a trade show? What are the important tasks that need to be done before the event takes place? What needs to be arranged before, during and after the trade show? In other words, I will describe the entire planning process, from start to finish of a trade show exhibition.

I used qualitative research methods, which I have gathered during my time at Company X The data collected consist mainly of e-mail communications as well as some documents from the company’s database. Some other sources that I consulted are websites such as of the trade shows described.

With the help of these questions and all the collected data, I can write the guideline, which will answer the main question: How to successfully plan an exhibition at a trade show? This final question will be answered in a guideline, created specifically for this product-oriented thesis.

1.1 Company X

Company X was founded in 2004, as a solution for designing, developing, and manufacturing seasonal food (and non-food) gift products (Company X 2020). It started as an American company but was later taken over by two Israelian men who have further expanded the firm to a Hong Kong and European department.

The European department is the one that I have been working for and have visited the trade shows with. Company X (hereafter referred to as X) was founded in 2017, with an unmanned office in Amsterdam. The staff is working in Espoo, Finland and has its own office there in Tapiola.

The main concept of the business is to find creative solutions for food products and pair them with some nice utensils, packed in a gift package. This can be done under a private label, or with the company's brands. Some well-known brands that they have worked with are Jim Beam, Disney & M&M's. However, a few ranges are also entirely their own brand, this includes The Gourmet Collection and Broken Knight Cocktails Company.

To get in touch with new potential business partners, the company exhibits at multiple trade shows each year. Some of these events belong to the biggest food-related trade fairs in Europe and the Middle East. Nonetheless, as new ranges are created, and the firm is expanding, different exhibitions will be attended. A good example of this is Interzoo, a trade fair specialized in pet products and service, here the company will present their new pet range.

2 Trade shows

A trade show, also referred to as a trade fair, expo, trade conference or exhibition, is a multi-vendor sales event, within a specific trade or industry. Here multiple companies will gather and showcase their products. (Shone & Parry 2018, 54.) I would like to add that not only is it an occasion for exhibitors to show their products, but trade shows are also an excellent opportunity for networking and sourcing new products.

2.1 Background information to X's trade shows

Below there are a few different trade shows that have been visited in the past or are of interest for X, with a short explanation and some facts & figures. I chose to include this information because I will often refer to them in the next chapter, and hope that the reader gets a better picture of the trade shows this way. I have a good understanding of all these trade shows since I oversaw the entire organisation and preparation process. Therefore, I can confidently explain the full exhibiting process. Some trade shows have been included because they have slightly different approaches which I will discuss later in more detail. Lastly, I would like to point out that these events are the most important fairs for X due to the business opportunities they provide.

The layout of all the figures (Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) are based on the event umbrella component mix, as depicted in Successful Event Management: A practical handbook (Shone & Parry 2018, 35).

The image (Figure 1) below sums up all the facts and figures of Anuga 2019, such as visitor and exhibitor numbers, what small events where happening at the show itself etc. (DFV Media Group 2020; Koelnmesse GmbH 2020).

Anuga 2019	Trade Show for the International Food Industry	Sourcing & connecting	7.972 exhibitors 169.653 visitors 201 countries 284,000 m² Exhibition surface
		Seminars	E-Grocery congress Anuga Horizon 2050 Culinary stage
		Anuga taste innovation show	845 companies 2.250 new product ideas 64 products commended
	Ancillary services	Matchmaking 365	Online platform/Tool which may assist in developing business relations
		Events at stands	Tastings Gatherings & Meetings with business partners and potential customers

Figure 1. Event Component Mix Anuga 5.10 – 10.10.2019 edition.

Anuga is said to be the world's largest food fair, held in Cologne, Germany at Koelnmesse, also known as Cologne Exhibition Centre (DFV Media Group 2020). It takes place at the beginning of October and is organized every two years. Anuga is a longer trade show of five days. The show's very first edition was in 1919, which meant that the previous edition, held in 2019, marked its 100th anniversary. (DFV Media Group 2020) Over the years it has grown into a popular trade show, showcasing all the new developments in the food industry, and is being visited by exhibitors and visitors from all over the world. The trade show has been divided into different sections, such as Fine food, meat, dairy, drinks, culinary concepts, etc. These sections are then subdivided into country pavilions. Nevertheless, at Anuga you can still get a stand at a different spot, even though the country pavilions might already be full.

The trade fair last took place in 2019, from October 5th till October 10th. The next Anuga will be taking place from 9 – 13 October 2021. X used to go to every edition, although they took a short break between the years 2011 – 2019. The most recent show was the 2019 edition, and application for the year 2021 is confirmed.

The next illustration (Figure 2) depicts all the facts and figures and mini events of Gulfood 2020 (Orange Exhibition Management 2020; ASP 2019).

Gulfood 2020	Food & Beverage Trade Show	Sourcing & Connecting	97.000 Visitors 5000 Exhibitors 185 Countries 120.000 m² Exhibition surface
		Seminars	Rethinking food 3 days of high-level, curated content Over 70 speakers
	Additional services	Events at stands	Tastings Small business meetings and gatherings
		Online networking portal	Share calendars and arrange meetings beforehand

Figure 2. Event Component Mix Gulfood 16.2 – 20.2.2020 edition.

Gulfood is the largest annual food and beverage trade exhibition, and it is organized in Dubai, United Arabian Emirates. The show is held in Dubai World Trade Centre, which has twenty-one halls. Gulfood lasts five days and is visited by people from all over the world, with the majority of attendees coming from the Middle East (ASP 2019). The first edition was organized in 1987 (back then the name was Gulf Food) and it has since evolved into one of the most popular trade shows in the food industry (DFV Media Group 2020). The show contains eight sections, and all sections are also subdivided into country pavilions. The only way to get a stand is to get into one of the country pavilions. Due to this measure and its popularity, it is not that easy to get in.
It is because of this that X tried to get an exhibitor stand for a few years before they got a stand space assigned.

The last edition took place from 16 – 20 February 2020, it was Gulfood's 25th show. It was the first time X participated in the event. The next edition is planned for 21 - 25 February 2021, and an exhibitor spot has already been confirmed.

Below you will find an image (Figure 3) containing all the facts and figures and other event components of the last Interzoo edition (DFV Media Group 2020).

Interzoo 2018	Exhibition of Supplies for Pets	Sourcing & connecting	38.600 visitors 1.990 exhibitors 126 countries 120.000 m² exhibition surface
		Pet shows & Demonstrations	Dog trimming for different breeds Aqua scaping
		Seminars	Interzoo country sessions Sustainability sessions
	Ancillary services	Events at stands	Meetings and business opportunities Pet presentations
		Networking	Guided retail tour Networking Wine Reception Meet & Greet European Pet Organization

Figure 3. Event Component Mix Interzoo 8.5 - 11.5.2018 edition.

Interzoo is the world’s leading trade fair for the pet industry. The event takes place once every two years and lasts four days. It is hosted in Nuremberg, Germany at the Exhibition centre (NürnbergMesse GmbH 2020). The first Interzoo was organized in 1953, and it has since developed in a very interesting trade show, where all sorts of pet food products, grooming aids and pet accessories are showcased for all four-legged pets, birds, ornamental fish, and terrarium animals (DFV Media Group 2020).

The last Interzoo was in 2018, and a new trade show was planned for 19-22 May 2020. X has applied to exhibit at the 2020 edition, but unfortunately, due to pandemic Interzoo has been postponed to 1 -4 June 2021 (Interzoo Team 6 May 2020). This will be the first time that the company will exhibit at Interzoo and showcase its exclusive pet ranges.

The next image (Figure 4) shows all facts and figures as well as some side events that took place at ISM’s 2020 edition (DFV Media Group 2020; Koelnmesse GmbH 2020).

ISM 2020	Annual Trade Fair for Confectionery & Snacks	Sourcing & Connecting	37.000 visitors 1.674 exhibitors 148 countries 120.000 m² exhibition surface
		Sweet Kitchen@ISM	Tony's Chocolonely chocolate making Vegan and sugar-free cookie baking Production of hard candies
		Trend court@ISM	Sweet trends – Presented by Innova Market Insights Start-up Area Expert stage
	Extra services	Events at stands	Networking and meetings Tastings of snacks and confectionary
		Matchmaking 365	Online platform/Tool to assist with development of business relations
		Guided tours	ISM 2020 – Facts & Figures Naturally healthy snacks Sustainability: Let's save the planet Sugar reduced products New sensory experiences

Figure 4. Event Component Mix ISM 2.2 - 5.2.2020 edition.

ISM Cologne is a trade show of four days long and claims to be the most important import trade fair in the world for confectionery and snacks. The fair is held at the same location as Anuga, in Cologne, Germany at the Koelnmesse, Cologne Exhibition Centre (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020).
The first edition of ISM was in 1971 and the most recent show of 2020 marked its 50th anniversary (DFV Media Group 2020).

X has been exhibiting at ISM for several years in a row. Thus far it has always been a successful show, so they keep on returning and will also be seen at ISM 2021. Their application has already been confirmed and a stand space has been assigned.

Lastly, some facts and figures of PLMA 2019, including some information about other activities that took place, can be found in the figure (figure 5) below (DFV Media Group; PLMA International Council 2020).

PLMA 2019	‘World of Private Label’ International Trade Show	Sourcing & connecting	16.000 visitors 2.700 exhibitors 120 countries 42.000 m² exhibition surface
		Seminars	Multiple speakers on a variety of topics
	Ancillary services	Events at stands	Tastings Meetings and gatherings with business relations

Figure 5. Event Component Mix PLMA 20 – 21.5.2019 edition

PLMA is the world’s leading trade show for private label products and manufacturers. There are three different editions of the expo, one in the USA, one in Asia and one in Europe (PLMA International Council 2020). When referring to PLMA in this thesis, the European trade show in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, is being mentioned. It is a shorter trade exhibition, of only two days and it is organized in the RAI Amsterdam Convention Centre. The very first PLMA trade show was in 1980 in Chicago, but the first European show in Amsterdam was in 1986 and since then it has become the world’s largest private label show, where manufacturers can present their food, beverages, snacks, health and beauty, household and kitchen, DIY, and personal and leisure products (DFV Media Group 2020).

X visits the PLMA show annually and has last exhibited there during the 2019 edition. Preparations for participating in the 2020 edition were already in process when they announced the show would be postponed to 2-3 December 2020, due to the global situation regarding Covid-19. As of September 2020, not much has changed, however, it has been decided that PLMA 2020 will not be a physical trade show. Instead, it will be a virtual exhibition. The firm will still be participating in the online version of this event.

3 The different phases of event planning

There is a lot of work involved for the exhibitors who attend a trade show. The whole process needs to be carefully monitored and the whole procedure consists of different steps. Below I will describe all the phases and the steps that need to be taken before a company can exhibit at a tradeshow. Moreover, I will then explain how the different phases are approached by X to give more detailed information regarding the process involved in different phases.

3.1 Planning

Planning is the process by which an organiser looks toward the event to determine what course of actions must be taken, and how best to do them. The planning process is a management and operational issue because a lot of input is required. (Shone & Parry 2018, 106.)

Before the planning process can start, objectives need to be set, so that there is a clear goal to work towards to. Only after the goals have been set, more systematic detailed planning starts, this includes the event's budget, logistics of the event and the team (Shone & Parry 2018, 108).

For X the planning phase consists of choosing which trade shows can be attended. The company needs to ask themselves the following questions: 'Which trade fair fits the firm's products, and does it fit in the production schedule to exhibit that show?'

I will dive a bit deeper into what decisions the company needs to make and how a typical application process looks like for a show which they attend regularly. Furthermore, I will discuss the struggles of trying to get a stand space at a popular trade fair, which they have not attended yet. The ROI will be examined and implemented from the perspective of X regarding figuring out which trade show is suitable.

3.1.1 Choosing a trade show

Since X is a company specializing in food gifts, their focus lays mainly on visiting trade fairs in the food sector. However, as new product lines are being developed, some exceptions are made, and different exhibitions are attended.

For all trade shows the main question is: 'Does X belong there, will the products be of interest to the visitors?'

With some trade shows it is easy to decide whether to go there as an exhibitor. For example, certain shows have always been profitable with positive outcomes, and then there is not much of a choice to be made. Other times, a new trade show appears, it can be a completely innovative event or an exhibition which is new to the company.

No matter what the situation may be, it is always important to first look at the time schedule. Some shows, such as ISM, Gulfood and ProWein, are organized with a short span of time (Beginning February – Mid March) between the shows. During trade shows, long days need to be made by the employees attending the trade show, and they need to make sure that they have their regular work schedule cleared or can continue working on their daily tasks at the show. The dates and timing of the trade fair must be taken into consideration before applying.

Another important factor is the budget, do the costs of showcasing extend the benefits? Will it be profitable in the end, does it seem that there are enough interesting visitors for us who might be interested? The budget is decided upon by the CEO, however, it is up to the attending team to do their research about the trade show before starting the application process. Some research will be done for shows that have not been attended before, to figure out if the company fits in with the theme of the show. They will also investigate the list of previous exhibitors to find out if X can exhibit there.

3.2 Setting objectives

Generating sales and getting profitable leads is the main objective of attending any exhibition. However, trade shows are also used as a place to meet with existing customers, and it is also an excellent place to raise awareness of the company.

For attending trade shows X has different objectives:

- Presenting innovative products and new product ranges
- Creating business opportunities in new territory
- Expanding both old and new business relationships
- Sourcing for ingredients and items

3.2.1 Presenting innovative and new product ranges

X often attends the same trade shows, as they have been profitable to the company before, and will generate good leads. Nonetheless, as the world is changing, the customer demand keeps on developing, and as such the company must do the same. Where they started with only food items, it has now grown into lines with cocktail infusions and a range for pets and their owners. It is obvious, that at a show such as ISM, where all focus is on candy, there is little sense in showcasing pet foods and bowls.

Therefore, X will attend Interzoo, where the main objective is to raise awareness, that not only is the company producing gift sets for humans, but they also like to extend that joy and love to people's pets. Interzoo 2021, will mainly be about letting potential business partners know about the company's existence and show that they create gift products for pets and their owners, and to introduce their new ranges of pet products.

To get in touch with the correct public and potential customers, it is important to introduce products and the company at matching exhibitions. X has been showing the cocktail infusions at Anuga, PLMA and ISM, and although many people found them interesting enough, there has not yet been a good lead for this item. This is because cocktails are not necessarily belonging at a show where either food or private label is in the spotlight. Therefore, a different show, such as ProWein needs to be attended. It is exclusively for wine, cocktails, and other alcoholic beverages. At this trade fair the main objective will be to find wholesalers who can help us bring awareness of this product, or to find businesses who will collaborate, such as a vodka or rum company.

3.2.2 Creating business opportunities in new territory

Sometimes new business opportunities and markets need to be explored. X is well established in countries such as the USA, UK, Germany, Mexico, and Australia, but there is always room to grow and expand. When trying to get started in a new territory, it can be good to visit a trade show first. Then you will also get to know more about the demand and the culture of a new market, and you will immediately be able to display what you have to offer.

It is was with this in mind that X exhibited at Gulfood. The company did not have any business customers in the Middle East, and with the developments going on there, it seemed like a good investment for X It was also an opportunity for them to visit the stores there and to learn about the gift niche in the UAE.
It turned out that gift sets, paired with food, were not yet a big concept there, but the company discovered that it was in the early stages of development. In other words, it was the perfect show for the firm; they were able to not only showcase some of their catalogue but managed to sell full containers on the spot and established quite a few successful business relationships at the trade show.

3.2.3 Company Awareness

Another motive I would like to address is the cultivating of business relationships. As previously mentioned, trade shows are also a place to have meetings with existing customers. At such a meeting they can present new products that might be of interest to their customers, and immediately discuss the next season's order and ideas. Together the client and a person of the sales team can already start to develop the new products. Also, many meetings can be planned within a shorter amount of time, as there is no need to travel to different locations.

It can also act as a place to meet people who were already interested in X's products. Trade fairs will allow them to meet some of the team behind the products, to see and hold the products with their own eyes and to ask questions. A face-to-face conversation is always faster than e-mail communication and misunderstandings are easier to clear up this way, rather than through a phone call.

Lastly, it is also a great way to meet new people and connect with companies they would otherwise probably never have come in touch with. When displaying the products, there is always a new audience to reach, simply by being there. Sometimes it helps with raising awareness, and other times such an encounter turns into a new business opportunity.

3.2.4 Sourcing for ingredients and items

Lastly, attending trade fairs is an excellent occasion to source for new suppliers. Sometimes X's customers request a gift item with a particular food product which they did not have before. If the timing is right and a request for new ingredients coincides with a trade show, a list of ingredients and foods is sent to the employees who attend the exhibition (Liu 10 October 2019). Then, if there is a lull in visitors attending the booth, one or two people can explore the expo, to find what is needed and approach potential suppliers. It creates the opportunity to receive all the necessary information fast and compare it all before making a final decision. It is also an ideal circumstance to figure out if there is more to be gained from a possible partnership and to see how well the communication between the two companies flows.

3.3 Event ROI/Defining six levels of objectives and evaluations

A practical tool to help in making the final decision can be the Event ROI (Figure 6). The ROI pyramid can help to gain better oversight on the objectives and the evaluations of an event (Laukkanen 2018). I have addressed the 5 W's: Why, who, what, when and where (Dawson & Bassett 2015, 24) since they are crucial to the planning of any event. These questions are applied to the ROI pyramid from X’s point of view. This should help clarify what questions are important to X before a decision regarding a trade show is made.

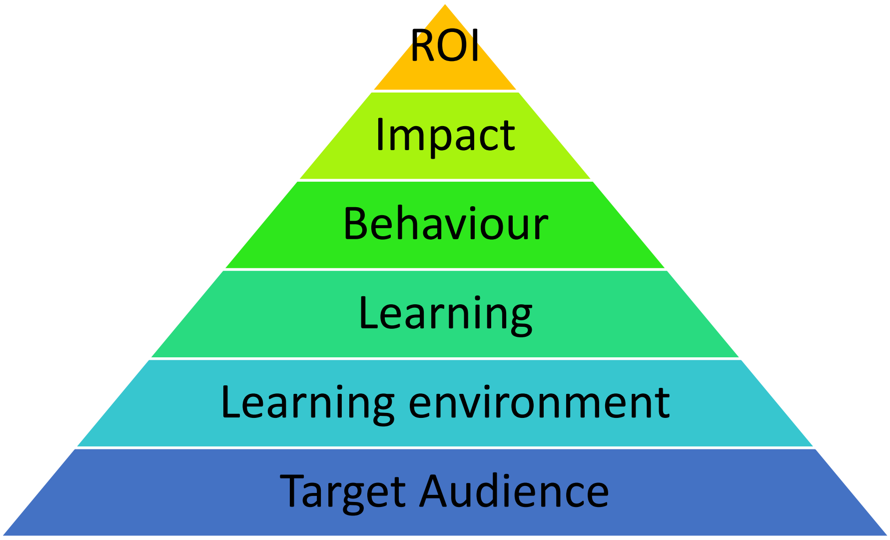


Figure 6. Event ROI showing the six levels of objectives and evaluation

3.3.1 Target Audience

When working with the event ROI, you work your way up from the lowest level, which is the ‘Target Audience’. The following question applies: ‘Who visits the show and are they the right audience for our products?’.

X’s products will be fully appreciated by visitors on trade shows concerning the food industry and/or gifting business. Their target audience is further defined by their ability to import and sometimes export. Lastly, to be profitable the customers must be able to order a large quantity of the products. The company offers unique food sets, which are not sold in the regular supermarket, thus the customer must also have the correct clients for the products that X sells. To sum it all up: The target audience for the firm are business partners who can collaborate, do not shy away from cross-border transactions and who are looking for something unique to provide to their customers.

3.3.2 Learning environment

The questions belonging to the learning environment in the event ROI from X's point of view are: ‘Where can we meet these visitors to achieve our desired change’ and ‘When can we meet them?’.

To answer the first question, of course, trade shows are a great place for the company to meet their target audience, but even so, it must be more specific, as there are so many different trade shows, both in the food and gifting sectors.

As they are looking for serious business relations who can import to, or sometimes even export from China, it does not make sense to visit a small local trade show. Therefore, X attends the larger international fairs, where there are many suitable potential customers. As the Dutch section of the company is working on business development in Europe, they tend to visit trade shows in Europe, with few exceptions.

Next, there is the question of when they can go to the expo: These events are planned long before the actual dates, and there should be enough time for the company to prepare. Furthermore, all trade shows require a timely application, or else there will not even be a booth assigned. If there is no time to apply as an exhibitor, then it might still be possible to go there as a trade visitor.

3.3.3 Learning

The products presented by the company must be of interest to visitors. This means that questions such as ‘What kind of visitors attend the trade show, and what can they offer for X’s development?’ are important before reaching a decision.

Since the company must produce on a large scale before making any profit, the most interesting attendees at a trade show are wholesale traders, distributors, etc. Such large events do attract employees of those business type’s, but then it still must be the right niche. Distributors of electronic items are not interested in gift sets that are focused on food and beverages.

This brings us to the next relevant question for X: ‘What kind of items should the company present at the exhibition and does it fit the theme?’ Despite having a versatile and extensive range of products it is still important to show the correct items, and to check that exhibition has a theme matching the company’s samples. Only when this correct, can they proceed to the next step of the pyramid.

3.3.4 Behaviour

What is the company attempting to do at an exhibition, what is the desired change in behaviour? These questions can be very simply answered. The goal of attending any show is to help the company grow and develop. This means that the desired change that X wishes to see is an increase in sale and long-term business relations with clients that they met at the trade fair.

However, even though the main goal is an increase in sales, the power of raising awareness of the firm's existence must not be underrated. Attendees may find the stand at a trade show, and despite not being able to use the services or products provided, they may know someone who can use what X offers. In that case, they can take a business card and forward it to the other party, or they contact the company later to learn more about the possibilities for future collaborations.

3.3.5 Impact

The kind of impact that the company is aiming for, is to reach out to as many people as possible. The more people know about the company, the more business opportunities will develop.

Knowing that there is a firm like this with the products and services that they offer, it can mean a large impact on the company with some drastic changes.

3.3.6 Return on Investment

The return on investment is measured by the leads that eventually result in sales. Getting to the final deal and the result of any collaboration can take years. However, it is worthwhile when the right business relations are found.

For X the right clients are business customers who are looking for a creative solution regarding packaging, development, and manufacturing. They should be able to order large quantities and have the means to an end to import from China to wherever they want to sell. They should not be afraid to let the company know all that they are looking for, as the employees of X will go above and beyond to come to a solution that fits the vision of their customers.

The conclusion is that the company is looking for trade shows which are international and are large events attracting enough big players. The event should offer enough opportunities for X to expand. Moreover, the timing of the event must fit the schedule of the employees and not clash with any other exhibitions.

3.4 Organising and preparing the event

According to Successful Event Management: A Practical Handbook, the next phase is the organisation and preparation of an event. This includes the development activities, deadlines, and preparation (Shone & Parry 2018, 108).

However, I would like to argue that when planning the entire exhibition process for a trade fair, the planning phase and organisational phase of the event are going hand in hand. It is true that one must have set objectives and goals as well as a budget before proceeding, nonetheless, the actual logistics of the samples for example are only figured out further on in the organization process. Deadlines are already considered before the organisational phase starts, because the company needs to know that a trade show will not interfere with the production process of a large order.

To give a better understanding of the organisation and preparation process for X I have created the image below (Figure 7). It clearly depicts all six steps that the company takes once an event has been decided upon for attending:

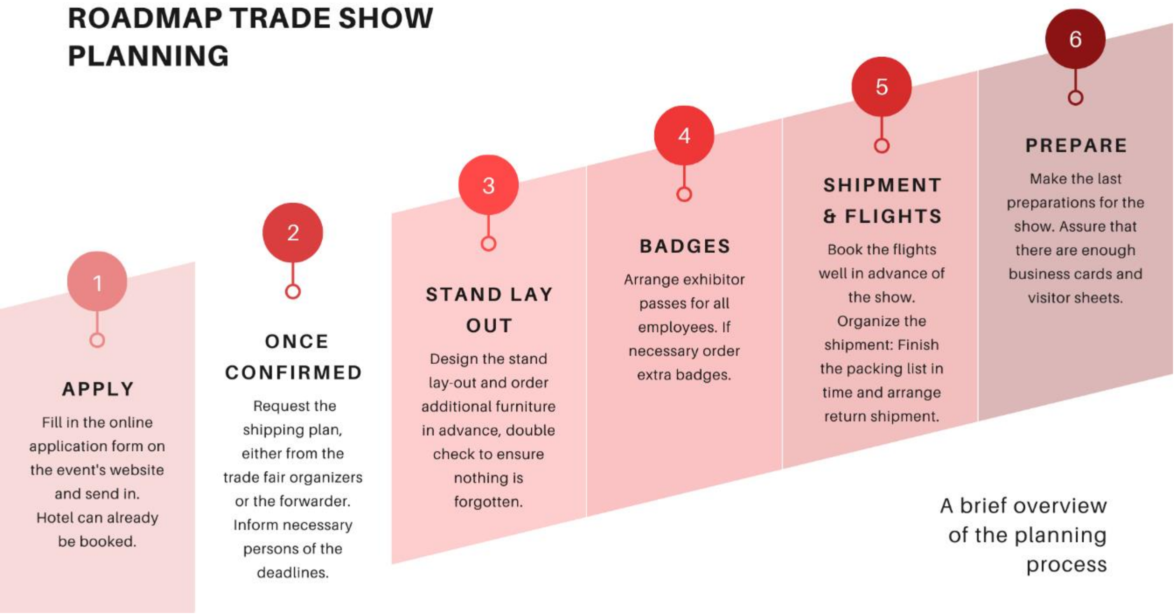


Figure 7. A brief overview of the planning process

All these steps will now be further discussed with more detail from X’s point of view.

3.4.1 Applying for a trade show as an exhibitor

When a trade show seems to offer possibilities to fulfil the objectives and the requirements, the show is selected for attendance. It is time to get started on the application process. For trade shows that X has previously exhibited at, it is a straightforward process.

As soon as the application is open for exhibitors, the contact person of the show's previous edition receives an e-mail. This e-mail will contain a link and further instructions on how to apply (Verschuur 16 April 2019; NEUREUTER FAIR MEDIA 26 September 2019).

For shows where X never had any presence yet, the procedure is a bit different, but it depends on the popularity of the shows. There are trade fairs, such as Interzoo, where the application was easily done by visiting the website and fill out the online application (NürnbergMesse GmbH 2020).

However, some of the prominent shows are divided into different sectors, which are further separated into pavilions. For these trade fairs, one might need to get in touch with an agent.

This was the case for the Gulfood 2020 application. As it is such a big and popular exhibition, it was necessary to contact the agent as soon as the application opened. Even then, there was no guarantee that a stand space would be assigned. The reason for this is that companies who have previously exhibited at the expo have priority over new participants.

For Gulfood 2019, X was within the assigned deadline of the application, but there was no more stand space available. After contacting the owner of Orange Exhibition Management, the agent who oversees the participants for the Dutch pavilion, they learned that it is best to contact them directly at the beginning of May 2019, to increase their chances for participating in the 2020 edition.

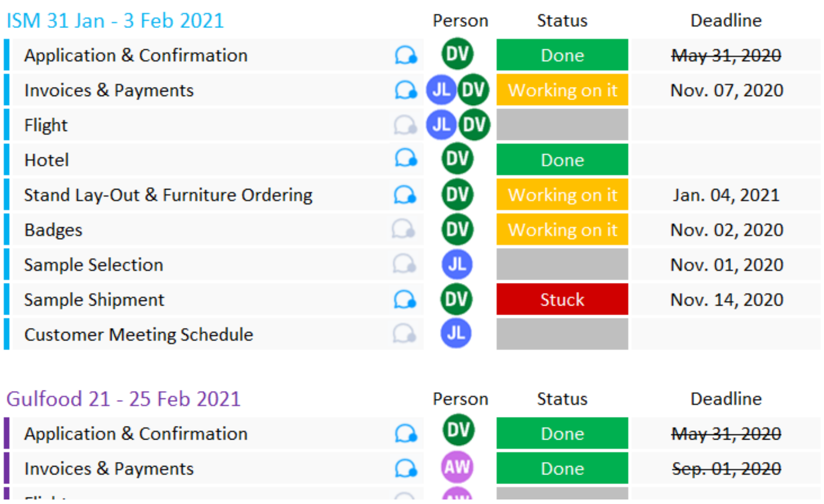
Thus said, at the beginning of May 2019 the company directly contacted the agent, and through them, they were able to get a stand space assigned (Cramer 17 June 2019). However, after the first check by one of the organizers of Gulfood, they decided that X did not belong at Gulfood (Cramer 20 June 2019). Instead, the company was made aware of Gulfood Manufacturing and Yummex. Regardless, as Gulfood Manufacturing is only for manufacturers and people creating packages, it would not be suitable. Yummex 2019 was already attended and deemed to be an inappropriate trade show for X as they did not fit in there with their products.

After some e-mail conversations with the person of the organization team, they concluded that misunderstood X's products and services, and in the end, they accepted the company as a participant (Cramer 28 August 2019).

3.4.2 Creating the planning schedule

Exhibiting at a trade show is a lot more than just filling in the application form and then showing up. Once the confirmation has been received there are practical arrangements to be made before the show. To keep a clear overview of all tasks, a planning schedule where all deadlines and tasks are clearly shown must be created.

X uses a website developed by the Monday.com company to keep track of the complete planning progress for all trade shows. It is a practical tool where tasks are easily assigned and put in a clear overview of all that needs preparation. The tool also provides an easy solution to keep track of the deadlines. Below there is an example (Figure 8) of a trade show's planning schedule on the website (Monday.com 2020) as used by the firm.



ISM 31 Jan - 3 Feb 2021	Person	Status	Deadline
Application & Confirmation	DV	Done	~~May 31, 2020~~
Invoices & Payments	JL DV	Working on it	Nov. 07, 2020
Flight	JL DV		
Hotel	DV	Done	
Stand Lay-Out & Furniture Ordering	DV	Working on it	Jan. 04, 2021
Badges	DV	Working on it	Nov. 02, 2020
Sample Selection	JL		Nov. 01, 2020
Sample Shipment	DV	Stuck	Nov. 14, 2020
Customer Meeting Schedule	JL		

Gulfood 21 - 25 Feb 2021	Person	Status	Deadline
Application & Confirmation	DV	Done	~~May 31, 2020~~
Invoices & Payments	AW	Done	~~Sep. 01, 2020~~

Figure 8. An example of a trade show planning schedule through Monday.com

Communicating with co-workers can be conveniently done per task. This makes it immediately clear what subject a question refers to. Moreover, all files belonging to the trade shows can be gathered here as well and are organized by attaching the files to the task.

3.4.3 Accommodation

Lodging is usually booked as soon as possible and might already be done before the confirmation is received. The reason for this is simple; experience has taught that acting fast is required to have an affordable hotel, that is also close to the trade show. If one is not fast enough, all the convenient options are already booked.
When booking the hotel, X tends to use a website from the booking.com company. This website shows all available options, and gives a clear overview of all matters that must be considered:

- Length of stay
- Prepayment and the cancellation terms
- Price per night
- Location and public transport connections
- Number of rooms to be booked

All these reasons will be further explained in the guideline.

3.4.4 Exhibitor passes

Per show, different instructions regarding the exhibitor passes apply. The process depends on the venue of the trade show.

For example, for Anuga and ISM, X always received three exhibitor passes, together with the first invoice (Koelnmesse GmbH 14 August 2019; Glardini 10 September 2019). They used to be sent about three months before the start of the show. These passes are without a printed name and must be filled in before the start of the show. The exhibitor tickets for these trade fairs, do not only act as admission to the events, but they are also travelling cards. It means that you can use the exhibitor pass as a tram, bus, or train ticket within the extended VRS network, in the surrounding travel zones of the location. The travel cards are only valid with a legitimate photo ID on the days of the shows. When travelling outside of these zones, the travel card is not valid without an additional ticket (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020). If more than three passes are necessary, extra passes can be ordered through the exhibition's website.

Currently, changes have been made to this system, due to Covid-19. For ISM 2021, no more paper passes will be sent out. Instead, the assigned contact person receives codes, which need to be distributed to the employees attending the show. All employees who participate must register in the ticket shop of the trade show's website. They will be able to print their tickets from there. The travel tickets will be sent in a separate e-mail to the participants of the show (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020).

The passes for Gulfood are arranged through a different system. The contact person for Gulfood receives an e-mail with log-in credentials to the show's exhibitor portal (Cramer 6 November 2019).

Here, there is a section specifically for exhibitor badges, where the company may order up to 10 passes. The contact person can send invites to the employees participating in the fair who then fill in the information required for registration (ASP 2020). The passes are then available for pick-up at the trade show. Exhibitors do have early access so they can pick up the passes well before the start of the show. The register for the pick-up is divided into sections of countries, and only one participant is needed to receive all the company's badges, to ensure a smooth flow.

The badges for PLMA were done in a similar manner. The participants needed to be registered online beforehand, and the badges could then be picked-up at the show (PLMA International Council 2019). Employees had to show their proof of registration, so that it was easier for the personnel at the PLMA registers to find and print the badges.

3.4.5 Stand layout and furniture order

Perhaps the most important matter to attend to is the stand layout and furniture available at a trade fair. There must be enough storage space to lock all our samples safely away and to avoid thievery.

Data suggests that X typically orders the same layout as they did for the show's previous edition, although there might be some small adjustments (Büttner 14 August 2019; MyStand-Shop 4 November 2019). Sometimes exceptions are made when employees notice that they do not have enough space to stow away the samples. In this case, it is possible to order additional furniture items at the trade show. However, it is more cost-effective to request equipment beforehand. This also guarantees that the company receives the requested items since only a limited amount is available for each piece of equipment at the exhibitions (Interzoo Team 15 January 2020; Verschuur 16 April 2019).

For every event, there are different procedures and deadlines to apply for the desired furniture.

Anuga and ISM are very similar since they are at the same location and thus have the same supplier. The deadline for ordering complete stand packages is 8 weeks before the start of stand construction. The deadline for ISM 2021 can already be found on the website and is 30.11.2020. The deadline for Anuga 2021 will most probably be somewhere at the beginning of August (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020). An illustrated example (Figure 9) of such a deadline announcement is depicted below:

STAND CONSTRUCTION

— **Deadline 30.11.2020 for ordering all-inclusive-stand package**

30.11.2020 | 11:59 p.m.

Order ordering stand construction services (incl. partition walls and carpet) via booth-configurator. It is possible to make a reservation at a later point in time for an additional charge.

Herr Ingo Keller
Stand construction
Tel. +49 221 821-3616
e-mail

Download calendar entry | **To the online application forms**

Figure 9. A screenshot of the deadline for ordering all-inclusive-stand packages ISM 2021

X always profits of the all-inclusive-stand package, and orders this when placing the application. There is a section on the application form, where exhibitors can mark if they require a stand package. After the application has been sent, the company receives some information about the available stand packages (Interzoo Team, 22 January 2020 & Koelnmesse GmbH, 5 September 2019). In the exhibitioner portal, they can then select the preferred package. Next, the stand volume and the sort of stand will have to be selected, before proceeding to place orders for additional furniture (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020).

For the purpose of this thesis, two illustrations of a furniture order are depicted below. The first figure (Figure 10) shows all the equipment that is included in an all-inclusive-stand package.

Art. No.:	**SSBMPO320**
Booth type:	**Terrace**
Booth size:	**4 x 3 (=12 m²)**
Carpet:	**anthracite**
Wall:	**white**
Fascia design (TEXT):	**Box, Tray & Giraffe B.V.**
Font color:	**RAL 9005 (jet black)**
Font:	**Helvetica**
Booth variant	**1.230,00 €**

Basic equipment (INCLUDED)

1	x	Cabin 1m² for Octanorm	SSBMPO925	incl.
1	x	Coat rack for Octanorm	SSBMPA260	incl.
1	x	Wastepaper basket, 20l	SSBMPA503	incl.
4	x	Spotlight, 40W, LED, standard	SSBMPA690	incl.
1	x	Table, 70 x 70 cm	SSBMPA770	incl.
1	x	Sideboard, lockable	SSBMPA570	incl.
4	x	Upholstered chair "Standard"	SSBMPA480	incl.
1	x	Curtain with lintel, white	SSBMPA810W	incl.
2	x	Shelf, straight, depth: 30cm	SSBMPA130	incl.
1	x	Triple socket, 230V	SSBMPA671	incl.
1	x	Assembly and dismantling incl.	SSBMPAUFBAU	incl.
1	x	Completion of stand construction 24h before show opening	STANDUEBERGABE	incl.
			Basic equipment, inclusive	**incl.**

Figure 10. Example of All-Inclusive- Stand Package Anuga 2021

The second image (Figure 11) illustrates an example of what else can be ordered (MyStand-Shop 2020).

Basic equipment (extra charge)				
1	x	Main supply point 8kW	SSBMPE110	220,90 €
			Basic equipment, extra charge	**220,90 €**
Your selected additional equipment				
1	x	Info counter Octanorm, lockable	SSBMPA325	185,60 €
1	x	High showcase 100 x 50 x 200 cm	SSBMPA890	325,70 €
18	x	Shelf, straight, depth: 30cm	SSBMPA130	545,40 €
7	x	Long-arm spotlight LED 21W	SSBMPA710	414,40 €
			Additional equipment	**1.471,10 €**

Figure 11. Example of an additional furniture order for Anuga 2021

After the initial order for the stand and its furniture has been placed, someone of the stand planning department proposes the stand design and layout (Karst 11 September 2019; Keller 7 November 2019). Then it is up to the person in charge of the stand design to see if everything is as it should be, or if adjustments need to be made.

For Gulfood there is a slightly different method to place the equipment order. All spaces encompass a stand package with some furniture included for this event, however, depending on the size of the stand, the sort of included equipment may differ (Cramer 6 November 2019).

Instead of ordering additional furniture through the exhibitioner's portal, the contact person for this expo will receive an e-mail from Orange Exhibition Management. Attached to this e-mail there is an excel sheet, where the exhibitor needs to select the required equipment. This sheet is sent to all Dutch companies during autumn, typically around October. The deadline is the end of the first week of December (Cramer 6 November 2019).

PLMA has a similar approach as the Koelnmesse portal, but a separate log-in is required to order the furniture for the show (PLMA International Council 2020). For the show's 2020 edition, a completely different method is used, due to the ongoing pandemic. It is because of this that the PLMA will be taking place as a virtual event, and there won't be a physical stand, and there is no need for any furniture order. Instead, someone of the company will upload images of the products, with the product description (PLMA International Council 2020).

3.4.6 Sample Selection

For a successful show, samples are needed, to showcase a selection of products and to give potential customers a good impression of what X has to offer and what the possibilities are.

There are multiple steps involved before the samples arrive at an exhibition. The first phase is to inquire which logistics provider has a collaboration with the trade show's venue and to get their shipping manual. This inquiry is made as soon as possible after having received the official confirmation (Fan 27 September 2019). This way the entire team knows what deadlines to work with. For trade shows at Koelnmesse, DB Schenker is the official shipping partner (Koelnmesse GmbH 2020; Fan 26 November 2019). For PLMA the official agent is Ceva (PLMA International Council 2020), and for Gulfood it is Al Naboodah Cargo Centre LLC (Maunder 15 December 2019). Occasionally shipment is arranged by different shipping services, such as DHL or FedEx (Lui 6 January 2020). However, this is rare and generally happens only if there is more time required to get all samples finished.

A shipping plan contains valuable instructions, such as labelling and packing requirements of the products, deadlines, required documentation, all tariffs, and of course also to which address the shipment needs to be consigned. The illustration below (Figure 12) is an example of the instructions for the Gulfood Shipping manual (Maunder 15 December 2019).

Consigning Instructions

All shipping documents Air Waybill / Invoice / packing list on freight prepaid must be consigned as follows:

Consignee:	*Notify:*
Al Naboodah Cargo Centre LLC *P.O.Box 10652* *Dubai, United Arab Emirates* *Attn: Reza Ahmed* *Tel: +971 4 455 9099* *For: GULFOOD 2020*	*Exhibitor's Name* *GULFOOD 2020* *Hall No. & Stand No.* *DWTC, Dubai* *UAE*

All documents should indicate "In transit to *GULFOOD 2020*, Dubai for free distribution or re-export after event"

The total number of pieces, total gross weight & total volume of the freight must be clearly indicated on the waybill and the same details must match 100% to the commercial documents. Separate house waybills must be issued for each individual exhibitor, when consolidated. A 10% outlay commission will be imposed on all "Freight Collect" Shipments.

Arrival Deadlines

Shipments should arrive Dubai Airports at least ***9 working days*** prior to the requested delivery date. Shipments arriving after this deadline will incur a 45% surcharge on all handling rates. ANCC will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that late shipments arrive prior to show opening but cannot offer any guarantees. Airport storage charges will be applicable irrespective of the cargo arrival deadline mentioned above.

Documentation

The following documentation is required for all shipments:

- ✓ 1 Original + 2 Copy Master Air Waybills
- ✓ 2 Original + 2 Copy Commercial Invoice & Packing List (* refer to page 8 for instructions to prepare)

Figure 12. Example of consigning instructions in the shipping manual: Gulfood 2020

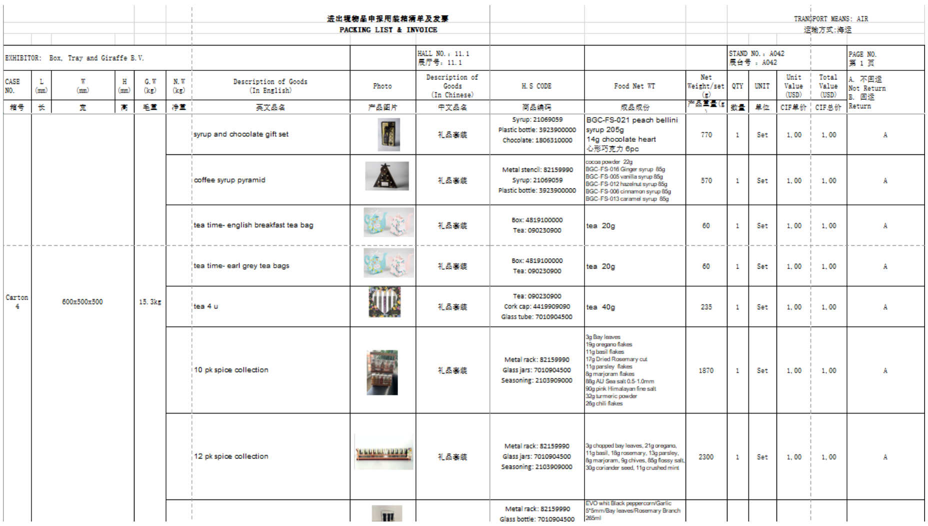
The most crucial part of any sample shipment is the arrival deadline, and the person overseeing the shipment must be informed as soon as the deadline is known. They must also be aware of the full shipping plan. X strives to get everything ready in time to make the sea freight deadline, as to have a large enough margin in case the deadline is not made. If that happens, the company can still use air freight to ensure all samples arrive in time. Furthermore, the shipping manual is sent to the appointed graphic design team, with a summary of the label requirements for the products. In doing so, the company ensures there is enough time for them to adjust some label artworks, if necessary.

Before the samples are shipped out, a selection of products needs to be acquired. This selection is typically made by the person who will be the head salesperson at the trade show. He or she uses pictures of the preferred products and then adds them in a Power-Point presentation, with additional comments if necessary (Lin 26 July 2019; Wen, 17 December 2019). This selection is then forwarded to the CEO, the head of graphic design, and the colleagues who will be attending the exhibition. Together they will check and raise concerns if there are any (Wen 17 December 2019; Yaron 17 December 2019).

After the sample selection is approved, a packing list (Figure 13) must be created. This list is part of the required documentation for all international trade fairs. It is also known as the commercial invoice.

This document contains a lot of information: All the samples are listed with the HS codes, there are product dimensions, their weight, a product description, and the value of each item. It also indicates which items are packed in which boxes, and the quantity per item (Li 10 January 2020).

Below there is an example of what a packing list should look like (Chuanxu & van Gijzen 10 September 2019):



进出境物品申报用装箱清单及发票
PACKING LIST & INVOICE

TRANSPORT MEANS: AIR
运输方式:海运

EXHIBITOR: Box, Tray and Giraffe B.V.

HALL NO.: 11.1
展厅号: 11.1

STAND NO.: A042
展台号 : A042

PAGE NO.
第 1 页

CASE NO. 箱号	L (mm) 长	W (mm) 宽	H (mm) 高	G.W (kg) 毛重	N.W (kg) 净重	Description of Goods (In English) 英文品名	Photo 产品图片	Description of Goods (In Chinese) 中文品名	H.S CODE 商品编码	Food Net WT 成品成份	Net Weight/set (g) 产品重量(g)	QTY 数量	UNIT 单位	Unit Value (USD) CIF单价	Total Value (USD) CIF总价	A. 不回运 Not Return B. 回运 Return
Carton 4		600x500x500		15.3kg		syrup and chocolate gift set		礼品套装	Syrup: 21069059 Plastic bottle: 3923900000 Chocolate: 1806310000	BGC-FS-021 peach bellini syrup 205g 14g chocolate heart 心形巧克力 6pc	770	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						coffee syrup pyramid		礼品套装	Metal stencil: 82159990 Syrup: 21069059 Plastic bottle: 3923900000	cocoa powder 22g BGC-FS-016 Ginger syrup 85g BGC-FS-005 vanilla syrup 85g BGC-FS-012 hazelnut syrup 85g BGC-FS-006 cinnamon syrup 85g BGC-FS-013 caramel syrup 85g	570	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						tea time- english breakfast tea bag		礼品套装	Box: 4819100000 Tea: 090230900	tea 20g	60	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						tea time- earl grey tea bags		礼品套装	Box: 4819100000 Tea: 090230900	tea 20g	60	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						tea 4 u		礼品套装	Tea: 090230900 Cork cap: 4419909090 Glass tube: 7010904500	tea 40g	235	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						10 pk spice collection		礼品套装	Metal rack: 82159990 Glass jars: 7010904500 Seasoning: 2103909000	3g Bay leaves 19g oregano flakes 11g basil flakes 17g Dried Rosemary cut 11g parsley flakes 8g marjoram flakes 88g AU Sea salt 0.5-1.0mm 90g pink Himalayan fine salt 32g turmeric powder 28g chili flakes	1870	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
						12 pk spice collection		礼品套装	Metal rack: 82159990 Glass jars: 7010904500 Seasoning: 2103909000	3g chopped bay leaves, 21g oregano, 11g basil, 18g rosemary, 13g parsley, 8g marjoram, 9g chives, 85g flossy salt, 30g coriander seed, 11g crushed mint	2300	1	Set	1.00	1.00	A
									Metal rack: 82159990 Glass bottle: 7010904500	EVO whit Black peppercorn/Garlic 5*5mm/Bay leaves/Rosemary Branch 265ml						

Figure 13. Example of a packing list for Anuga 2019

To create this list correctly, a lot of internal communication is unavoidable. All HS codes are taken from a website created by the European customs portal. Here are all the HS codes for all products and materials (European Customs Portal 2020).

Usually, the packing list is filled in by multiple people. Someone of the trade show's hosting team will start by entering information such as the HS codes and product descriptions. Then someone of the design or the shipping team will take over to fill in in the remaining information, such as the weights that could not be found by the person who started the list (Zhang 24 February 2020).

3.4.7 Shipment Arrangement

As previously mentioned, the head of X’s logistics department is included in all arrival arrangements as soon as the deadlines of shipping are known (Liu 17 December 2019). One of the employees who will be at the show, remains in touch with the head of the logistics team, to ensure a smooth collaboration between both teams.

The logistics team will then organize the shipment of the samples, as well as all required documentation (Liu 21 August 2019; Liu 6 January 2020). For instance, for some trade fairs health certificates are required, since all the company’s products are food items. Occasionally there are questions about the shipping manual (Fan 15 July 2019), and then it is up to the employee who has been assigned as the trade show’s contact person, to get in touch with the organizers of the trade fair (Maunder 15 December 2019) or with the contact person of the shipping agent (Fan 25 September 2019). Typically, this happens all through e-mail communication, where then also the head of the shipping department is included and informed. It gives them a chance to ask the trade show’s organizers directly if more unclarities need resolving.

Communications between the head of the logistics department and the trade show’s contact person will continue throughout the shipment process, with updates about the shipment’s whereabouts (Lui 21 August 2019; Lui, 6 January 2020). It is crucial to know when it is the shipment has left the factory, when it arrives at the trade show booth, if there are complications with the customs clearance, and so on.

Generally, this all goes without any major issues, but there are rare occasions where the shipment did not go as planned. An example of this is the sample shipment for Gulfood 2020. First, there were some issues with the sample selection, causing some delays (Wen 17 December 2019; Yaron 17 December 2019). Next, there was an unforeseen event: Covid-19 broke out in China and everyone had to go in quarantine. Due to this, X also missed the deadline for air shipment. They tried to arrange sample shipment through a service such as DHL or FedEx, but then that was impossible due to the pandemic. In the end, one of the employees who travelled from China had to take all the samples with her. This was, of course, the last resort option and should be avoided at all costs.

The return shipment of the samples needs to be arranged as well. This is organized by the employee who is trade show's contact person, and generally can only be arranged shortly before the start of the show. The company already has done this several times, and often uses DB Schenker for the return shipment to Finland (Rau 11 February 2020; Polzoni 11 October 2019). Since all goods are already imported to Europe, they have been customs cleared. Therefore, there are no additional documents needed for the return shipment and the original documentation can be used.

3.4.8 Flights

With all the European employees of X working in Espoo, Finland, it is necessary to book flights for all shows, as the most relevant events take place in different countries. Travelling by air is by far the fastest and most convenient method, to reach any trade fair since all are located close to airports.

Booking flights happens through the Finnair website, and then it is just a matter of selecting the ones which are not too expensive but still will fit the purposes. As X attempts to make the most out of the trip, they look for an early departure flight and a late return flight. This helps the employees in having enough time to set up the samples, and visit customer's stores, for reasons previously mentioned.

3.4.9 Final preparations

After all the big preparations are made, and the departure date is nearing, the preparation for the actual journey starts. There are a few matters to be attended to before the employees arrive at the exhibition:

- All attendants need to be informed of the hotel address and travelling directions
- Supplies such as business cards and visitor sheets need to be printed
- The employees all need to have the company blouse to wear at the event.

More detailed information about the final preparations have been included in the final product.

3.5 Implementation

The implementation phase of the event is the running of the event itself, the key to this are good communications (Shone & Parry 2018, 154). I would like to argue that it seems that the key to this phase is not only communication but also control. It means controlling the schedule of the event, controlling the budget as well as risks, to ensure the event progresses according to plan (Rutherford Silvers 2013).

This entire subchapter describes the last few steps that need to be taken before the start of a show, and everything that happens shortly before, during and after the event. Unless specified, there are no references listed in this chapter since this was written based on my personal experience and observations. It describes the processes of multiple trade shows that I have attended and how everything was dealt with.

3.5.1 Preparation upon venue arrival

Once the employees have arrived at the trade show, they may need to pick up the exhibitor badges before entering the venue. As soon as the stand is located, it is essential to check if all ordered furniture is there and to see if all storage spaces are lockable and have the appropriate keys. If anything is missing, or wrong, the employs arrange it immediately.

Next, all samples are unpacked and checked by the employees. Some damage may have occurred to the samples during transport. A place for all samples is already assigned then, so that the process of preparing the booth on show days is sped up. It is also a final opportunity to see if there are no items which should not be showcased, due to cultural differences. At Gulfood 2020 this last check of samples was important since, despite the sample selection, there were still a few products which depicted pigs and some mentioning of pork. The employees noticed this in time and could take it any item related to pork out of the showcased products.

Lastly, all products are then taking out of the vitrine and off the shelves. The employees store the items out of sight and reach in the lockable cabinets. This precaution was implemented to prevent theft.

3.5.2 Before the show opens

On the days of the exhibition, all stand holders must arrive before the show opens to visitors. This ensures that there are no unattended stands when the visitors enter, and all booths can be accessed.

For X this means that their employees generally arrive at the stand about an hour before the show starts. This provides enough time to clean all shelves, to set up all samples and, if necessary, stolen items can get reported.

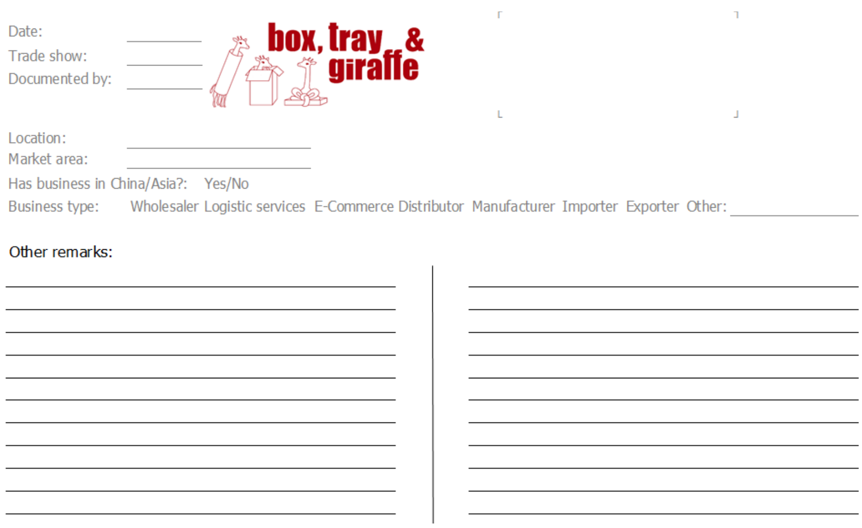
3.5.3 During the trade fair

During the trade show, several tasks need attending. The scope of exhibiting at such an event is to attract potential business partners. Therefore, it is crucial to be open to all visitor and to stay approachable. Nonetheless, it is also an opportunity to check out the competition and to source for products and ingredients.

As previously mentioned, X often has samples of their cocktail infusions for visitors to try. It is a smart method to approach a potential customer, as the innovative product often leads to questions and sparks up a conversation. Being at the booth further means to approach customers when they show interest in the available products. They will have questions about the minimum order quantity, the prices, how and where the products are produced and where the ingredients come from. It is up to the employee to answer all these questions, so quite an extensive knowledge of the products is necessary.

Once a potential business partner has left, it is time to fill in the visitor sheet (Figure 14). All that was discussed during the conversation is documented by the worker who spoke with the person. Moreover, the business card is attached to the sheet so that all the information is kept together.

Below there is an illustration of the visitor sheet as an example:


Date: ________
Trade show: ________
Documented by: ________

box, tray & giraffe

Location: ________
Market area: ________
Has business in China/Asia?: Yes/No
Business type: Wholesaler Logistic services E-Commerce Distributor Manufacturer Importer Exporter Other: ________

Other remarks:

Figure 14. An empty visitor sheet

The stand can function as a place for meeting with existing customers too. These meetings are planned a few weeks before the show and are spread out throughout the days so that there is enough time to discuss the new collections and go over orders. Typically, the meetings are limited to one or two per day.

As previously mentioned, sourcing for ingredients is one of the objectives for exhibiting at a trade fair. Once the situation allows, one of the employees walks around the halls and have a look at the stands of other companies. Walking around the show has multiple purposes. It is to source ingredients that colleagues need, and to find samples to return to the factory in China, or to see what the competitors are doing.

3.5.4 After the event

Each event comes to an end, and that means that a set of tasks must be performed before the employees can leave the booth unattended. There is a difference in closing on a normal day and the very last day of the show. I will shortly explain both procedures below.

On a regular show day, closing is generally not a lot of work. It is just a matter of getting all samples from the shelves and the vitrine, before locking them either in the storage cabin or in one of the lockable counters. The visitor sheets that have been filled out are taken to the hotel by one employee, to warrant their safety.

Overall, there is a different approach to closing on the last day. The products will either be shipped or in rare cases samples are sold throughout the day. When there are serious business customers, they will often receive the items that they are interested in. All employees are informed about the person/company and the items they are entitled to.
X often needs the samples, to showcase them in their European head office. Therefore, customarily some of the showcased items are shipped to Finland. This return shipment is arranged in the days or weeks leading up to the start of the show. In this case, the return labels for the pallet and boxes are delivered to the stand. A pick-up timeslot has also been agreed upon (Rau 27 January 2020; Polzoni 11 October 2019).

In some cases, the products are not returned. Such was the case at Gulfood 2020. Due to the same issues that prevented the ordinary shipment of the samples, the return shipment was also impossible. Thus, the employees tried to sell all items on the last day of the show.

3.6 Aftercare

Once an event has finished there is also an evaluation of the trade show. This is necessary to discuss if all objectives have been set and if the event was lucrative.
The evaluation should happen within a month after the event has taken place and should be based on all the available information. This can be either quantitative information: e.g.,

visitor data, sales and target market or qualitative information: e.g., surveys, staff & volunteer feedback (Shone & Parry 2018, 291.).

After the representatives of X have returned from a trade show, it is time to follow-up with their potential leads. Some visitor sheets are sent to colleagues from different departments. Quotations and offers need to be made, and it is the start of a lot of negotiation. It may take some time before an actual deal is struck. The information listed below is not based on specific sources and references. I have observed this process and written down all that I know of the follow-up and evaluation.

3.6.1 Follow-up through visitor sheets

The visitor sheets are a crucial aspect of the follow-up procedure. Since there is essential information recorded on it, and the contact details are also attached, they are invaluable.

The project manager ranks and prioritizes the sheets by the business opportunities that they present. Some visitor sheets are forwarded to other employees. For example, occasionally a good sales lead comes along at a European trade show, for a company in the United States. Then the visitor sheet is forwarded to the project manager of the US department. They will then contact the company and take over all further communication.

The follow-up process can be a long and tedious one, with offers and demands between customer and company going back and forth before an agreement is reached and production can start.

3.6.2 Evaluation

An evaluation of the event needs to happen as well. It is generally done with the CEO of the company and the attendants of the show. The good leads are discussed, and all that was sourced is forwarded to the purchasing team.

After a thorough discussion and a conference meeting, the decision needs to be made after answering the following questions: Was the show worth it? Do the costs outweigh the benefits? Should the company exhibit again at the next edition? And thus, the circle of exhibiting at a trade fair is round and the planning phase for another event starts.

4 Project Plan

This chapter contains the project plan, where the scope, requirements, the implementation plan, stakeholders, and the planned timeline are explained. The project plan was written before the creation of the guideline was started. In the next chapter I will write my experiences and explain more about the research methods and how the guideline came to be. The final product: ‘A guide to trade show exhibition’ is included at the end of the thesis (Appendix 1).

4.1 Scope

All previous data suggests that many matters need to be taken into consideration when planning a trade show. As there is so much information involved, a guideline is a practical solution to summarize all. The guideline can be produced in a variety of formats such as a video, audio file or a brochure. The final format of this guide will be a PDF, a written document. The reason for this is simple: Experience has shown that it can be easier to navigate when it is in written form, and some employees have shown a preference for a physical copy. A PDF file can be printed, is a solution to those who prefer the manual in a physical form.

Furthermore, a roadmap of the whole planning process will be included in the final project, as well as a packing checklist and a broad timeline. Since contact persons for some services might change over time, there will be no specific names and e-mail addresses mentioned in the final product.

Moreover, the definite guide will be for general use only. In the theoretical framework, different situations of trade shows were mentioned. Since the guideline needs to be applicable for all events that the company will attend, there will be no more mention of specific venues or trade fairs. The focus will lay on the steps which are the same for all event.

The final product belongs to X and will therefore not be publicized. To ensure that the guideline can be edited if important changes happen in the process, a Word document is also provided. Both the PDF file and the Word document will be uploaded to the company’s cloud.

4.2 Requirements

The main requirement of the guideline is that it should be easy for everyone to understand. It should not only be clear for people who have been working at X for a longer time already. Occasionally new colleagues will need to deal with the planning of trade shows, and it must be coherent for them. It means that all instructions must be concise, and no complex terminology will be used. Nonetheless, as the guide is for internal use only, there will be no comprehensive background information regarding the company. The tone of the text will be informal, taking the general tone and language at the office into account.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the guideline must be functional for multiple trade shows, therefore it cannot be limited to a certain market area or a specific event. Instead, it will show the most important steps that need to be taken, which apply to all exhibitions. Another requirement is that the guideline will be in the style of the company, this means I will stick as much as possible to the colour red (which is the colour of the company logo). The style must be consistent throughout the whole product.

Lastly, to check if the guide is clear for the intended party, a few proof-readers are needed. For this, I have already arranged three people. One of whom will be the person who will use the guideline, the second reader is someone else within the company who has experience with the whole process. The last proof-reader will be someone neutral, who has no experience, nor does she know the company that well. All information will, of course, remain confidential and all test readers have been informed of this.

4.3 Stakeholders

The stakeholders for this project are X as a company, but also the individual employees. The guideline was not commissioned, but instead written on the author's initiative, and thus X should not be mistaken for the commissioning party. The most important stakeholder will be the employee using the guide, as it must be clear for them and they should be able to implement it and plan an exhibition without any complications.

4.4 Implementation plan

The guideline will be released as one product, in addition to the thesis. However, as the thesis will not be relevant to X it will be delivered to them as a separate product. The final guide will be uploaded to the company's cloud and is accessible to all employees.

The main programs that will be used to create the guide, are Microsoft Word and Excel. There is a possibility that PowerPoint will also be implemented to create the final product. To design the checklists and timeline, a different program will be utilized, namely Canva, since there are free templates available which will aid the project.

To meet the goals, several references will be used, such as e-mails, documents provided by the show organizers and the theoretical framework of this thesis.

4.5 Timeline

With any project, smart planning is essential, and it can be helpful to set deadlines. Therefore, the table below (Table 1) shows the planned deadlines of the project, to simplify the overall creating process.

Table 1. Planned timeline for the project

Deadline	**Task**
30.9.2020	Gathering data
9.10.2020	Finding resources to create the guide
11.10.2020	Start of the project
23.10.2020	Creating the templates and other visuals
31.10.2020	Finish the guideline and send to proof-readers
9.11.2020	Have all feedback received from the proof-readers
12.11.2020	Manual is adjusted according to received feedback
13.11.2020	Final review and editing
15.11.2020	Send in the guideline

5 Project Assessment

In the following chapter I will describe the entire process of the guideline creation. The research method will be explained, along with the data used to create the manual. Next, I will talk about the tools that were used for this project then further explanation regarding the included content. I will also reflect on the planned timeline versus the actual time spend and describe the execution timeline in further details.

5.1 Research methods

The entire guideline was written based on the theoretical framework which I prepared for this thesis. This means that I conducted a qualitative research, based on e-mail communications and websites. All e-mails that were sent and received during my time of employment at X were checked and taken note of. All data used for the thesis consisted of e-mails sent between April 16th 2019 - February 24th 2020. Other sources used to conduct the research were documents relating to trade shows, such as the packing lists, sample selection and invoices. All this collected data was carefully analysed to make sure that all important parts would be included in the manual.

To collect more data regarding the individual trade shows, some websites had to be consulted. These were the official trade show websites as well as a website that gathers statistics on all trade fairs. However, this was only used in the theoretical framework to provide more background information for the reader. None of this information was implemented in the guideline.

I have also used the observative method, for the part about what happens at the trade shows. I carefully observed and learned all that is necessary to ensure a smooth flow when exhibiting. The observation was done on three different events: PLMA 2019, Anuga 2019 and Gulfood 2020. During these events I learned a lot and I was able to put some content from those observations into the guideline.

5.2 Tools used

For the guideline, I had to use a few different programs and tools. They were mainly already the tools that I described in the project plan. I chose to write the guideline using Word 2016, because I have easy access to it and a lot of experience with it. It also provided me all the opportunities I needed for the layout I desired to have.

For some topics, it was challenging to avoid repetitive words, and thus a website from the company Dictionary.com, LLC was regularly consulted to find appropriate substitutes and synonyms.

5.2.1 Visuals

The visuals implemented in the text come from a variety of sources. All images used are either created by me explicitly for the guidebook or they come from the company's database. I have also included some screenshots, from a project management website of the Monday.com company which X uses

I made the roadmap of trade shows with a graphic design platform, called Canva. Canva can be used either in a browser online or downloaded as an application. For the project, the browser version was used. At this website you can find templates for all sorts of projects. At first, I tried to create my own design, using Smart Art and the PowerPoint design option, but it was never really what I was looking for.

The timeline of the months leading up to the trade fair, was created in Word 2016. I wasted a lot of time trying to find templates from different sources but was unable to get what I needed. Therefore, I decided to create the timeline in Word, using the Smart Art function. It gave me complete control of the shape, text, and colours, which made it easy to fit the theme of the project.

For the packing checklist template, I have combined different programs to create the final product. Again, Canva was used, but I was unable to find a checklist there that complied with my requirements. However, I did use one element from one of their existing templates, so that all the checkboxes and the lines are of equal shape and size, with equal space and distance between them. The rest of the checking list design was created in Word 2016, to ensure that it matched the style of the rest of the guideline.

5.3 Content of guideline

As previously mentioned in the project plan it was always the intention to have an informal tone and to keep the text understandable for everyone. While writing the guide, I stuck to simple language and avoided any use of terms which may be only known to employees who have been working at the company for a longer time. The reader of this guide is addressed as 'you' to keep the tone informal and I have kept the text as engaging as possible. Since the employees of X are also using an informal tone in their internal communications it seemed only logical to also write the text in that manner. It is part of the company's 'vibe'.

As for the content of the text itself, it may seem that I included very simple steps on how to use specific programs or where to find specific files. This was done in case a brand-new employee joins the company, as was the case with the employee for whom the manual was intended. Because I based the guideline on their knowledge it includes some additional information such as how to use the Monday.com website as well as where to find files on FangCloud.

All steps were written in chronological order so as not to confuse the reader. I followed the steps as I showed them in the timeline, of which the visual is included in the final product. This way it is apparent when the appropriate step should be taken. This also normally is the timeline that the company uses when a trade show is prepared.

The text is enhanced by visuals such as to make everything even more comprehensive for the reader. As previously mentioned, all visuals used are created by me or come from the company's database. The choice to include the images as I did, mainly stem from that they add valuable information to the text. Images can help as an example, and to clarify the written text. I have also included the company's logo into the guide two times. I chose to do this, to make sure that this is an exclusive product used by X's employees.

I chose to add a few tips, because I feel it adds to the informal tone to include some additional information. These tips had to stand out from the regular text. To do this, I used the textbox function in Word 2016 and matched the colours to the rest of the guide.

For all the colours and images, I made sure that they could also be printed in black and white, with the text still clearly visible. This was not a requirement mentioned in the project plan, however I deemed it important because there is not always the possibility to print in colour on the work floor.

5.4 Execution timeline

The idea to create this guideline came to me because I needed a better thesis topic. I had a different topic before, but I figured out early on that it seemed rather difficult to combine with a fulltime job. My supervisor at X said that she did not think such a guideline was necessary but gave me full permission to use it as a subject and to use whatever information I needed. Since it was not commissioned, I had to work on it outside of the working hours, making it a long process. Nonetheless, in hindsight the delay was a good thing because it gave me more material and experience to work with.

I have illustrated the complete execution timeline in the image depicted below (Figure 15):

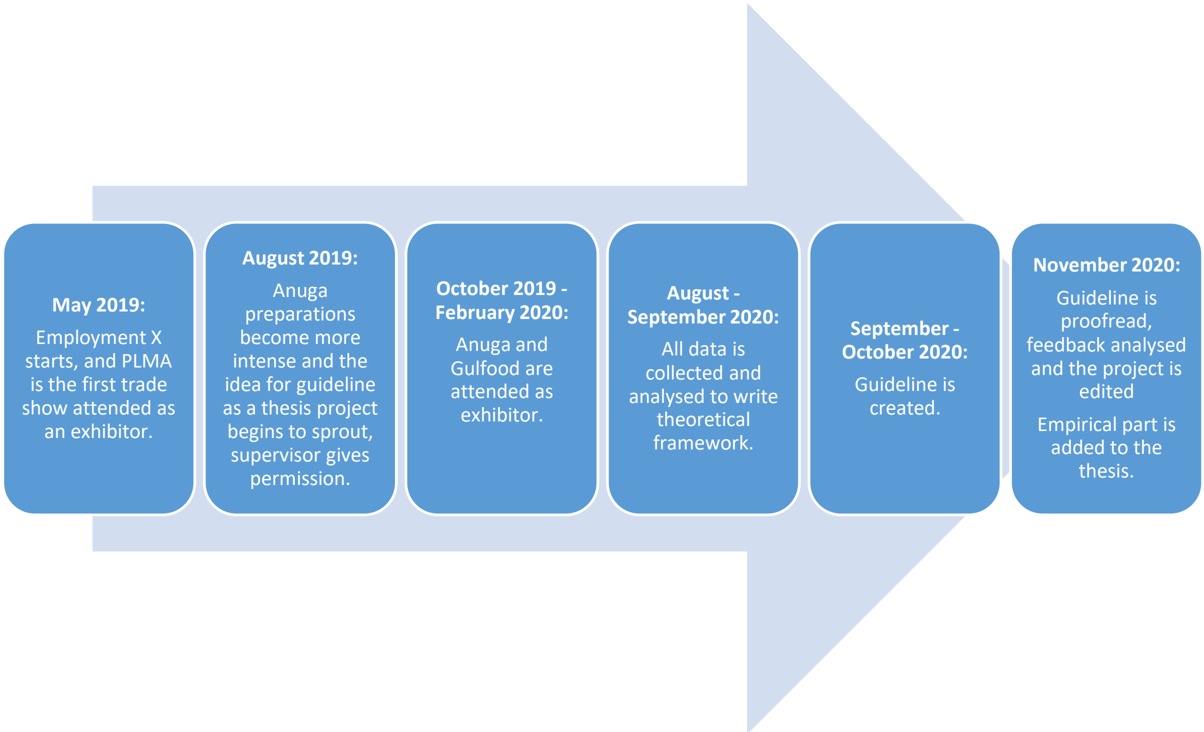


Figure 15. Visualisation of the execution timeline.

As the image shows, the first trade show I attended as an exhibitor, was shortly after I joined the company, but it took me a few more months to start forming the plan of writing a guideline. All the data used for the thesis and the guideline were collected during 18 months of employment for X

5.5 Guideline creation

After all the research was conducted, I started the creation of the guideline. I started to write a quick introduction and continued from there. Since it was important to mention all steps, I used the roadmap (figure 7) that I had created earlier as a guide to write the guideline.

Whenever I felt that an image would add more to the text, I made sure to take a screenshot of the described image or to create additional visuals. The entire manual was written chronologically, including the content creation. At first, I thought I would create the visuals separately, but I chose to add them together with the text, to have a better balance between writing the text and making the images.

Once the guideline was finished, I sent it to three different proof-readers (please refer to subchapter 5.6). Based on their feedbacks I edited the text of the manual.

5.6 Testing the product

I deliberately chose three proof-readers with different levels of knowledge and experience, when it comes to organizing and planning. This turned out to be a valuable call as it was easy to compare their comments and adjust the guideline based on their suggestions. I asked for feedback from all three, and to at least give me one point which they liked, and if they wanted me to change anything. Please find their profiles and their main feedback below:

5.6.1 Proof-reader A

The first proof-reader is the person who will ultimately use the product. They work for the company, but they do not have any experience with event organization and have not been working for the company long, which means that everything is new to them.
In the image below (Table 2), their main pro’s and con’s (Kleylein-Sohn 8 November 2020) regarding the manual are listed:

Table 2. Pro's & Cons of Proof-reader A

Pro’s	**Cons**
All steps are clear	Some sentences are difficult to read
Good images	
Understandable for me	

5.6.2 Proof-reader B

The second proof-reader chosen was my supervisor. They taught me how to plan and organize for trade shows and have lots of experience with the process.
A figure (Table 3) with their comments (Lin 9 November 2020) is depicted below:

Table 3. Pro's & Cons of Proof-reader B

Pro’s	**Cons**
Clear overview and pictures	Some texts are too long
Well explained	Too simple in some steps
Especially like the packing checklist	

5.6.3 Proof-reader C

The last reader is a good friend of mine, they have no knowledge of the company, nor do they have any experience regarding the planning of an event to this extend. I deemed it important to have someone neutral to the work, to get the best picture of how understandable the guideline is.
Below their comments (Brady 5 November 2020) are listed in a table (Table 4):

Table 4. Pro's & Cons of Proof-reader C

Pro’s	**Cons**
Even I understand it	Maybe try to avoid repetitive words
Feel like I have learned a lot about the planning process	

As can be seen from their comments, it was clear that I had to adjust the text of the guideline a bit. I do have the tend to repeat words, and according to the most experienced proof-reader, I did over-explain some steps. However, I did not take that particular comment into account when revising the guidebook, seeing as that it is for people who lack that knowledge.

Overall, all three people were fairly positive about the product, and therefore I have just looked at ways to shorten the text and to make sure that all sentences are readable. This required multiple read throughs on my part but in the end, I managed to shorten sentences and changed the use of repetitive words.

6 Discussion

This last chapter will address the conclusion of the thesis. In the project evaluation I will discuss how I experienced the product development and address what I could have done differently, or what I should have taken into account before starting the project. Lastly, I will describe my personal development, this is not only limited to the thesis process, but I also explain a bit about my professional development.

6.1 Conclusion

Before you can successfully plan a trade show as an exhibitor, you must be aware of the deadlines and the different steps that need to be taken. It is crucial to know when which phase of the planning should start and to implement everything well. To help future employees of X with this process I put all essential information into the guideline.

To decide what the essential information is, some extensive research had to be done. The theoretical framework shows the result of the research that I have done and includes all necessary information. After analysing all the collected data, it was very clear what steps had to be included in the guideline.

The final product was then created using the six main steps that X follows when exhibiting a trade show:

- Application & Confirmation
- Stand Layout & Furniture Order
- Badges
- Shipments & Flights
- Final Preparations
- At the Trade Fair

This guideline was written created in the company style, with an informal tone. All the text is further complemented by different images. The illustrations all provide valuable additional information to enhance the instructional objective of the manual.

After finishing the initial product, it was proofread by three different people, with different backgrounds and knowledge of both the company and event organisation. The product was then edited based on their feedback, so that a valuable guideline was created.

6.2 Project evaluation

At the beginning of the project, I wrote the theoretical framework of the thesis. By doing this, I spend a lot of time on the foundation of the manual, without even realizing it. This effort was certainly not wasted. When looking at the project plan, I do see that I made a fair estimation regarding the tools and requirements, even so, I did stumble upon another requirement which I had not foreseen earlier, but it was a good addition which I caught in time.

Throughout the creation process I was able to use some of my creativity. In doing so I kept myself excited and motivated about the making this guidebook. It provided a good balance between writing and analysing the previous research and doing something enterily different on a more artistic level.

In the end, I managed to produce a valuable guidebook, which fits all requirements that I previously made and is understood by all three proof-readers. The final product can be used to the advantage of the company, this was the main goal, and proofs that it is a useful guide. It will help new employees with the organization and planning of trade shows and to keep track of deadlines. It contains some useful tips as well, which I would have liked to have been mentioned to me before organizing any trade fair. This hopefully improves the usefulness of the manual and simplifies the entire planning process. However, now that all events including physical trade shows have been put on hold it will be some time before the guide can be really put to the test.

If I were to redo this project, the main thing I would change is my time management between work, the thesis, and my spare time. Since the start of the project, I have gained a better understanding of how long it can take to create visuals. This will never be underestimated anymore and if I were to do this again, I would have started working on this earlier. I must admit that it was a tremendous help in the project to have so much already prepared and written down. I did put a lot of time into writing the theoretical framework and although it was quite a pain to prepare it all, I am very glad that I pulled out all the stops on that part. If I had not been as precise with it as I have been, it would have complicated the writing process a lot and there would have been a lot of delay and time wasted.

My time management was particularly bad when it came to the visuals of the manual. Again, I expected it to be an uncomplicated process, which it wasn't. However, I did stay true to myself and what wished the manual to look like, and therefore I can honestly say that I am proud of the final product.

6.3 Personal development

Throughout the whole thesis process, I did learn a lot. At the trade shows I gained a lot of experience, but also when working on the preparations of the shows.

Not only did I learn more about all that is involved in attending such an event as an exhibitor, but I also learned more about communication. Communication is necessary to ensure that all the samples arrive on time, but also to provide potential customers with all the correct information. I also discovered that although sometimes things are very clear to me, that does not mean that they are clear for a newcomer to the company.

Moreover, I gained a better understanding of the length of the entire planning process. I had learned at university that events were a longer process and could take multiple years. Regardless, I had no personal experience with that yet. I am not just talking about the planning of an event now, but when looking at the timeline, it is clear that also the thesis process was a lengthy one. This is definitely not something that one simply rushes.

Lastly, I would like to mention that although conducting research was not a challenge, I definitely learned a lot regarding the empirical part of a thesis. It turns out that I am good writing down a theoretical framework, but I had a lot of difficulty differentiating between the theoretical and empirical part. Fortunately, I have now grasped the concept.

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