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# GLOBAL VIEW

Notes

# 5 WAYS To Miss a Trade Show



By Michelle Bruno

**E**ven though natural disasters, equipment failures, and unexpected delays can wreak havoc on a well-formed plan to ship international goods to a U.S. trade show, there are ways that exhibitors can also contribute to missing the show. Here is a list of the top five blunders that international exhibitors commit and what to do about them.

**1. Don't read the shipping instructions.** It's a well known fact that most exhibitors don't read exhibitor manuals, show rules and regulations, and shipping instructions. They are long, complicated, and boring. They cover situations that don't apply to all customers (like instructions for shipping food or hazardous materials when most shows don't involve either commodity). Often, they aren't user friendly or easy to follow. Manuals and instructions are meant to cover the issuer's legal requirements, not the exhibitor's preferences.

**What to do:** Exhibitors should discuss the highlights (at least) with a qualified freight forwarder. Experienced forwarders will check documents and freight before shipping to make sure that the most important rules are adhered to. At the very least, skim the documents to learn about:

- Consignment details
- Documents
- Packing
- Deadline dates

**2. Don't observe the deadline dates.** Some deadline dates have the appearance of being too conservative. A ten day lead time for air freight and 45 days for ocean freight seem unrealistic when actual transit time is 10 hours by air and as little as ten days by sea.

**What to do:** If an exhibitor cannot make the posted deadline dates, they should immediately contact the official freight forwarder or the customs broker in the U.S. to ascertain whether a cushion has been built into the deadline dates, whether other shipping options are available (and the additional cost) or if plans to ship some goods to the show should be abandoned.

**3. Don't list all items on the commercial invoice.** It isn't unusual for exhibitors to have last minute reservations about the quantities or products being shipped to the show. It's impossible to predict whether all items to be displayed will be of interest to attendees. If the goods are intended as giveaways, it's difficult to know how many visitors will come to the booth. First time exhibitors may believe there is little harm in throwing a case of wine and some non-perishable food items into the shipping container so they can avoid the hassle of shopping in a strange city or buying from the convention center.

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**What to do:** Inform the freight forwarder about any items that are undeclared. Often, the exhibitor will have an opportunity to amend the invoices before they are presented to U.S. Customs. If, however, the goods remain undeclared (also known as smuggling), the importer is subject to fines, seizure and possible criminal penalties depending on the items.

**4. Don't consign the documents correctly.** Most tasks these days are intuitive. Rather than consult the shipping instructions (which are prepared specifically for trade show shipments), it's often easier to prepare documents the same way they are prepared for commercial shipments or in the manner that seems most logical to the shipping department. The unwitting forwarder then prepares the bills of lading from incorrect invoices.

**What to do:** The bills of lading are the most critical of the documents for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). In the interest of security, these documents dictate the ultimate destination of the goods and MUST be very specific. It is possible to amend bills of lading after the shipment leaves the port of origin but it may take several days of precious time that the exhibitor may or may not have allowed for.



**5. Don't declare realistic commercial values.** Exhibitors sometimes undervalue exhibition shipments to lower the bond costs or reduce the duty and taxes (for permanent imports). This action is risky from an insurance standpoint (insurers will only reimburse shippers for values stated on the commercial invoice) and CBP computers can compare similar commodities based on the tariff codes to detect any irregularities in declared values.

**What to do:** Discuss values with the customs broker. Sometimes the goods can be classified more appropriately (in the case of used items or items for demonstration purposes only) or in the case of high value goods, entered under a temporary import, trade fair entry, or ATA Carnet. If none of these discussions takes place and the values are improperly declared, the shipment could be seized by CBP or the broker could refuse to clear it.

Experienced exhibition forwarders are skilled at troubleshooting and knowing which mistakes, omissions, and missteps can be corrected and which cannot. A qualified supply chain of forwarders, carriers, and brokers builds in "checkpoints" and redundancies so that errors can be discovered long before the "point of no return." Nevertheless, it is ultimately the exhibitor's responsibility to consult with professionals, consider options and alternatives, and follow the shipping guidelines in order to make it to the show on time.

Past issues of the *Global View* newsletter and *Global View Notes* are available online as PDF files (see link below). All articles are available in MS Word for inclusion in newsletters or as web site content. To obtain Word versions, contact Michelle Bruno, editor.

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