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The Exhibitor as a Client of the Trade Fair Organiser – a Diagnosis of the Level of Satisfying Needs

Summary

The aim of this paper is to determine what exhibitor's expectations towards trade fairs organisers are and to assess the level of exhibitor's satisfaction from mutual cooperation on the example of research of the participants of the selected event. The article is of the research nature. In the presented research process, it was possible to distinguish eight detailed areas of cooperation between trade fairs organisers and exhibitors. Furthermore, it was determined which of these areas most significantly affect the overall evaluation of this cooperation. It was also established how exhibitors, who took part in the 6th International Trade Fair for Suppliers of Maintenance Products and Services, Maintenance, and the 7th International Trade Fair for Powder & Bulk Solids Technology in Poland, SyMas, evaluated the organiser with regard to the listed categories.

The obtained results, due to a more comprehensive diagnosis of the exhibitor needs, enable trade fairs organisers and operators to boost the competitive strength of their trade fair offer.

Key words: trade fairs, exhibitor, trade fairs organisers.

JEL codes: M39

Introduction

The contemporary trade fairs industry is a significant component of economic reality. It is estimated that in Europe alone there are approximately 700 trade fairs service providers and they enable 680 000 exhibitors to get in touch with 67 million trade fairs visitors annually (Markiewicz, Resiak-Urbanowicz 2014, p. 196-216). Competing on the market of trade fair organizers and operators requires continuous enhancing of the offer which would meet the needs of both exhibitors and visitors. There are varied purposes¹ behind exhibitions at trade fairs, which entails differentiated expectations towards the event organizers. The ongoing monitoring of changing expectations is indispensable for the organization of an event which matches the market demand.

Therefore, the aim of the research presented in this paper is to determine what exhibitor expectations towards trade fairs organizers are and to assess the level of exhibitor satisfac-

¹ The traditional simplified approach to the objectives of trade fairs participants which assumes that exhibitors want to sell something during the trade event and visitors want to buy something was long ago replaced by more complex analyses of trade fairs goals for both these groups of participants. Compare to (Hansen 1996, p. 39-53).

tion from mutual cooperation as illustrated by the case of the 7th International Trade Fair for Powder & Bulk Solids Technology in Poland, SyMas, and the 6th International Trade Fair for Suppliers of Maintenance Products and Services, Maintenance. Both the events were held in the International Exhibition and Convention Centre EXPO Kraków on 6-7. October 2015. The thus defined research area is seldom an object of scientific and research studies. It is more common to define exhibitor expectations with reference to visitors. Still, it should not be neglected that exhibitors' success at trade fairs is a function of the support they receive from trade fairs organizers.

The obtained results, due to a more comprehensive diagnosis of the exhibitor needs, enable trade fairs organizers and operators to boost the competitive strength of their trade fair offer. It is especially significant in the today's market reality, in which exhibitors have at their disposal increasingly more opportunities to choose appropriate tools for the realization of their business objectives (Dołhasz 2015, p. 1426-1433). Organizers of particular trade events have to be aware of competing not only with the other representatives of their own industry but also with other forms of market communication (Rinallo, Borghini, Golfetto 2010, p. 249-258). Trade fairs especially have to cope with strong competition from the Internet as a communication tool and source of market information (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, Lipińska 2012, p. 12-26).

Exhibitor expectations towards trade fairs organizers – the state of the art

The participation of contemporary exhibitors in trade fairs is becoming more and more professional. Exhibitors are precisely defining trade fair objectives and carefully planning the ways to achieve them. This leads to a rapid increase in their expectations from trade fairs operators.

The management process of fair trade participation, realized by exhibitors, is multi-stage and often significantly spread over a longer period. Its main stages are: preparations for the event, participation in a trade fair and summing up the outcomes. At each of these stages of trade fair management, the organizer support can significantly increase the effectiveness of fair trade participation (Proszowska 2015, p. 540-547). Exhibitor expectations fall into two categories: informational and organizational (those resulting from technical requirements of the prepared exhibition and those pertaining to perfecting the communication process with fair trade participants).

During the first phase of fair trade preparations it is crucial for the exhibitor to obtain information on the very nature of the event, as this enables them to make a proper choice of the event and to plan preparatory activities. Such information is of a very basic character and does not require any complex action on the part of the organizer. What is most important is to efficiently communicate information about particular trade fairs. Individual exhibitors planning their participation in these trade fairs for the first time may have a number of more detailed questions to ask and they expect a prompt and complete answer. If they make the

decision that they are willing to participate, they start to declare their organizational needs concerning the arrangement of the stand, provisions for the stand personnel as well as the preparation of additional promotional activities. During the event exhibitors will also expect further support from the organizers in the form of press conferences, seminars or other events. Exhibitor expectations do not stop when the event comes to an end. Afterwards, they will be interested in the trade fairs statistics, like the information on the number of visitors, exhibitors as well as in opinions expressed by the media and the other participants of the trade fairs (Solberg Söilen 2013, p. 312).

Expectations labelled as organizational will become considerably more complex and less precisely defined, primarily those related to the optimization of the communication process between fair trade participants. The number of factors significantly affecting the communication process is growing rapidly. What is more, factors like emotions and experience are assuming greater importance and they are much more difficult to monitor as they result from an interaction of different activities (Tarczydło 2014, p. 159-165). Thus, having control over exhibitor expectations in this area is becoming even more significant.

The adopted research method and sample selection

The analysis of thus formulated research problem was carried out on the basis of questionnaire surveys conducted among the exhibitors during the 7th International Trade Fair for Powder & Bulk Solids Technology in Poland, SyMas, and the 6th International Trade Fair for Suppliers of Maintenance Products and Services, Maintenance, which were held in the International Exhibition and Convention Centre EXPO Kraków on 6-7 October 2015. The questionnaires were distributed to all the exhibitors on the first day of the event and successively collected until the last day of the fairs. The size of the sample was limited by the number of participants of the surveyed trade events. In both cases, 160 exhibitors took part and the questionnaires were filled out by the personnel of 128 trade stands.

The process of collecting completed questionnaires was accompanied by complementary interviews with staff members employed by the exhibitors, which allowed to gather additional information and verify the reliability of data from the questionnaires. A statistical description and correlation analysis were the methods applied in the process of analyzing the obtained information.

The specific character of the selected trade event conditioned the characteristics of the surveyed exhibitors, who were representatives of broadly understood investment industries, in particular of the machinery, measuring, warehousing sectors, etc. These sectors were represented by both manufacturing companies and services firms. The average year of the establishment declared by them was 1989 ($s=28.9$), so it was a moment of rapid development typical of the market transformation period. The surveyed exhibitors were differentiated in terms of the magnitude of employment; they employed between 1-3,000 workers (the average employment: 127 workers). Still, these were mostly small-sized companies (the median: 25 people). The fact that the examined trade event was dominated by smaller busi-

ness entities might be attributed both to the lack of the dominant position of the Krakow's trade centre on the Polish trade fair market and to the character of the surveyed exhibitors' offer as well. The products displayed by the exhibitors were customized offers, prepared for individual customers, which frequently accounts for a relatively small number of employees. The stands rented by exhibitors were on average 19 m² in area (the smallest: 4 m², the biggest: 100 m²). The prevailing legal form of the surveyed business entities was the limited liability company (92 firms).

A diagnosis of exhibitor expectations towards trade fairs organizers and the exhibitor satisfaction level: the research results

In order to determine the exhibitor expectations towards the trade fairs organizer and to assess the level of exhibitor satisfaction from the cooperation with the organizer it was decided to distinguish the basic areas of the exhibitor-trade fair organizer relationship during the entire management process of a company's participation in a trade fair. The next stage was to diagnose how the surveyed exhibitors evaluated the Targi w Krakowie Ltd with reference to the distinguished areas, and then, what factors influenced their assessment. It was assumed that the basic statistical parameters pertaining to the profile of the surveyed exhibitors and their selected behaviours connected with their participation in the trade fairs would be taken into account. What was considered as particularly significant were additional promotional activities undertaken by the exhibitors during the trade fairs and the application of special procedures for evaluating the outcomes resulting from the participation in the trade fairs.

The criteria and the results of the evaluation of the trade fairs organizers by exhibitors are shown in table 1.

It was established that the organizer did not get a score of 1 in any of the categories and the average scores ranged from 4.95 (for "supporting the evaluation of trade fair outcomes") to 5.82 (for "communication with the organizer in the course of stands reservations and preparations for the trade fairs"). At the same time, within the categories "communication with the organizer in the course of stands reservations and preparations for the trade fairs" and "quality of the trade fair infrastructure", not only were there no scores of 1 but also scores of 2 were not recorded (the average score: 5.73; $s = 1.07$).

Analysing the actual space arrangement potential of the venues where the trade fairs in question were held and comparing them with other Polish or foreign facilities of this kind, it can be assumed that especially the last rating was slightly exaggerated. Probably, this result was due to the appreciation of the positive development changes of the venue of the Targi w Krakowie Ltd over the last few years rather than a great impression made by the facility². From an organizer's point of view, it is also really good information, as such opinions are

² It would be confirmed by oral opinions of the exhibitors, who, despite the positive evaluation of the event, emphasized the fact that, for example, German organizers offer a higher standard.

the evidence of the exhibitors' positive attitudes towards the organizer and should encourage them to participate in the next edition of this trade event. On the other hand, a relatively low rating for the promotional activities realized by the organizers in the external media should inspire them to additional efforts in this area.

Table 1
Evaluation of the trade fairs organizer by exhibitors – summary of results

Category of assessment	The number of exhibitors grading organisers on given level Scale: 1 (extremely negative) – 7 (extremely positive)							Average score of the organizer in a given category	The average score given to the trade fair organizer by the exhibitors (by category)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		exhibitors who made use of additional promotional activities	exhibitors who did not make use of additional promotional activities
quality of information on the event	0	1	5	15	31	46	30	5.61	5.45	5.72
quality of the trade fair infrastructure	0	0	4	11	38	38	37	5.73	5.58	5.82
quality of the trade fair services	0	2	3	11	33	49	30	5.67	5.64	5.69
accessibility to additional services	0	1	7	23	42	32	23	5.29	5.41	5.21
communication with the organizer in the course of stands reservations and preparations for the trade fairs	0	0	3	10	31	47	37	5.82	5.86	5.78
offer of additional opportunities for promotion during the trade event	0	1	5	15	41	43	23	5.47	5.60	5.38
media promotion of the trade fairs	0	4	11	28	39	28	18	5.01	4.90	5.09
supporting the evaluation of trade fair outcomes	0	4	14	28	37	28	17	4.95	4.90	4.98

Source: own research.

The responses to the question³ on the degree to which the cooperation with the trade fairs organizer had met their expectations fell in the 3-7 bracket with the average of 5.71. This high rating is important for the organizer and helps them create a highly positive image on the market. Yet, it points out to a relatively low level of exhibitor expectations. The dynamic development of the trade fairs sector and its ongoing professionalization force organizers to

³ They had a scale of 1 (extremely positive) to 7 (extremely negative) at their disposal.

immediately start thinking about new elements to be included in their offer so as to avoid being surprised by an increase in exhibitor and visitor expectations in the future.

The analysis of the correlation between the variable describing the degree to which the cooperation with the organizer satisfied the exhibitor expectations and the variables describing the detailed assessment of this cooperation (within the framework of the eight above mentioned categories) revealed that all the Pearson's⁴ linear correlation coefficients for these relationships were significant at $p < 0.05$. The quality of the trade fair services turned out to be the most significant ($r = 0.77$), while the quality of the information on the event and offer of additional opportunities for promotion during the trade event were second and third in the order of significance ($r = 0.67$ and $r = 0.66$, respectively). The accessibility to additional services turned out to be the least significant of all the above mentioned factors ($r = 0.59$).

A significant level of correlation was observed between the overall evaluation of the cooperation between the exhibitors and the organizers and variables like an increase in requests for face-to-face meetings and talks on cooperation ($r = 0.25$) as well as an increase in the number of phone queries on the same subject ($r = 0.25$). The values of these coefficients indicate the areas which most significantly affect the overall evaluation of the cooperation with the trade fairs organizer.

Furthermore, it turned out that those exhibitors who did not observe any direct influence of their participation in the trade fairs on the situation of their companies gave lower ratings to the cooperation with the organizer (R Spearman's⁵, the coefficient value: 0.27). Although it is a rather weak correlation, the very fact of its occurrence is to be considered significant. This observation suggests that a lack of positive outcomes resulting from the participation in the trade fairs might lead to a lower rating of the cooperation with trade fairs organizers. In extreme cases, it might even happen that exhibitors will attribute their own poor preparation for particular trade fairs and a failure to tap the full potential of the event to the organizers.

It was found that among the surveyed respondents 58% did not make any use of additional promotional activities during the trade fairs. The results of the assessment of the cooperation with the trade fairs organizer within the listed categories were divided into two groups, depending on whether or not the exhibitor used additional promotional activities (See Table 1). This division allowed to note that those exhibitors who implemented additional promotional activities during the trade fairs were more satisfied with the quality of additional services, communication with the organizer, additional opportunities for promotion and with the overall cooperation. The largest discrepancies in assessment occur with reference to the quality of information, while the willingness to make use of additional promotional activities least affects the evaluation of the quality of the organizer's trade fair services⁶. Based on that, it may be assumed that forecasting exhibitor preferences and expectations on the basis of the

⁴ Assuming that the suggested scores were allotted in accordance with quantitative measuring scales.

⁵ The measuring scale is nominal.

⁶ It is also confirmed by the box and whiskers plot for these relationships. The plots are not identical for the influence of using promotional activities on the categories of cooperation marked in the table with the following numbers: 2, 5, 7, 8. For the remaining categories pertaining to the evaluation of cooperation, the discrepancy of results varies in different groups of respondents.

responses to the question if they are planning any additional promotional activities would be helpful in shaping the relationship between trade fairs organizers and exhibitors.

The exhibitors who did not use the special procedures for the evaluation of the trade fairs participation rated the cooperation with the organizer higher. Based on the assumption that the level of the provided service was comparable in the case of particular exhibitors, it can be inferred that the less complex the procedures for the assessment of trade fairs outcomes were, the more satisfied the exhibitors were with the cooperation with the organizer. It would suggest that the more professional the exhibitor's approach to their participation in trade fairs is, the more critical they will tend to be towards the organizer. Assuming that the professionalization of trade fair activities is a natural tendency among exhibitors, it may be presumed that their expectations towards trade fairs organizers will be rising. This finding should encourage trade fairs organizers to create new offers of trade activities and services, which could help to maintain a high level of satisfaction among exhibitors in the future as well.

Conclusions

To sum up, in the presented research process it was possible to distinguish eight areas of cooperation between exhibitors and trade fairs organizers. Furthermore, it was determined which of these areas most significantly affect the overall evaluation of this cooperation. It was also established how researched exhibitors evaluated the organizer with regard to the listed categories.

It was proved that the assessment of the quality of cooperation with the organizer is affected by the use of additional promotional activities as well as by the application of selected assessment methods of trade fairs outcomes. The implications pertaining to the implementation of particular measures by trade fairs organizers were presented within the framework of the research process description.

This project is a starting point for further research to be carried out on participants of next trade events. Due to a number of limitations and the relatively small number of the analysed questionnaires, the obtained results cannot be considered as representative for the entire trade fair market in Poland and need to be further explored. The significance of the obtained results is also lowered by the fact that a considerable proportion of questions included in the research questionnaire were closed-ended. It presents the risk of the omission of some relevant responses. Still, the results are an interesting study on an analysis of trade behaviours of exhibitors from the sectors represented at the trade fairs which were examined. This research project will be continued within the framework of next trade events.

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Wystawca jako klient organizatora targów gospodarczych – diagnoza poziomu zaspokojenia potrzeb

Streszczenie

Za cel artykułu przyjęto określenie oczekiwań wystawców wobec organizatora targów i ocenę poziomu zadowolenia ze współpracy z nim na przykładzie badań uczestników wybranej imprezy targowej. Artykuł ma charakter badawczy.

W zaprezentowanym procesie badawczym udało się wyodrębnić 8 szczegółowych obszarów oceny współpracy wystawców z organizatorami imprezy targowej i określić, które z nich są powiązane z całościową oceną tej relacji w stopniu największym. Ustalono też, jak wystawcy uczestniczący w VII Międzynarodowych Targach Obróbki, Magazynowania i Transportu Materiałów Sypkich i Masowych SyMas oraz w VI Międzynarodowych Targach Utrzymania Ruchu, Planowania i Optymalizacji Produkcji *Maintenance* ocenili ich organizatora w wymienionych kategoriach. Otrzymane wyniki, dzięki pełniejszemu zdiagnozowaniu potrzeb wystawców, dają organizatorom i operatorom targowym możliwość poprawy konkurencyjności ich oferty targowej.

Słowa kluczowe: targi gospodarcze, wystawca, organizator targów.

Kody JEL: M39

Экспонент как клиент организатора экономических ярмарок – диагноз уровня удовлетворения потребностей

Резюме

В качестве цели статьи приняли определение ожиданий экспонентов от организатора ярмарки и оценку уровня удовлетворения от сотрудничества с ним на примере обследований участников избранного ярмарочного мероприятия. Статья имеет исследовательский характер.

В представленном исследовательском процессе удалось выделить 8 детальных областей оценки сотрудничества экспонентов с организаторами ярмарочного мероприятия и определить, которые из них увязаны с совокупной оценкой этого отношения в самой высокой степени. Определили тоже, как экспоненты, участвующие в VII Международной ярмарке по обработке, складированию и транспорту сыпучих и массовых материалов *SyMas*, а также в VI Международной ярмарке поддержания движения, планирования и оптимизации производства *Maintenance*, оценили их организатора в перечисленных категориях. Полученные результаты, благодаря более полному диагнозу потребностей экспонентов, дают организаторам и операторам ярмарок возможность повысить конкурентоспособность их ярмарочного предложения.

Ключевые слова: экономические ярмарки, экспонент, организатор ярмарок.

Коды JEL: M39

Artykuł nadesłany do redakcji w kwietniu 2016 roku

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