

## Visitor Invitations – An Integral Part of Trade Fair Communications

Trade fair companies invest a large portion of their budget into promoting the event, endeavouring to attract a maximum number of trade visitors to the exhibition. However, that does not mean that these visitors will also communicate with all exhibitors of interest to them automatically. It is therefore essential, especially at major trade fairs, that exhibitors actively participate in the marketing of their exhibition presence and advise potential visitors of their participation in advance of the trade fair, motivating them to visit their stand.

Different tools exist to draw the attention of customers and potential customers to your trade fair presence, including:

- Visitor invitations
- Announcement of exhibition presence on the website
- Advertising of exhibition presence in daily communication documents (e-mail signature, invoices, quotations)
- Personal invitations extended by the sales force, customer service and distribution partners
- Press releases
- Advertisements in trade media, online media, newsletters or on the official exhibition website
- Listing in the exhibitor database
- Publication of trade fair attendance in social media

According to an AUMA study, a good incentive for visiting a stand, besides existing and potential business relations, is an invitation from the exhibitor.

### **Why are customer invitations so important?**

The time trade fair visitors have available is limited. More than 80% of trade visitors plan their exhibition visit in advance and arrange their important interview appointments before the fair starts. With targeted customer invitations, exhibitors can make sure to be on the visitor's radar and scheduled on his personal visit itinerary.

### **How and when to adequately plan an invitation campaign?**

The most important rule up front: early planning pays off. Just the update and amendment of address data is time-consuming – and essential. Addressing visitors correctly has to be a top priority. Planning the mail-out date for customer invitations should take into account that executives and guests from faraway places need more lead time for their scheduling. Holidays and vacation periods also need to be factored in. Internal organizational processes should be defined at an early stage: Who should accept and process responses? Who coordinates appointments at the trade fair and how? Have the sales staff been informed about the content and mail-out date of invitations, and can they react competently when contacted by interested visitors?

### **How to overcome the attention threshold?**

Overcoming the attention threshold is the key to success of an invitation campaign. The following factors contribute to accomplishing this objective when planning a customer invitation:

- Multi-stage implementation
- Implementation across various media
- Target-group specific approach and medium
- Concept and quality of campaign performance

### **How can an exhibitor stand out with his invitation from the other exhibitors?**

Multi-stage invitation campaigns across various media achieve the highest attention. A best-practice approach is to send a "save-the-date" e-mail first, followed by an invitation letter, and last a personal reminder-call shortly before the fair starts.

Interest in a stand visit can be enhanced by various incentives such as a sweepstake, information about innovations, invitations to stand events and special promotions.

**PRACTICAL TIP:** Easy to integrate and very popular with visitors are one-day ticket vouchers that can be ordered from the event organizer, allowing visitors free admission to the trade show. Often, these vouchers are also available in electronic format and can be incorporated in e-mail campaigns without much effort.

The invitation campaign should stimulate the senses and stand out from the rest of the correspondence and e-mails. With a customer **invitation sent by mail**, exhibitors have the opportunity to offer their target clients a pleasant haptic experience, include giveaways or free vouchers, and implement the company's corporate identity. In recent years, a handwritten letter or envelope has become a rarity and is sure to make an impression. A longer delivery time should, however, be factored in for postal correspondence.

### **What should be included in the customer invitation?**

The following components should not be missing in both your postal and online communications:

- Personalized address
- Event venue and date
- Your company logo and trade fair logo
- Directions to the exhibition stand (location, hall, stand number)
- Special topics, products, services, novelties
- Trade fair message
- Customer/visitor benefits
- Events (product presentations, lectures, etc.)
- Incentives (e.g. admission voucher)
- Response options
- Contact person with contact details for inquiries

**PRACTICAL TIP:** After the fair, or even while it is still on-going, it pays off to complement the invitation campaign with a thank-you letter to visitors. A fast reaction distinguishes you from competitors and will reinforce the positive first impression communicated during the event.

## What characterises successful e-mail marketing?

A well-maintained address database is the most important prerequisite for sending out customer invitations by e-mail. In this context, exhibitors should ensure that the contact data of their target group is

- up-to-date and correct (first name, last name and salutation),
- can be mapped to the customer personally (avoid info@ or contact@ e-mail addresses) and
- is included only once (eliminate duplicates).

An **e-mail invitation** enables interactive communications with customers, for example by integrating a survey, links to various information sources, an appointment-making tool or gift vouchers which can be redeemed at the exhibition stand. E-mails are delivered to the recipient immediately.

Various e-mail marketing tools can be used for e-mail campaigns. Some of the best-known tools for drafting and dispatching e-mail campaigns are, for example, CleverReach ([www.cleverreach.de](http://www.cleverreach.de)), MailChimp ([www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)), Sendy ([www.sendy.co](http://www.sendy.co)) and kajomi ([www.kajomi.de](http://www.kajomi.de)).

These verified tools have major advantages over common e-mail programmes (such as Outlook):

- Easy address administration
- Tracking capability (success evaluation of campaign)
- Easy addition of variables (dynamic content)
- Mailing to very large distribution lists
- Reducing the risk of blacklisting, which classifies an IP address / e-mail as unsafe due to suspected SPAM

Drafting and design of e-mail content can be carried out for example based on different existing templates or be programmed according to the company's CI (requires HTML and graphic design knowledge). Alternatively, it can be booked as an extra service, as offered by kajomi.

Selection of the right tool for e-mail campaigns is crucial and should be made based on the following criteria:

- Legal compliance of mailout
- Bounce management (information about undeliverable e-mails)
- Import and export of address records
- Interfaces with proprietary software such as the corporate CRM system or the shop
- Personalisation of e-mails
- Existing templates and designs
- Sending HTML and conventional text e-mails
- Quality assurance
- Sending of test e-mails and A/B tests (two different e-mails are being sent to two subgroups of target audience, in order to assess their effect)
- Tool performance
- Tracking

- Cost (user fees)
- Availability of address database

**PRACTICAL TIP:** E-mail marketing tools offer tracking with different scope. Most important for evaluating any e-mail campaign are the details on opening rates, click-through rates, unsubscribed e-mails and bounced (undeliverable) e-mails.

### **Risk of Spam when sending e-mail campaigns**

When sending out commercial e-mails to customers or prospects, the risk is that these are considered as Spam, that is, unsolicited advertising. Cease and desist letters and legal action may be the consequence. To protect your e-mail campaign against accusations of spamming, the following legal requirements must be met:

#### **Opt-out procedure**

In the case of existing clients, it is possible to send e-mails without prior permission, provided several conditions are fulfilled as described in the Act Against Unfair Competition § 7, Article 3: The address has been collected in connection with a sale, only similar own products are being advertised, the customer has not objected to the use of e-mail and has been informed that he can object at any time.

#### **Opt-in und double opt-in**

In all cases where the requirements for the opt-out procedure have not been fulfilled, obtaining the recipient's agreement is a must and accomplished by way of the opt-in procedure. By opting in, the customer actively confirms his informed consent, which constitutes the basis for legal effect.

For sending newsletters and advertising e-mails however, the simple opt-in is not sufficient: the customer's agreement is required twice, i.e., a double opt-in. Following his initial agreement, the customer receives an e-mail with a request to confirm his consent. This is to ensure that only the registered owner of the electronic mail address – and not a third party – has agreed to be included on the distribution list. It is incumbent upon the sender to guarantee that no inappropriate mailings are being sent.

**PRACTICAL TIP:** Further information is provided in § 7 UWG (Act Against Unfair Competition) and in the TGM (German Teleservices Act).

Sources:

- [www.auma.de](http://www.auma.de)  
AUMA – Association of the German Trade Fair Industry

Disclaimer: The author assumes no responsibility for the topicality, accuracy and completeness of the information provided.