

Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firms' Marketing Communication - an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process

Marketing
Master's thesis
Rilla Engblom
2014

Author Rilla Engblom

Title of thesis Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firms' Marketing Communication – an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process

Degree Master of Economics and Business Administration (M.Sc.)

Degree programme Marketing

Thesis advisors Professor Pekka Mattila and Researcher Elina Koivisto

Year of approval 2014**Number of pages** 115**Language** English

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study the role of the trade fairs in the firms' marketing communication mix at the present as well as in the future. Furthermore, the study explores the reasons trade fairs are used, how they support the companies' relationship building process and how other marketing communication tools are used to support their fair participation. First, the thesis discusses what is trade fairs role as part of the firms' marketing communication now and in the future. Second, processes that lead to successful trade fair participation are described. This is important, as none of the previous research has integrated the different processes needed in the successful trade fair participation. More specifically, this research looks for the critical processes that have input on successful trade fair participation taking into consideration the on-going and sequential nature of the processes.

Data for this study was gathered from qualitative semi-structured interviews. Twenty-one firms were interviewed from top management level executives representing different fields of businesses for this study. The companies and the executives were chosen from the client base of the Finnish Fair Corporation. The data analysis followed the principles of Straussian grounded theory where analytic coding was used. The grounded theory method was suitable for getting insights into the role of fairs as part of the firms marketing communications now and in the future, and more knowledge about the overall fair participation process in order to elaborate the theory. The interviewees were given latitude to express their opinions freely and spontaneously. The theoretical framework was built from the researcher's collection and analysis of data through the researcher's perceptions and past work experiences to increase understanding of the phenomenon and give guide to action.

The results indicate that trade fairs have a significant role in the firms' marketing mix. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to understand the different processes linked to the trade fair participation in order to reach the best possible results. In this study, four essential processes are identified: 1) planning and execution, 2) human resources, 3) marketing communication, and 4) evaluation and control that are interconnected and in use at different time frames such as pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair. The two most critical processes according to the research material are '*planning and execution*' and '*human resources*' processes. Indeed, successful exhibitors plan carefully their exhibition participation and the best exhibitors recruit the most suitable persons to take care of the whole integrated exhibition process – without forgetting the importance of marketing and evaluation. This research has provided both a new integrated conceptual framework and some useful empirical results that can help to understand, assess and improve the processes of the trade fair participation.

Keywords trade fair, marketing communication, marketing mix, trade fair process

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3
1.1	<i>Research background</i>	8
1.2	<i>Objectives of the study and the research questions</i>	10
1.2.1	What is trade fairs role as part of the firms' marketing communication?	11
1.2.2	What kind of processes will lead to success in the trade fair participation?	12
1.3	<i>Structure of the study</i>	13
2	Literature review and theoretical context	15
2.1	<i>History of the fairs</i>	15
2.2	<i>Defining and classifying the trade fair</i>	16
2.3	<i>Trade fairs as part of firm's marketing communication</i>	19
2.3.1	Marketing mix and trade fair's role in it	19
2.3.2	Marketing communication tools supporting trade fair participation	21
2.4	<i>Trade fairs advantages compared to other marketing tools</i>	22
2.4.1	Personal face-to face contacts	22
2.4.2	Neutral grounds, motivated visitors	23
2.4.3	Hands-on experiences	23
2.5	<i>Planning the trade fair participation</i>	24
2.5.1	Objectives for participating in trade fairs	25
2.5.2	Selling, non-selling and buying motives	26
2.6	<i>The vital role of stand personnel</i>	28
2.7	<i>Measuring the trade fair performance</i>	30
2.7.1	Follow-up of contacts	30
2.7.2	Non-selling benefits	31
2.8	<i>Theoretical framework</i>	32
3	Research methodology	34
3.1	<i>Research design</i>	34
3.2	<i>Grounded theory</i>	34
3.3	<i>Reliability and validity of the thesis</i>	35
3.4	<i>Interviews</i>	36
3.5	<i>Data analysis</i>	37
4	Findings	39
4.1	<i>Trade fairs role in the firms' marketing communications</i>	39
4.2	<i>Uniqueness of trade fairs</i>	42
4.2.1	Place for genuine face-to-face encounters	42
4.2.2	The quality and easiness of the connections	43
4.2.3	Marketing tool for all senses	43
4.3	<i>Integrated trade fair process</i>	44
4.3.1	Pre-fair stage	45
4.3.2	At-fair stage	47
4.3.3	Post-fair stage	48
4.3.4	Planning and execution process	49
4.3.4.1	Objectives for participating a trade fair	50
4.3.4.2	Attracting the visitors	55
4.3.5	Human resources process	59

4.3.5.1	The importance of skilled stand personnel	62
4.3.6	Marketing communication process	63
4.3.7	Evaluation and control process	65
4.3.7.1	Assessing the end results	67
4.3.8	An on-going integrated process	69
5	Success factors within the processes	71
5.1	<i>Success factors in the planning process</i>	71
5.2	<i>Success factors in the human resource process</i>	74
5.3	<i>Success factors in the marketing process</i>	74
5.4	<i>Success factors in the evaluation process</i>	75
6	Discussion	76
6.1	<i>Keys to successful trade fairs</i>	76
6.1.1	<i>Neglected marketing process</i>	79
6.2	<i>Managerial implications</i>	81
6.3	<i>Recommendations for the trade fair organizers</i>	85
6.3.1	<i>Livening up the fairgrounds</i>	85
6.3.2	<i>Prioritizing sales and customer encounters</i>	87
6.3.3	<i>Remembering the importance of customer-orientation</i>	90
6.3.4	<i>Refreshing the trade fair program</i>	91
6.3.5	<i>Other suggestions for improvement</i>	92
6.4	<i>The future of marketing communication</i>	94
7	Conclusions	99
7.1	<i>Theoretical implications</i>	99
7.2	<i>Limitations and further research</i>	100
8	References	102
9	Interview Data	112
9.1	<i>List of interviewees</i>	112
9.2	<i>Interview form (in Finnish)</i>	113
10	Appendices	114
10.1	<i>Appendix 1: Exhibition investments in Finland (M€), in 1996-2009</i>	114
10.2	<i>Appendix 2: The great advertising pie 2012 – 3,38 mrd €</i>	115

1 Introduction

Trade fairs are largely used and companies invest in them since only direct selling receives more funds than fairs in terms of the marketing mix (Herbig et al. 1998). Fairs have been widely used tool of marketing communication even though they have been difficult to measure and prove their efficiency. On the other hand some firms have chosen alternative ways to communicate to their potential or current customers. The reason might lie in the limitations of trade fairs, which are known to be the high costs and measuring difficulties of their effectiveness (Herbig et al. 1997, Sashi & Perretty 1992, Bonoma 1983) but also in the chaotic fair environment (Bello & Lohtia 1993, Bello & Barksdale 1986). The purpose of this research is to understand the role of trade fairs in the marketing mix of companies and the different processes related to trade fair participation that will result in successful results.

Marketing executives are concerned about the effectiveness of the trade fairs as a communication tool. My research reveals that the six most questionable factors are: 1) the costs of trade fair participation, 2) the time-consuming and physically demanding fair process, 3) the difficulty of reaching the right audience at the fair, 4) the fact that measuring is difficult, and 5) the skills and presence of the stand staff, and 6) the slightly chaotic trade fair environment. According to the investigation made by Herbig et al. (1997) the main reasons for firms not to exhibit were the unknown effectiveness and the high costs of the trade shows. Nevertheless most of the non-exhibitors still visited personally trade shows on an annual basis. Banting & Blenkhorn (1974) found out in their study four main complaints made by the exhibitors; 1) the rising costs of participation which included the construction, labour and maintenance of the stand, 2) the increasing number of trade fairs which problematized the probability of the attendance of potential customers, 3) the large number of “sightseers” visiting the trade fairs, and that 4) the trade fairs were held too often. Other issues that concerned the exhibitors in the study were e.g. the amount of resources it requires, the long length of the trade fairs, the lack of specialization and industry irrelevant

exhibitors at the trade fair, weak publicity and the shortage of audited visitors among others.

Trade fairs' main weakness seems to be that they are considered to be an expensive media. It is not just the cost of a floor space but also other costs such as personnel, travel, constructing and marketing. For some firms it can be the single biggest cost in their marketing budget adding even up to 40%. Sashi & Perretty (1992) argue that because of these rising fair participation costs, trade fair participation should not be taken lightly but instead should be approached systematically. Firms invest around 5 to 35 % of its annual advertising budget to the trade fairs. The average is between 10 to 12% of the firms' whole annual marketing budget (Bonoma 1983). In order to be successful small businesses should invest 28% of the marketing budget to trade fairs from the whole marketing budget (Tanner Jr. 2000). Furthermore the cost of the stand is usually 15% of the total trade fair budget and this cost has more than doubled during the past ten years (Herbig et al. 1997). For many firms trade fair costs become second, just after the sales force costs, in the competition of marketing budget investments (Bonoma 1983, 76). Thus, trade fair participation requires significant investments over an extended period of time from the firms that need not only to buy services at the fair but also before and after the fair as well (Kirchgeorg et al., 2010). It is evident that if the share of the marketing expenses is this high, the management wants to get evidence for the effectiveness of fairs as a marketing media.

Trade fair participation process is time- and resource consuming as well as physically tiring. Häyrynen and Vallo (2012) state that firms think one of the discouraging factors of trade fairs are the need of resources and the amount of time that fair participation requires. When thinking about the resource expenses, these researchers remind that the firms should bear in mind the important role of personnel at the stands because their presence affects the company image and communicates about its values. Representing ones company at the stand can be physically tiring and a demanding job. Moreover Lee-Kelley et al. (2004) points

out that workforce are also needed in the designing, constructing, transporting and dismantling the stands too. For its part, human power is linked to many different costs such as accommodation, travel costs and insurances. Due to the vast amount of different costs associated with trade fairs it is not surprising that marketing executives and firms' top management especially controllers would like to see more measurable results (Herbig et al. 1998).

Another important fact is that when firms invest huge amounts of marketing euros in their trade fair participation, they expect to get in touch with their target audience. Already Banting and Blenkhorn (1974) pointed out the fact that the increasing the number of trade fairs have made it less probable for firms to reach their customers and that there are a large number of sightseers visiting the trade fairs. Also today's hectic work environment competes with visitors' time, so trade fair organizers and exhibitors need to be really active in order to get the real decision-makers and influencers to visit the fair. During their visit it is then as vital for exhibitors to recognize their prospects from the crowd and be able to attract them to visit their stand.

Furthermore measurability from the trade fairs is called upon. However often firms do not know how to measure the effectiveness and they rely purely on their gut feelings or competitors' actions. Even though trade fairs are extensively used, the success of trade fairs can be hard to measure and some marketing experts have not been able to prove the effectiveness of trade fairs (Herbig et al. 1997, Gopalakrishna & Williams 1992). Bonoma (1983, 76) indicated that unknown effectiveness i.e. marketing return on investment and the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness were among the key negative characteristics of trade fairs. There have been attempts to measure the effectiveness of the trade fair participation but the evaluation techniques have been weak (Banting & Blenkhorn 1974). They certainly are not as easy to measure as advertising and direct sales. Bonoma (1983, 75) thinks that some managers still feel forced to participate because of the pressures from the marketplace i.e. competitors, visitors and other relevant parties. Some other reasons why firms participate in trade fairs, although they are

considered to be somewhat ineffective compared to other promotional media, are their suitability for introducing new products, maintaining corporate visibility and creating new customer contacts (Banting & Blenkhorn, 1974).

Trade fairs stand out from other marketing media for requiring quite a lot of time and physical effort. Trade fairs have been compared to a carnival environment and there is a risk of fair fatigueness both mental and physical as well as information overload of both sides the exhibitors and visitors. The huge amount of visitors can make the fair centres crowded, noisy and even messy places. Large trade fairs are sometimes “cluttered, crowded and confusing” (Herbig et al. 1997). The chaotic environment may prevent effective communication and relationship building at the fair (Bello & Barksdale 1986) also because different sounds, colours, signs, odours and the crowd can become overwhelming for the visitors and they can find it hard to process meaningfully all the information available (Rinallo et al. 2010).

Partly due to this chaotic environment there is also a significant need for skilled stand personnel. The different and sometimes chaotic selling environment of trade fairs can be difficult to handle for exhibitors and especially for the sales personnel who are used to selling at the field. At trade fairs salespeople are removed from their own terrains. The same selling techniques do no work at the fair situation with large crowds of visitors. The salesperson cannot spend the same amount of time with one person as they would in traditional sales meetings. This kind of behaviour can result in unsatisfactory sales results (Bello & Lohtia 1993).

The primary concern in my study is to understand why firms use trade fairs as part of their marketing communication mix despite all the abovementioned limitations and weaknesses, and what processes contribute to their successful fair participation. The trade fair participation process is continual and demanding, so my concern is how firms that use successfully fairs as a medium cope with the processes and what they think are the cornerstones of these processes. I will also reflect on how the firms see the future of their marketing communication in general.

The theoretical implications of my research will assist the researchers for advancing their studies in providing better tools to and increasing the understanding of marketing executives and fair organizers to get the best marketing results and reinforce the power of trade fair media in the future. As Palumbo and Herbig said (2002) it is going to be a terrible waste of time to participate at fairs if companies do not plan and execute them well. The primary sources of literature that address this topic come from the industrial marketing, promotion management and business literature. The recent research has studied the advantages and limitations of the fairs, the fair selection process, the objectives for the fair participation, the importance of the stand personnel, and the efficiency and value of fairs. However there is a clear gap for looking at all the processes together in order to make a coherent understanding of the trade fair participation process as a whole. The results of this research will enable researchers to view the fair participation as an integrated process where planning, execution, human resources, marketing and evaluation are connected. These processes should also be observed on different time stages (pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair).

Hence, my study will look into the role of trade fairs as part of firms' marketing communications and concentrate on the fair processes and the cornerstones of the overall participation process in making the most out of trade fairs as part of the marketing communication mix. In order to do that I am doing a qualitative research and interviewing 21 marketing executives. I am using a grounded theory method where the theory is obtained from the research data and the knowledge is socially constructed. The results of this study will not only give recommendations to fair organisers how they can enhance the medium, but also a better understanding for the marketing executives about the ways how they can improve the role of trade fairs in their marketing mix and how they can make the most out of their overall trade fair participation process, now and the coming years.

1.1 Research background

Trade fairs are growing their significance in the international marketing literature. Nowadays they are acknowledged as a noteworthy marketing tool that has the potential to affect the company's ability to compete and succeed in the rapidly changing business environment (Seringhaus & Rosson 1998). Trade fair industry has been remarkably dynamic and it has continued to grow even in the time of economic crises proving that the exhibition media qualifies as one of the top marketing tools for companies aspiring to advance their business (UFI 2012). The UFI's 10th Global Barometer (UFI 2013) shows that the majority of exhibition companies reporting increased turnover for 2012. In 2009 Finnish companies invested in fairs a total of M€ 187 (Appendix 1) and the investments have grown over 100% since 1999. Nevertheless, the trade fair industry's major concerns seem to be the economic crises, local competition and internal management challenges (UFI 2013). According to a survey commissioned by the Finnish Advertising Council, in 2012 MRD€ 3,38 was spent on marketing communication in Finland (including planning and production costs) and fairs were the 6th largest marketing channel (Appendix 2). These figures proof that trade fairs are widely used and they have maintained their role as part of firms' marketing mix in Finland.

Fairs are a unique place where parties sharing an interest in a subject are physically represented under one roof at the same time. These different parties come to the trade fair as they share a common interest to a specific subject. The exhibitors as well as the visitors are prepared to spend time, money and effort to fulfil their needs (Blythe 2010). Munuera and Ruiz (1999) stated that trade fairs are an important element of the promotion strategy for industrial products but that they are also a suitable source of information about market trends for managers of those companies that attend these events. Thus, trade fairs are broadly used and considered to be effective. For this reason, companies invest in them and only direct on-site selling receives more funds than fairs in terms of the marketing mix (Herbig et al. 1998). Moreover, trade fairs are especially cost-effective in

recognizing customer needs, in the development of product specifications and in searching for suppliers. They also work as a medium in providing feedback on product/service performance (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995).

Already in 1976 Cavanaugh stated that trade show exhibiting can be a greatly effective and a low cost media for communicating a message to current or potential customers. He also pointed out that the success of the trade show participation depends on the thorough planning, setting of objectives and evaluating the effectiveness of the show as return on the trade show investment needs to be demonstrated to the management. Cavanaugh's original thoughts are still highlighted at present. Palumbo and Herbig (2002) stress that careful planning and understanding the role of trade fairs within the promotion mix are needed in order to succeed in the global marketplace. Otherwise without clear objectives and performance evaluation managers need to rely purely on their judgment when they decide which show to participate, what products to exhibit and how to advertise (Gopalakrishna et al. 1995). Quite often exhibitors have participated in trade fairs just because their competitors are there or just to boost the company's image, but the times have changed. In recent times more weight has been put on effectivity of exhibitions (Tongren & Thompson 1981).

It might be because the value of trade fairs is not an easy task to measure that there is scepticism toward trade fairs and their value. The costs of trade fairs have risen and companies have started to think whether the investment in trade fairs is worth the expense (Sashi & Perretty 1992). There are also other discouraging factors like the need of resources and time (Häyrinen & Vallo 2012), and the chaotic feeling of the selling environment (Bello & Lohtia 1993) that make managers think carefully their decisions on the trade fair participation. However, Sashi and Perretty (1992) argue that trade fairs are an important and valuable part of the promotion mix for companies if they take the non-selling aspects to be part of the evaluation.

Rosson and Seringhaus (1995) presented the concept of networks where trade fairs should be seen as microcosms of industries where a crowd of buyers, sellers, service providers, industry and regulatory bodies and partners to name a few are all gathered in one location to do business and exchange relationships. Trade fairs become the representation of 'the market' for the duration of the fair days. Thus trade fairs should be looked like networks that would mean success at all relationship levels (suppliers, customers, associations, partners or regulators) not just at the simple buyer-seller level.

The technological transformation, emergence of the social media and increased usage of the Internet have changed the traditional trade show environment. This change together with the increased demands to measure the marketing investments will challenge the exhibitors and the fair organizers as well as the academicians in the future (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 2012). It is evident that in the future events, such as trade fairs, will no longer be present only for the parties in the physical venue, but to anyone no matter who, where and when. However fairs will maintain their important traditional role because of their true interactiveness and personal face-to face contacts that cannot be replaced by multimedia applications (Rintamäki 2009).

1.2 Objectives of the study and the research questions

The objective of this study is to get an overall picture of what is trade fairs role in the firms' marketing communication at the present and how those firms foresee the future of trade fairs in their marketing communication mix in the future. I will also investigate the different processes related to trade fair participation that lead to successful results. Trade fairs are largely used and in my study I have chosen to interview 21 top management level executives in sales and marketing from companies that use exhibitions as part of their marketing communication tools.

The main research question is two-folded. My research focuses on the given research phenomenon by answering the following research questions. I will examine; 1) what is trade fairs role as part of the firms' marketing communication now and in the future, and 2) what processes lead to successful trade fair participation.

1.2.1 What is trade fairs role as part of the firms' marketing communication?

Already in 1974 Banting and Blenkhorn argued that trade fairs have had a long-established role as part of the promotion mix of companies in all sizes. The companies are interested in maximizing the opportunity and they have recognized the power of trade shows for speeding up the sales (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995). I try to find out in my study how the Finnish companies perceive fairs as part of their marketing communication now and how do they foresee the near future. I will also address the relationship between the different communication tools and the reasons for firms to use each tool.

If the companies want to be successful they need to integrate trade fairs into their multi-channel communication strategy. Solely fair participation depends on the integration of various media since it includes other marketing communication tools such as advertising, social media, direct mail, sponsoring, promotion and printed matter (Häyrinen & Vallo 2012, 33). Andersen (2001) developed a three phases communication model for relationship building process that includes 1) a pre-relationship phase, 2) a negotiation phase and, 3) a relationship phase. These phases involve a number of challenges in terms of communication tools and strategies. The researcher argued that there are different aspects of marketing communication (communication task, communication type and communication tactics) in relation to the phases. According to his studies in the pre-relationship phase the communication is one-way oriented and the communication task is awareness building, which can be done through mass media, reputation management and referrals. In the negotiation phase the communication is

dialogue, the communication task is to persuade via reasoning and tactics that are used are influential. In the third relationship development phase the communication task is commitment, which is reached through the atmosphere of exchange, encompassing feelings, intentions and interest of both parties via databases, Internet applications, e-mail and interactive face-to-face communication. Since relationship learning at the trade fairs is an opportunity for creating differential advantage in relationships (Li 2006), it would be interesting to see if trade fairs as a communication tool could be used successfully throughout the relationship-building process and if they could be used as a communication tactic in all the phases when increasing awareness, convincing customers and increasing commitment.

In this study I try to find out if the companies have integrated trade fairs as part of their' over all marketing communication and if they create their own mini-marketing plans especially for the trade fairs. I will also study the reasons why trade fairs are used, how trade fairs support the companies' relationship building process and how firms make use of other marketing communication tools to support their fair participation.

1.2.2 What kind of processes will lead to success in the trade fair participation?

According to Gopalakrishna and Lilien (1995) the keys to successful trade fair participation is based in four areas: 1) setting objectives and ensuring comprehensive preshow planning and promotion for fair participation, 2) evaluating each fair beforehand, 3) executing the fair skilfully, and 4) timely follow-up of contacts from the fair. Very many of the marketing managers are forced to rely merely on their judgement when selecting the fair, preshow advertising and stand selection since they lack of clear objectives and a unified framework for evaluating performance. Sashi and Perretty (1992) argue that planning for the show is a critical step in order for a fair participation to be successful. Planning sets up list of the activities that must be completed in a timely manner. If firms do no execute the pre-fair activities, it might lead to less

satisfactory results or complete failure. As Bellizzi and Lipps (1984) said if firms have decided to use fairs they should as well do it right. Therefore I will explore the overall trade fair participation process of the Finnish companies and try to understand which processes are crucial for achieving successful trade fair participation. Kirchgeorg et al. (2009) state that without objectives of participation the success of trade fair activities cannot be measured. How important it is to formulate clear-cut objectives for the communication mix, especially if trade shows are used as a communication platform. Kirchgeorg et al. (2010) also state that it is useful to use several communication tools at trade fairs if multiple objectives are combined e.g. increasing awareness and sales simultaneously. The exhibitors can have both selling and non-selling objectives. In my research I attempt to understand how firms plan their trade fair participation, what kind of objectives firms set for fair participation, how do they measure them and what should be done in order to achieve maximum effect of the participation. Thus, I will investigate different processes that lead to firms' successful trade fair participation.

1.3 Structure of the study

I begin my research study with a theoretical foundation constructed from the literature and studies in marketing communications and trade fairs. I first position my work relative to other marketing, promotion management and business literature on trade fairs. In the literature view I briefly describe the history of fairs as well as define and classify trade fairs. Then I explore trade fairs as part of the firm's marketing communication, observe what makes trade fairs successful and how trade fair performance is being measured. In the end of the theoretical context I address the theoretical framework for this study.

Then I bring together the historical data on trade fairs with contemporary data from the interviews. New insights are sought for my research questions ‘what is trade fairs role in the future as part of the firms’ marketing communication’ and ‘what processes lead to successful trade fair participation’ through interviewing 21 marketing executives from companies that present current exhibitors of the Finnish Fair Corporation.

The interviews are followed by descriptive and interpretive analysis. From the research data, the empirical results are presented using the grounded theory method. In the end I discuss the managerial implications, make suggestions for the trade fair organizers, and highlight some raised issues about the future of trade fairs. Finally I will conclude my research by stressing the theoretical implications and the limitations of this study.

2 Literature review and theoretical context

2.1 History of the fairs

Around the world and for many centuries trade fairs have been crucial sales and communication tools (Kirchgeorg et al. 2010, 301). Trade fairs are one of the earliest media there is to promote and sell variety of wares. In fact it can be traced back to ancient Biblical market places (Cavanaugh 1976, 100). The term "fair" itself originates from the Middle Ages and comes from the Latin word "feria". It means a religious festival that takes place near a convent or a church. Also the current word in German "Messe" and Finnish "Messut" originates from the Latin term "Missa est" that was used at the end of a religious service giving a sign for opening the market held in the church square (UFI 2013).

In the medieval times crafts persons and village folk sold their goods at the local fairs. At those time fairs were a handy place to gain access to a huge crowd of potential buyers from far away villages, and it was relatively inexpensive to do so as well (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 2012). These market places grew and started to tempt all kinds of people such as traders, vendors, farmers and even prostitutes. Already during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries fairs were very important places for marketing of various goods such as spices, grain, cattle, wool, clothes, furs and jewellery (Wedemeyer Moore 1988). A famous well-known fair that is held yearly, the Frankfurt Book Fair, dates back to the thirteenth century (Palumbo & Herbig 2002).

In the 16th century international trade fairs were the main medium for reaching potential customers and introducing products (Palumbo & Herbig 2002). In the early 18th century trade fairs were used for disposing agricultural surpluses. The market places also offered a chance for different business actions such as collecting debts and rents, taking orders and hiring people. For the buyers trade fairs were a good opportunity to buy things that were not available every day (Mitchell 2007). However, the first contemporary trade fair was the London

World's Fair held in 1851 for seven months period showing the accomplishments of the British Empire and encouraging international business for the British companies (Palumbo & Herbig 2002). Trade fairs were extremely popular in the 19th century. They had especially entertainment value since there were no mass communication media (radio or television), but they were also valuable for promoting new technologies (Lippincott 2003).

In recent times the core element of trade fairs still remains. They are a world into itself for a limited duration of time. At most fairs there is a unique cosmopolitan atmosphere, where locals have no advantage over strangers. Hotels are built within easy access to exhibition centres and many overseas visitors actually spend no time outside the exhibition (Skov 2006). The number of international trade fairs has increased and they have become an important promotional tool for industrial firms (Hansen 1996).

2.2 Defining and classifying the trade fair

Trade fairs are events that perform a marketing task. They bring customers to a fair centre where they can see, touch, listen, smell and sometimes taste the goods on the exhibition. When diving into the world of trade fairs it is important to clarify how different terms are defined and used in this study. Originally Banting and Blenkhorn (1974) defined a trade fair as:

A facilitating marketing event in the form of an exposition, fair, exhibition or mart; which takes place at periodically recurring intervals, ranging from quarterly to triennially; having pre-established hours of operation during a period lasting between one day and several weeks; whose primary objective is to disseminate information about, and display the goods and services of competing and complementary sellers who have rented specifically allocated and demarcated areas or "booths", clustered within a particular building(s), or bounded grounds; and whose audience is a selected concentration of customers, potential buyers, decision influencers, and middlemen.

Currently The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI, 2013) defines trade fairs as market events where a large number of companies come and present their main product range of one or more industry sectors. Trade fairs are events of specific duration that are held at intervals and mostly attract trade and business visitors. They can be characterized as integration of several factors, including visitors, exhibitors, business partners, venue owners, media people and other stakeholders like politicians since they have a positive regional impact. At trade fairs companies exhibit their latest products and services, study their competitors and discover new trends and opportunities. Regardless of their limited period of time and dynamic nature, trade fairs are places where relationships between exhibitors and visitors begin and the information sharing start (Reychav 2009, 143-144).

Fair organizers say that fairs are the oldest ‘social media’ there is. That argument lies in the main advantage of fairs ‘face-to-face’ rendezvous. It is this direct contact between the seller and the buyer that makes this marketing communication tool different from others such as advertising, promotion etc. Trade fairs also differ from sales calls, because the contact is not initiated by the seller but by the buyer (Munuera & Ruiz 1999). Therefore, I find that Skov’s definition of a trade fair is quite to the purpose while she takes into consideration the social aspects of a fair. She defines trade fairs as social settings which are enacted and experienced simultaneously by thousands of members, and done by bringing together geographically dispersed, socially embedded, culturally diffuse sets of companies on a neutral ground on which they re-enact an internal structure that is abstract and relational (Skov 2006, 768).

According to Richards and Richards (1994) fairs can be divided into four main categories: 1) trade fairs where sellers and buyers of industrial sectors meet, 2) consumer exhibitions that are open to general public, 3) mixed trade consumer fairs that admit public on certain days only, and 4) private exhibitions where individual companies show their own products to selected audience. Virtual fairs, with the growth of Internet, have also recently been developed that display good

and services only online, but their characteristics does not include the physicality of a fair (UFI 2013). In this study I am concentrating on the trade fairs whether they are held solely to industrial buyers or mixed together with general public for certain days. These trade fairs are open for visitors usually by invitation and with pre-registration requirement (Palumbo & Herbig 2002).

Trade fairs are further categorized into four sub-groups: 1) vertical buyer-seller type, where buyers and sellers have only a single product interest e.g. a lighting fair 'ValoLight2013 in Finland', (2) horizontal buyer-seller type, where buyers and sellers of all types of industrial and consumer goods are involved e.g. an exhibition sponsored by a commune such as a municipal fair Kuntamarkkinat in Finland, (3) horizontal buyer-vertical seller type, where a homogenous group of sellers are exhibiting to buyers from all industries e.g. MATKA Nordic Travel Fair in Finland, and (4) vertical buyer-horizontal seller type, where a diverse group of sellers are exhibiting to homogenous group of buyers e.g. Educa an event for educators in Finland (Rathmell 1954, 271-272). In this research the interviewed firms represent all the four groups in order to get an overall view of the phenomenon.

Other common terms, when investigating fairs, are exhibitors / sellers, visitors / buyers and trade fair organizers. Rathmell (1954) defines the sellers and buyers followingly "sellers comes to the trade fair with the desire and authority to consummate sales and the buyer comes to the trade fair with the desire and authority to make purchases". Therefore, the trade fair is based "on a continuing and routine relationship between sellers and buyers" (Rathmell 1954). Traditionally exhibitors have been referred to as sellers and visitors have been referred to as buyers. However, the study by Kåre Hansen (1996, 39-40) shows that visitors and exhibitors may have dual motives as being both buyers and sellers in their participation at the trade fairs. Trade fair organisers are companies that put together the fairs. They recruit the exhibitors and attract the visitors, even though they often rely on the exhibitors' activity to invite the right visitors. Sometimes they are also in charge of the program content, even though it is usual

that there is a program partner e.g. an industry association, which provides knowledge, expertise and connections to draw the visitors (Stevens 2005, 5).

2.3 Trade fairs as part of firm's marketing communication

2.3.1 Marketing mix and trade fair's role in it

It seems evident from the marketing literature that trade fairs are indeed a very important marketing medium and part of the firms' overall marketing communication strategy. A marketing communications medium can be defined as anything that is capable of carrying or transmitting a marketing communications message to one or more people (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). Already in 1974 Banting and Blenkhorn stated that trade fairs have had a long-established role as part of the promotion mix of companies in all sizes. Marketing communication is one part of a firm's marketing mix, and it can be divided into five categories; 1) advertising, 2) sales promotion, 3) public relations, 4) personal selling, and 5) direct marketing (Kotler 1999, 143). Gopalakrishna et al. (1995) argue that trade fairs are mixes of direct selling and advertising. Whereas Pickton & Broderick (2005, 675) argue that exhibitions have been considered to lie between sales promotion and personal selling, but to make the participation successful all areas of the marketing mix should be utilized (Häyrinen & Vallo 2012, 27) argue that more and more they can be categorized as personal selling, and at best they are affecting people's deepest emotions. Stevens (2005, 15) argue that trade fairs are more than just another marketing communication medium. According to her trade fairs uniquely combine sales with marketing taking advantage of the power of each.

When looking at other marketing communication tools such as advertising and sales calls, trade fairs have a unique characteristic of allowing direct contact between different parties and bringing the customer to the company rather than vice versa (Munuera & Ruiz 1999). Thus, for companies this represents a platform of highly potential customers and novel opportunities that are not

available in any other way (Gopalakrishna & Williams 1992). Particularly in the early phases of the buying process, trade fairs may play a cost-effective role in the communications mix but the effectiveness decreases in the evaluation and selection phase, and increases again in providing feedback on product/service performance after the sale (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). Smith et al. (2004) found out that personal selling activity is improved and more efficient if trade fairs are part of the communication mix. This also resulted in robust profits. The companies are interested in maximizing the opportunity and they have acknowledged the power of trade shows for shortening the sales cycle (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995). Trade fairs are perceived to be a suitable tool to enhance a firm's customer relationships. Trade fairs were ranked as one of the three most suitable tools for awareness, familiarity and loyalty stages of the customer relationship cycle. Marketing managers think that trade fairs are especially fit for increasing brand awareness (71%), fostering customers' trust (69%) and strengthening customer loyalty and its brands (68%) (Kirchgeorg et al. 2010, 67). If the companies want to be successful they need to integrate trade fairs into their multi-channel communication strategy. To support this view, Tanner Jr. (2000) claimed also that small businesses should integrate trade fairs to their overall marketing communications to be more successful.

If the trade fair participation is not part of the firm's overall marketing communication strategy and marketing is not involved with the exhibition, there is a fear that the message at the trade fair does not mirror the company's objectives and additionally the message could even be in conflict with the message the company is trying to communicate through other media. Therefore for the sake of uniformity in the messages, it is vital that the goals set for trade fairs reflect the company's overall marketing goals and that marketing experts are involved (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995). Quite often firms fail in the combining of these different parts of the marketing communication palette, and usually they have many external partners for executing these parts. In a comprehensive marketing communication of a firm, they should identify all the situations where a customer might confront the firm, its products and brands and try to signal a consistently positive message in all contact situations (Kotler 1999, 155-157).

2.3.2 Marketing communication tools supporting trade fair participation

Fair participation depends on the integration of various media since it includes other marketing communication tools such as advertising, social media, direct mail, sponsoring, promotion and printed matter (Häyriinen & Vallo 2012, 33). Therefore, it is important that exhibiting is an integral part of the company's media plan. This fact makes the designing of the exhibit plan more complex as well (Cavanaugh 1976). Trade fair participation should be supported by other marketing communication tools such as direct mail (both pre- and post-fair), advertising and field sales. For example an exhibitor could have an ad in the magazine about being at the trade fair or a radio broadcast telling that the exhibitor is sponsoring the fair or some parts of it (e.g. show stage). The company should invite its present customers and new prospects to the trade fair via direct mail or social media. Especially if firms have multiple objectives for exhibiting (e.g. increasing awareness and boosting sales) they should use several communication instruments at trade fairs (Kirchgeorg et al. 2010). Smith et al. (2004) argued also that the integration of pre-show messages via direct mail or advertising would increase the number of trade fair visitors at the stand.

At the fair it is crucial to have a stand that communicates about the company and its value in a positive way and the personnel should be taking advantage of the face-to-face selling opportunity in a best possible way. Not to forget the posters, give-aways and printed material needed at the stand. The stand should be thought as a three-dimensional ad where the exhibitor wants the right people to get the right message and take action. Therefore the stand should call for an action, showcase the message clearly, focus on benefits versus features and be personable (Stevens 2005, 99). Palumbo and Herbig (2002) wanted to point out that press should not be forgotten. A large supply of press kits should be placed to the trade fair organizer's pressroom in the language of the host country. Other possibilities could be to arrange press appointments or held press conferences at the fair (Stevens, 2005).

A post-fair follow-up should be supported with follow-up communication. There can be numerous tactics to follow-up the contacts made at the fair. A personal e-mail, a personalized thank-you letter, reminder of the trade fair special offer, or an update to the website can all be used as communications tactics after the trade fair participation. Firms should remember that an on-going series of messages after the trade fair could prolong the value of the trade show investment. If some promises are made to customers at the fair, the firm should keep in mind that a broken promise is worse than no contact at all (Stevens, 2005).

2.4 Trade fairs advantages compared to other marketing tools

Trade fairs are especially unique compared to other marketing tools when talking about live communication and touching all the senses. Also the fact that the visitors are in a right mood when entering the fair is a huge advantage for the exhibitor company. These three strengths of trade fairs support firms' motives and objectives in their marketing aspirations.

2.4.1 Personal face-to face contacts

With all the electronic communication opportunities one might wonder why firms exhibit at fairs. Reychav (2009, 155) thinks that trade fairs promote knowledge sharing with customers because at trade fairs visitors can see the products in person, talk with specialists and meet them face-to-face. According to Palumbo and Herbig (2002) the marketing executives of today think that overall buyers are more difficult to reach but they are more accessible at the trade fairs. The real value of trade fairs lies in its face-to-face contacts because most of the other communication tools are indirect mediums (Shoham 1992, 336). Kirchgeorg et al. (2010, 310) predicts that it is absolutely the personal contact between decision-makers, companies and customers in an appealing and emotional environment that will be greatly appreciated still in 2020. Another study by Kirchgeorg et al. (2010, 68) reveals that in situations where a firm already has a customer or the sale is closed live communication is better than traditional or virtual communication. To

sum up, it seems that the personal face-to-face contacts have been and are going to be in the future one of the biggest advantages of trade fairs compared to other marketing communication tools.

2.4.2 Neutral grounds, motivated visitors

Trade fair's other advantage is that it is on a neutral ground and they offer the opportunity for different parties to meet in neutral settings (Reychav 2009, 155). There are not so many interruptions than might be in the office surroundings (Shoham 1992). Skov (2006) also points out the neutrality of the fair ground related to the exhibitors, at the trade fair they can exhibit free of history, geography and social context. However she points out another fact that because of this neutrality it is important for a firm to think about size of the stand as well as its location since they are tangible measurements of the relative importance of the company.

The fair ground is also neutral to the visitors. Many people feel more comfortable as part of a crowd where they can blend and they do not feel obliged to buy something. For a fair visitor it is convenient to find the products and services they are looking for under one roof (Bryant 1995). Visitors are open and positive about the subjects presented at the trade fairs unlike in a sales call situation where the salesperson usually has made the initiative for the meeting. Trade fair visitors are motivated, they have come there on their own initiative and they most likely view the exhibiting firms positively (Shoham 1992).

2.4.3 Hands-on experiences

Trade fair is an interactive and powerful live communication tool that allows people to get "hands-on evidence and experience" about brands (Shoham 1992, Kirchgeorg et al. 2010). This ability to engage the whole person in the process strengthens the key characteristics of live communication, building trust and emotional bonds between the exhibitor and the visitor, which are vital elements in

building successful customer relationships (Kirchgeorg et al. 2010). There are many techniques that exhibitors can enhance the sensory appeal to visitors such as demonstrations, films, lighting, sound effects, music, aromas, refreshments, giveaways etc. (Banting & Blenkhorn 1974).

2.5 Planning the trade fair participation

Many companies do not specify their objectives when participating at a trade fair, much less attempt to quantify them. The lack of clear objectives, combined with the lack of evaluating methods, have forced managers to rely primarily on judgement when deciding on fair selection, booth size and preshow advertising (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). According to Tanner Jr. (2000) companies that develop a complete marketing communications strategy and involve fully their sales personnel for achieving their exhibit objectives are more successful in their fair participation. They treat the fair visitors visits like sales calls, reach a higher level of management among customers and do more networking. The planning for the fair participation is crucial because it sets up a list of activities that have to be done in a timely manner. It is the failure to pay attention to these details in pre-fair activities that can lead to unsatisfactory results or even complete failure in reaching the desired objectives (Sashi & Perretty 1992). Tanner Jr. (2000) also stated that successful exhibitors work in a way that is in line with their fair objectives.

Firstly a marketing executive needs to know what is the target of his actions and then start to evaluate which trade fair would be best to fulfil that target (Bonoma 1983, 80). Therefore, before exhibiting the company should ask itself which trade fair reaches the right audience. Joining the fair is like using any other media, you need to know whom you are targeting and what your objectives are (Siukosaari 1999). In order for a firm to be effective in its trade fair participation and make the investment worthwhile, it needs to define its marketing objectives and trade show purpose clearly. The well-defined objectives help the firm in selecting the right trade fair, constructing the exhibit design and evaluating the outcome. These

objectives should then be quantified in order to influence sales-related performance (Lee & Kim 2008). It is quite clear that success of trade fair activities cannot be measured unless the objectives of participation are precisely defined in advance (Kirchgeorg et al. 2009).

2.5.1 Objectives for participating in trade fairs

Different companies have different objectives for participating at the trade fairs. In 1974 Banting and Blenkhorn indicated that introducing new products, establishing personal contacts with current and potential customers and maintaining the visibility of the firm's name and products, were the three most important reasons for companies to exhibit. The most common goals for exhibiting at the trade fairs are securing customer leads, introducing new products, obtaining industry exposure, developing good will, obtaining positive publicity in the media, reaching hard to find buyers and influencers and obtaining orders (Bellizzi & Lipps 1984). Especially for introducing new products trade fairs have been valuable marketing tools, but Tanner and Chonko (2002) found out that trade shows are effective marketing tools for products in any stage of the product life cycle. Cavanaugh (1979) listed some other purposes that companies also might have for exhibiting such as a training tool for sales personnel, gauging the market for a prototype or conducting market research. According to Shoham (1992) firms should consider several possible trade fair goals before the exhibition. These goals could be exposure to an exhibition, number of stand contacts, actual sales, awareness of new products, and distributions of samples or promotional literature. There are also other objectives such as recruiting and seeking feedback. A research by Tanner Jr. (2000) pointed out that firms that only focus on pursuing leads and sales and forgetting about promoting brand image and company capabilities are more likely to be dissatisfied with their exhibit outcome.

Sashi and Perretty (1992) recommend objectives to be precise, quantifiable and measurable in order for firms to follow-up them properly. Objectives like 'We

have to be there because of the competition’ or ‘ We have to be there because otherwise it would look like we are having problems’ or ‘We have to be there because we are a market leader’ are not good objectives. Competition should be taken into consideration when setting the objectives for a trade fair, but it should not be a reason for exhibiting otherwise the company assumes that the competitor’s objectives are theirs as well. Sometimes it might be efficient to use trade fairs as marketing tools even if the competition is not exhibiting in order to increase, maintain or recover its market share (Cavanaugh 1976).

2.5.2 Selling, non-selling and buying motives

The exhibitors can have both selling and buying motives at the trade fair. They also have a dual role when participating at the trade fair. Exhibitors are ‘buyers’ in relations with their suppliers and ‘sellers’ to their own customers. Trade fairs serve as an exceptional platform for salespeople to reach customers that would not be so easily reachable through personal selling – “the inaccessible decision makers become available but only to salespeople who possess the knowledge necessary to exploit the trade show selling opportunity” (Bello & Lohtia 1993). As stated by Bonoma (1983, 79), the selling opportunities include access to key decision makers and potential customers but it also gives an opportunity to service existing customers. Bonoma has identified five important selling objectives: 1) identifying prospects, 2) getting access to key decision makers, 3) distributing information about products, services and personnel, 4) selling, and 5) servicing current customers. Hence the exhibitors selling motives do not only consist of recognizing prospects and taking care of the current customers, but also introducing and testing new products, and concrete selling (Hansen 1996, 41-43). Trade fairs are a place that enable negotiations, thus busy executives think trade fairs are an effective place to hold as many meetings as possible within one day (Palumbo & Herbig 2002). Trade fairs also support personal sales and help firms for closing a sale since it takes about 0.8 sales calls on average to close a deal that started at a trade fair, while the same number required by a field salesperson is five. The average total cost of a deal using trade shows is circa 254€ and the cost

per contact is roughly one-third of a sales call (Herbig et al. 1998, Gopalakrishna & Williams 1992). However, it is good to keep in mind that these numbers are here for illustrative purposes. They are not recent estimates and they can differ across industries. All in all, the advantage of trade fairs is that the firms can reach a huge amount of potential customers quickly in short amount of time (Rope 1995). Also the exhibitor has a better opportunity to meet the right buyer at the fair, because trade fairs bring more customers than some firms might see in a year under one roof the way that no other medium does. At the trade fair a company has the opportunity to represent itself to competitors' customers as well (Garret 1993, 116).

For non-selling motives trade fairs offer a unique setting as well. Trade fairs are suitable for the non-selling motives such as information exchange, relationship building, and channel partner assessment (Sharland & Balogh 1996, 65). The senior management of the firms acquire interpersonal and intercultural contacts at the trade fairs and these contacts can develop into long-term business collaboration (Palumbo & Herbig 2002). Often the non-selling motives relate to the competitive environment. Such motives could be; 1) intelligence gathering, where exhibitors identify new competitors and find out the strategies of existing competitor, 2) generating new product ideas, 3) managing relationships with new suppliers and finding new sources of supply, and 4) forming strategic alliances (Shoham 1992, 338-339). Other non-selling motives could be improving and maintaining corporate morale and enhancing corporate image in the eyes of customers, press, channel members, suppliers and the government (Bonoma 1983, 79; Hansen 1996, 43). Trade fairs with thousands of potential customers offer a place to test new products (Bonoma 1983, 83) and to do market research as well (Garret, 1993, 116). Knowledge sharing is also an important non-selling motive. Valuable learning can occur between suppliers and customers and through that their relationships can be initiated or reinforced. This can have effects for a long period of time after the trade fair (Reychav 2009). The non-selling motives are only part of the firm's functions at the fair but even though quite important because it is vital for a firm, in order to succeed, to gather information about its

competitors quickly, easily and at low cost, and be alarmed about the changes in its environment (Sharland & Balogh 1996, 65).

2.6 The vital role of stand personnel

Tanner Jr. and Chonko (1995) claim that companies do not take the full advantage of the trade fairs. Trade fairs are seen as secondary methods of marketing that managers do in addition to their ‘regular’ jobs without the full support from the firm. These researchers also were surprised that so few marketing managers are involved in the trade fair process. Firms should understand the importance for participation by upper management, sales and marketing personnel. It is advisable to let sales management to participate in the decision process when thinking about the sales objectives. Equally important is the participation of upper management in the fair process since the fair visitors include current customers, potential investors and the press (Tanner Jr. 2000). Trade fairs function mainly through personal contacts of stand personnel. Therefore the staffing practices are critical to improving selling productivity and the stand should be designed (e.g. seating areas, private meeting room) to ease the personal contacts (Bello 1992). One major motivation for visitors to come to trade fairs is to see particular products and companies. Thus firms need to pay attention to the availability of key personnel and the transfer of critical information (Rosson & Seringhaus 1995). In order to do well in their exhibiting, the firms should appoint one person who is primarily responsible for coordinating all fairs and there should be adequate and appropriate stand personnel (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995). The exhibiting firms should staff the stand with personnel that can best achieve the objectives set. This means that if the objectives are to increase sales there should be sales personnel at the stand (Tanner & Chonko 2002). Some people are excellent at trade fairs and others are not, so firms should focus on staffing the stand with the most suitable people. With the right people firms can save time and money (Palumbo & Herbig 2002). Selling at a trade fair is fast-paced and competitive. The personnel at the stand must meet as many prospects as they can in a short time. So in order to take the full advantage of fairs, the stand personnel must quickly separate the “lookers”

from the “buyers”. Therefore Gopalakrishna and Lilien (1995) claim that more personnel at the stand can make more contacts with visitors and thus result in greater number of leads.

Sales personnel should be instructed and trained in techniques assisting in reaching the exhibit objectives. Lee and Kim (2008) argue that it is far more important to focus on stand personnel training and securing good stand location than enlarging stand size or increasing the number of the stand personnel. It does not matter how many people there are working at the stand, if they cannot perform their role properly their number is insignificant. Hence it is much more effective to train the stand personnel properly to understand their role and enable them to make effective contacts with the visitors and come up with marketing results. It is the stand personnel who provide the data needed to evaluate the results (Cavanaugh 1976, Bello 1992). Herbig et al. (1997) believe that careful selection and proper training for trade fair exhibitors will make a profound difference on trade fair effectiveness and results. Stand personnel training has found to have positive impact on image-building, information-gathering and relationship-improvement performances (Lee & Kim 2008). Thus quality of the stand personnel is crucial. It is on their shoulders to maintain a professional atmosphere and attract the visitors. Because the contacts at the fair are quick, the presentations should be short and to the point. The personnel at the stand should be sufficiently knowledgeable about the products and services presented at the fair. Visitors should never walk away dissatisfied because it would effect the firm’s image poorly (Sashi & Perretty 1992). Blythe (2001) argues that the current emphasis on selling should be replaced by the emphasis on marketing and relationship building. According to him firms should focus on dialogue rather than one-way communication in order to get more satisfactory results from the fairs. Measuring the results from the trade fair should orientate towards prospecting, gathering competitive and customer information as well as distributing information (Herbig et al. 1997).

2.7 Measuring the trade fair performance

Already in 1974 Banting and Blenkhorn noted that many firms automatically plan to continue their participation even though they do not have any hard evidence to justify their trade fair expenditures. And later Blythe (1999) stated that many exhibitors do not set objectives and so it remains unanswered whether or not fairs are an effective communications medium. As we all know, marketing budget is a scarce resource and therefore management wants to be sure that the money is spent wisely (Tanner Jr. 2000). Tanner & Chonko (2002) have listed the overall top six measures that are; 1) the number of qualified leads, 2) performance of booth personnel, 3) booth traffic, 4) sales obtained, 5) number of customer requests for additional information, and (6) attitude of visitors to the booth. It seems that frequent exhibitors have a greater tendency to set objectives and use hard measures such as records of contacts made, leads taken and business done (Blythe 1999). The effectiveness of stand personnel can be a crucial factor (Gopalakrishna & Williams 1992) as well as the fact that field sales personnel is integrated into the planning and implementation of the fair participation. According to Li (2007) this can lead to sales productivity and profitability from trade fairs.

2.7.1 Follow-up of contacts

The fair visitors need to feel that their interests are noticed, so the follow-up of contacts should be emphasized even if sales would not be an objective at the fair (Cavanaugh 1976). Lee and Kim (2008) have found out that if firms quantify their trade fair objectives and do to follow-up activities properly it has positive results on their sales-related performance. Therefore it is important to record data of the stand visitors (names, titles, addresses, phone numbers, inquiries, criticism, reservations, attitudes, requirements and interests) in order to transform those contacts into sales later (Banting & Blenkhorn 1974). Ideally the follow-up should be done in 24 hours. A week is reasonable, but after 30 days it is too late to serve the prospect's needs or given a professional image of the exhibiting company (Stevens 2005, 227).

2.7.2 Non-selling benefits

However, Bonoma (1983, 78) reminds that effective marketing communications involve also objectives that are not selling related, so the emphasis should not be just on the number of contacts, cost per contact, amount of literature distributed and sales leads. Rather fairs should be used as a tool to maintain relationships with key customers or satisfying other needs such as benchmarking competitors. A dialogue with the customer might serve as a way to realise possible problems before they become a threat to the business or better understand customers' future plans. Thus, trade fairs should not be measured just for their effectiveness on a cost-per-call basis and ignore the other important potential benefits. There are also other factors that influence the effectiveness of the fair participation. Lee and Kim (2008) also found out that pre-show promotion had a positive impact on image building, information gathering and especially in relationship-improvement performances.

The return on trade fair investments is perplexed by many factors. First of all a firm's participation can result in direct sales as well as attitudinal or cognitive effects e.g. increasing awareness, building image and reputation. Secondly, the trade fair participation interacts with other elements of the marketing communication mix such as direct mail, advertising and personal selling. It can range from weeks to many months before the prospective customer moves from interest to actual purchase, and all of this makes the measuring quite complex (Gopalakrishna et al. 1995). Often fair organizers can support the exhibitors to measure and evaluate their fair success. They will make data available of audience quality, audience activity and exhibit effectiveness (Bellizzi & Lipps 1984). Exhibitors should utilize this valuable information before and after their participation.

2.8 Theoretical framework

Previous research has mostly focused on studying the role of the trade fairs (e.g. Blythe 2001, Cunningham & White 1974) and the effectiveness and evaluation of them (e.g. Dekimpe et al. 1997, Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995, Bellizzi & Lipps 1984, Bonoma 1983 and Herbig et al. 1994). The studies have concentrated on issues related to exhibiting and visiting objectives (Kirchgeorg et al. 2010, Blythe 1999 and Hansen 1996), exhibition selection (e.g. Berne & Garcia-Uceda 2008, Kijewski et al. 1993 and Shoham 1992), performance (e.g. Hansen 2004, Blythe 2002 and Li 2007), exhibitor and visitor behaviour (e.g. Blythe 2010, Bello 1992, Herbig et al. 1997, Godar & O'Connor 2001 and Rosson & Seringhaus 1995). However none of the previous research have tried to integrate the different processes needed in the trade fair participation, and gather information about which of these processes are helping the firms to gain success from their trade fair participation.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH OF TRADE FAIRS (TF)						
The role of TF	TF planning & motives	TF effectiveness & evaluation	TF resources	TF marketing communication	Time-related process view	The future of TF
Rathmell (1954)	Cavanaugh (1976)	Cavanaugh (1976)	Tanner Jr. & Chonko (1995)	Marken (1989)	Rosson & Seringhaus (1995)	Kirchgeorg et al. (2010)
Banting & Blenkhorn (1974)	Gopalakrishna & Williams (1992)	Bonoma (1983)	Ling-ye (2006)	Jinlin & Xiaogin (2004)	Lee & Kim (2008)	
Cunningham & White (1974)	Kijewski et al. (1993)	Bellizzi & Lipps (1984)		Pitta et al. (2006)		
Tongren & Thompson (1981)	Tanner Jr. & Chonko (1995)	Bello & Barksdale Jr. (1986)		Ling-ye (2010)		
Ruiz & Munuera (1999)	Hansen (1996)	Kerin & Cron (1987)				
Blythe (2001)	Herbig et al. (1998)	Gopalakrishna & Williams (1992)				
Palumbo & Herbig (2002)	Blythe (1999)	Sashi & Perrety (1992)				
Ling-ye (2005)	Godar & O'Connor (2001)	Shoham (1992)				
Skov (2006)	Kirchgeorg et al. (2010)	Bello & Lohita (1993)				
Rintamäki (2009)		Williams et al. (1993)				
Blythe (2009)		Herbig et al. (1994)				
Gopalakrishna & Lilien (2012)		Gopalakrishna & Lilien (1995)				
		Gopalakrishna et al. (1995)				
		Sharland & Balogh (1996)				
		Dekimpe et al. (1997)				
		Tanner Jr. (2000)				
		Hansen (2002)				
		Tanner Jr. & Chonko (2002)				
		Horn (2002)				
		Smith et al. (2003)				
		Chiou et al. (2007)				
		Berne & Garcia-Uceda (2008)				
		Wood (2009)				

Figure 1. Summary of the previous research of trade fairs classified by different themes.

Gopalakrishna & Lilien stated in their book (2012) that there has been attempts to reflect the entire trade fair process but more comprehensive are needed. Lee and Kim (2008) came up with a conceptual model with a multi-staged nature where pre-show, at-show and post-show determinants were introduced linking different determinants to performance.

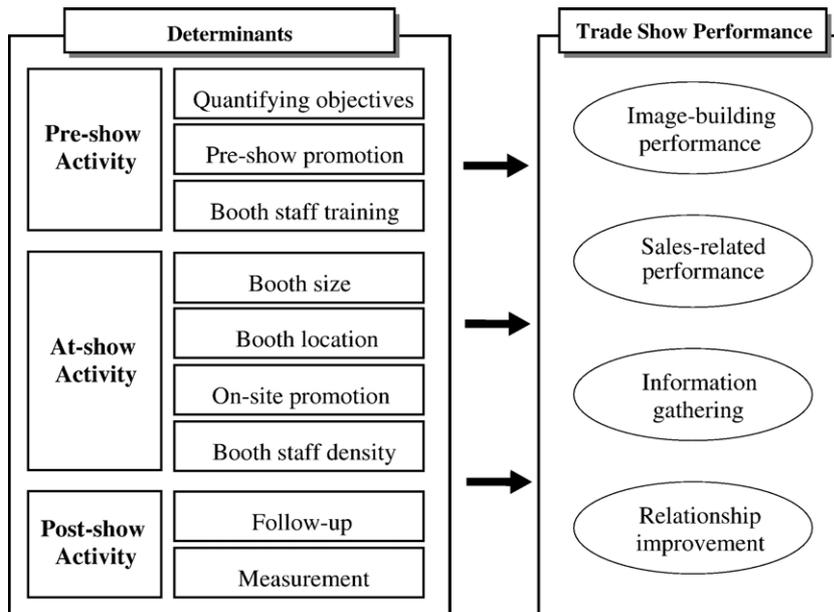


Figure 2. A conceptual model of determinants and outcomes of trade show performance (Lee & Kim 2008).

In this research an attempt is made to form a more widespread model with trade fair processes from end-to-end. This research looks for the critical processes that have input on successful trade fair participation taking into consideration the on-going nature of the processes where the different time stages are relevant.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research method is used in my study, where “the findings are not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 10-11). My analysis is based on qualitative data such as interviews, literature analysis and my own past work experience. I have been working for the Finnish Fair Corporation for nine years as an exhibition group manager, and during that time I have had the profit/loss responsibility of over ten fairs. The marketing executives thoughts and feelings about the forthcoming years in terms of their marketing communication requires going out to the fields and exploring the thoughts, feelings and expressions of the interviewees. I follow Gummesson’s (2005) recommendation by not pushing a planned economy with its standardisation and bureaucracy to be forced but rather allowing a market economy to prevail in my research.

3.2 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method and it develops theory on a given phenomenon and relations. Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive procedures for collecting and analysing data to build theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. Grounded theory methods are flexible and experiential strategies rather than systematic procedures. Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory methods that are used by qualitative researchers to legitimate their research (Charmaz 2013, 249-251). The results must be based on data, which refers to the word ‘grounded’. Grounded theory is also called “constantly comparative method” since the data verifies the theory and vice versa (Damgaard et al. 2000) instead of a two-stage process of data gathering and interpretation (Glaser & Strauss 2009). Using grounded theory means that theory is derived from the data that is systematically gathered and analysed. As a

researcher I have allowed the theory to emerge from the data in order to resemble the reality (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 12). According to Strauss and Corbin, grounded theory will satisfy the understanding of the people who were studied and make sense to them. It should also be conceptualized in adequately broad terms to have generality and provide control with regard to action. This research method is more likely to offer insight, increase understanding and offer a meaningful guide to action (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The philosophy of the grounded theory sees knowledge as actively and socially constructed (Goulding 1998). The application of grounded theory, which originates from the discipline of sociology, seems appropriate as a research tool in marketing since there are significant behavioural implications that need to be considered (Goulding 2005). According to Goulding (2005) grounded theory would be suitable tool for studies in relationship marketing and sales situation.

3.3 Reliability and validity of the thesis

'Insight' is an essential concept in the grounded theory. Techniques include systematic comparison of two or more phenomenon and becoming aware of highly meaningful situations or phrases. In the research nothing should be taken for granted (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The theory builds from the researcher's collection and analysis of data through the researcher's perceptions and experiences (Glaser & Strauss 2009, 225).

In my study based on the grounded theory I have used data collection, coding, analysis of data, theoretical sampling, constant comparisons, category development, systematic coding, memoing, saturation and sorting (Jones & Noble 2007). In practising grounded theory I as a researcher kept an open mind but did not reject existing literature and my previous knowledge to support the study (Tan 2010). Strauss and Corbin (1990, 13) said that analysis is an interplay between the researcher and the data, in other words analysis is both science and art. The creativity can be shown in the researcher's ability to name categories, ask

stimulating questions, make comparisons and come up with an innovative, integrated and realistic scheme from the data.

From the research data, new meanings are opened and concepts are discovered by examining the differences and similarities that rise from the interviews (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 102). Saturation was achieved in this research by executing interviews until no further evidence emerged (Goulding 1998). In my study I have used the Straussian approach, which differs from the Glaserian grounded theory by using analytic coding in the analysis phase (Goulding 1998). Coding helped me as a researcher to gain new perspectives and focus further on data collection. Coding can also lead to unforeseen directions (Charmaz 2013, 258).

3.4 Interviews

The data was collected to get insights into the role of fairs as part of the firms marketing communications now and in the future, and more knowledge about the overall fair participation process in order to elaborate the theory. Data collection was done by interviewing top management level executives such as CEOs, marketing and sales managers, representing different fields of businesses. The companies and the executives were chosen from the client base of the Finnish Fair Corporation. I interviewed twenty-one firms for this research study. These interviews provided the empirical data for grounding the theory. The decision to interview firms that have been using trade fairs as part of their marketing communication mix was done in order to get more insights into the overall process for participating. The companies that do not use trade fairs were left out. The interviewed companies represented various business fields, mainly pharmaceutical industry, travel industry and food industry. The in-depth interviews were conducted with people, who are in charge of the decision to participate at fairs and responsible for the company's marketing communication. In this research I have interviewed firms representing all the four sub-groups (vertical buyer-seller type, horizontal buyer-seller type, horizontal buyer-vertical seller type and vertical buyer- horizontal seller type). Thus, the interviewed group

represent a wide type of audience from wide range of industries in order to get a broad overall understanding of the phenomenon.

A questionnaire was created in two parts. The first part concentrated on the firms' marketing communication, trade fairs' role in the communication, the pros and con of the trade fairs as well as the firm's objectives, planning, execution and follow-up of the trade fairs. The latter part of the questionnaire concentrated on the future of fairs and how they should evolve in order to 'survive', as well as the future of marketing communication of the firms. The interview method was semi-structured and the questions were open-ended so that they would give enough freedom for the interviewees to express their opinions freely and spontaneously. Most grounded researchers collect their data using non-structured, open-ended questions in the least leading manner possible to reach high conceptual yield (Martin & Gynnild 2011, 23). The interviews were approximately one-hour sessions and they were conducted in Finnish during March-May 2013. The collection of the data was stopped when the interviews did not provide any new further insights (Damgaard et al. 2000). As Goulding (1998) stated, only when the theory has substance, or when no new findings arise from freshly collected data, should the researcher review the work in the field and relate the theory to it through the integration of ideas.

3.5 Data analysis

The twenty-one interviews of the marketing executives were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The massive amount of data was then analysed and categorized to different themes. The conceptual categories were selected and then grouped for identifying intragroup similarities and differences. The selections of the categories were based on the research problem, existing literature and the data (Mäkelä 2004, 11). The central findings were allowed to arise from the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), there are two conditions, creativity and theoretical sensitivity, that should be taken into consideration in the analysis.

Therefore, I explored new aspects and meanings from the data and coded the emerging data as I collected it. Coding helped to get new perspectives into the material. The coding process involved breaking down the interviews into distinct units of meaning. However, the findings are both theory laden and value laden since I as a researcher have approached the research situation with both theoretical perspectives and my own personal interests and values (Goulding 1998). I used my own personal and professional experience of working as the exhibition group manager for the Finnish Fair Corporation in the making of the study design and in the theory building. However, I understand that there is a dilemma, which is keeping the balance between drawing on prior knowledge and still keeping a fresh and open mind to any new concepts that might arise from the data (Goulding 2005).

4 Findings

The review of the literature and interviews with marketing executives and managers led to the identification of trade fairs role as part of the firms' marketing communication. The findings support the previous research about the strengths of the trade fairs and their optimistic future. All the interviewed firms indicated that trade fairs are part of their company's overall marketing mix and that they plan to use trade fairs also the next coming years.

As the results indicated that trade fairs have a big role in the firms' marketing mix, it is more so important to understand the different processes linked to the trade fair participation. In this study, four essential processes are identified: 1) planning and execution, 2) human resources, 3) marketing communication, and 4) evaluation and control that are interconnected and in use at different time frames such as pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair. Understanding the integrated trade fair process, its time frames and on-going nature will help the marketing executives to successfully execute their trade fair performance.

4.1 Trade fairs role in the firms' marketing communications

We already know that firms have for centuries used fairs for maximising business opportunities and they have recognized the power of trade shows for speeding up the sales (Tanner Jr. & Chonko 1995). My study confirmed that the firms are still eager to use fairs as part of their marketing communication palette. However nowadays they use extensively the Internet and digital media in their marketing communication. These two totally different kinds of media solutions seem to complement each other; other one offering the face-to-face contact, but being relatively expensive and requiring fairly heavy workload to accomplish, and the other one being easy, simple, low-cost way of providing information in a rather one-way communicative style. The role of the Internet and digital media is very strong and firms confirmed that they currently invest heavily on those activities. Search engines and banners are used to get visitors to one's own web pages. The

advantages of digital media, the 24/7 accessibility, easiness, fastness, up-to-date and controllable, are incontrovertible. Increasingly the Finnish customers seem to search information, make orders and spend time in the Internet. Therefore it is understandable that firms invest more to this low-cost medium.

Nonetheless, almost half of the interviewees indicated that trade fairs were in a very significant role as part of their marketing communication mix, the rest said that they use fairs as any other media. Fairs have been successful because of their social nature. Face-to-face contacts are needed for persuasion, relationships building and reassurance. The dialogue with customers is important and fairs offer a place for this dialogue in these hectic times. The interviewees pointed out that they have even increased the amount of smaller events. These events can be arranged by them or jointly done together with carefully selected partners. Many firms called for easier fair concepts and many of them told that the Easy Fairs concept has been an answer to their needs. Smaller and more focused fairs, local road shows, training sessions and events seem to have a prominent future.

The role of traditional print, TV and outdoor media has diminished quite radically. Some interviewees told that they have completely stopped using these media or planning to do so within next few years. Some still believed in their power and used them as part of their marketing communication mix. Print is used more for advertorials, deeper information sharing but also for awareness building and for tactical campaigns. Some justify the use of print because they are still reaching with it older generations better and because some trade magazines reach the certain target audience well. Print's, TV's and outdoor media's shrinking role leads back to the high expenses, their stiffness to adopt to changes and to their one-way communication style where no dialogue is possible. Radio on the other hand was said to be quite cost-effective medium. Radio supports the activation of web pages and the interviewees pointed out that it could be used for both increasing brand awareness, advancing recall and providing experiences. Substantive cooperation is an easy way to advertise in radio and since firms are driving for cost-effectiveness this form of cooperation method is eagerly used.

The companies notified that they use direct mail widely, mostly in electric form. This communication tool has its benefits of being quick, easy and it reaches well the target audience. Firms can buy registers of decision-makers and they use their own registers to contact potential and current customers. However, the vast disadvantage of this medium is that it has grown enormously during the past few years. The amount of junk mail is huge and the attention rate has decreased. For this reason some said that the traditional direct mail works even more efficiently nowadays, and some marketers were planning to give up using direct e-mails.

Social media, mobile and ambient marketing as well as the use of bloggers are raising their importance. These media still are used quite marginally and firms have not found their way of utilizing them to their fullest potential. However all of these stimulated the interest of today's marketers. Social media is providing firms a channel to communicate easily and quickly with their customers. Social media is truly a tool where dialogue is reinforced and used, it makes companies easily accessible to their customers. Interviewees stated clearly that firms need different kinds of skills and resources to handle social media tools the way they would like to. The role of social media was unclear for many companies. Some use it for information sharing, some for service & product development, product launches or purely entertaining their customers.

All in all today's marketing executives are tackling with multiple marketing channels and marketing tools. Their job is to find the best channels for their target audience. Many managers told that the challenge of handling multiple channels is demanding since they have to be accessible to their audience via those channels that the customers wish to use. Marketers also talked about their role being more consultative and commentary than before. Marketing function in some firms have been closely integrated to other functions such as R&D, IT and sales. It seems that the increasing importance and usage of digital marketing tools in all business areas have intensified the cooperation between different departments in the firms.

4.2 Uniqueness of trade fairs

4.2.1 Place for genuine face-to-face encounters

Veritably the number one strength of trade fairs according to this study was the fact that fairs offer a place for authentic face-to-face encounters, where visitors come to sellers and not vice versa. It is a strength that no other media can offer. The authenticity shows up with the fact that people trust each other more easily while having personal contacts and it is easier to detect truly interested potential. It is because of this genuine interaction that trade fairs were found to be suitable for both acquiring new customers and reinforcing current customer relationships. Especially it was stated that dissatisfied customers were easy to convert with personal encounters at fairs. Meeting face-to-face can more easily put things to rights and ease the drama than messaging via other media.

Trade fairs were said to be meeting points where many extempore encounters happen. *“Being at trade fairs is different, it is fun for me”*, this phrase reflects that people expect to bump into their old student friends, colleagues from competitors and other acquaintances as well as work-related contacts, and they enjoy these encounters. *“You can see everybody from the industry”* in one place, and this networking ability makes trade fairs exceptional. This media offers contacts from prospects to existing customers but also contacts to members of media and other business partners also the ones the firm itself has not invited. These contacts leave memory traces of the exhibiting firms. Visitors do not only meet sales personnel but also management, and conversely management and other administrative staff who rarely meet customers get the ground feeling and are able to understand the field personnel better. The main message was that people are behind all business and trade fairs provide a good tool for people to connect, an authentic meeting point.

4.2.2 The quality and easiness of the connections

Compared to the traditional mass media the target group is already narrowed down to people who are interested about the subject and searching for information. *“People are in really good mood and it makes the contact easy”*, hence at the trade fair, visitors are laid-back and tuned into receiving input from the exhibitors. *“At the fair the atmosphere transmits, an enthusiastic exhibitor can stir up the visitors to the right kind of mood”*. Many interviewees talked about the right kind of ‘mood’ or ‘vibe’ or ‘attitude’ that helps them to initiate contact with the visitors. They also told that trade fairs open doors to customers that they have never been able to book appointments with. The easiness of the connection, the quality of the target group and the ambience where all parties have gathered for the same topic give trade fairs an advantage over other marketing communication tools. For encounters trade fairs provide a different environment away from office space.

Exhibitors look for the right target audience especially decision-makers and they are extremely interested about prospects that they could not have been able to reach on their own. Therefore the visitor profile is important tool for the trade fair organizer as well as for the exhibitors. The quality of visitors was regarded as one of the top strengths of trade fairs, *“it is the right target audience that you can find from trade fairs, which is really valuable”*. If the trade fairs’ visitor profile meets the needs of exhibitors, firms want to invest in them. Firms want to be sure they will get good connections from the fairs. The number of connections and the amount of visitors visiting the fair was also considered important, but the quality of the connections outruns the amount.

4.2.3 Marketing tool for all senses

Based on the interviews trade fairs’ robust advantage is the fact that it enables the use of all the senses. It is the sense of sight, smell, touch, taste and ambience that makes trade fairs unique. It is important for visitors to be able to test and touch

products. Tastings are often used tactic to get visitors to stay at the stand and for the food industry it is the best way to showcase their products, provide a taste experience and plant new ideas to visitors. Nowadays marketers enhance brands to be experienced in a certain way, trade fair environment facilitate the creation of a brand experience. *“It has significance for the brand. It is important how we feel, look and sound. At fairs we can construct the service experience”*. Thus visuals at the stand are important. As a marketing media trade fairs differ from the others because the environment itself provides experiences, they are far from office spaces and the environment does have an effect on people’s attitudes and minds. For some products it is important to get people to try them and get a hands-on feeling, it was stated that Finnish people are genuinely suspicious and they can be more easily converted once they have been able to test the products themselves.

4.3 Integrated trade fair process

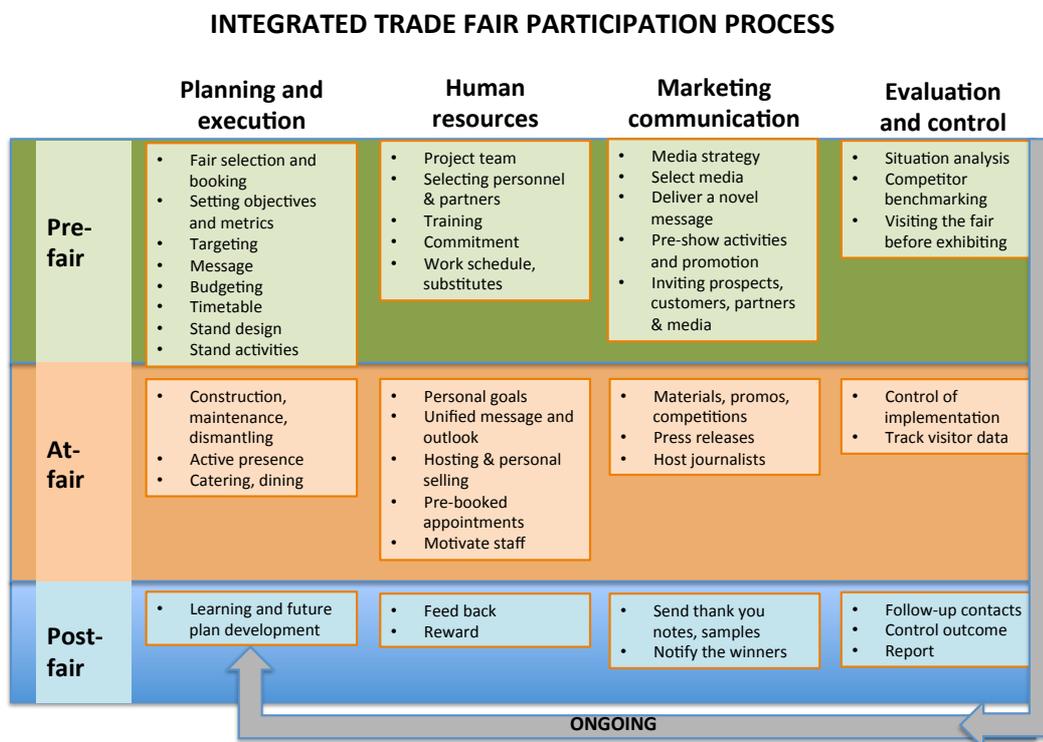


Figure 3. Integrated trade fair process

In this study it was investigated what processes are needed for the trade fair participation during these different ‘pre-fair’, ‘at-fair’ and ‘post-fair’ phases and which elements of those processes are critical for firms to be successful by using trade fairs as a marketing medium. These time phases have been commonly used in the marketing literature of trade fairs and they were as commonly used by the interviewees. However there is a lack of integrated process view, which shows different elements that are needed for successful trade fair participation. From my research data I identified four central processes that overlap each other depending on the time phases (pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair). These processes derive from the success factors that were presented by the interviewees. The two most critical processes according to the research material are ‘*planning and execution*’ and ‘*human resources*’ processes when it comes to trade fairs. However even though the marketing executives did not put as significant weight on ‘*marketing communications*’ or ‘*evaluation and control*’ processes they definitely should not be neglected.

4.3.1 Pre-fair stage



Figure 4. Pre-fair stage

In order for a firm to improve its trade fair participation, it should concentrate on strengthening the pre-fair activities. At *pre-fair stage* it is important to get acquainted to the trade fairs as a marketing medium, evaluate the situation and competitors and preferably visit the fair before exhibiting. Strategic planning is critical and it consists of selecting the right fair and stand space, setting objectives & metrics, finding a unified message, planning and tracking the budget, developing a timetable and planning the stand design & activities. The appeal of a firm's stand is directly related to the stand size if other things are equal. Thus, an increase in stand size means greater number of visitors attracted from the fair audience (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). However, a trade fair consultant Candace Adams says that firms should first think about their message rather than the stand (Atkinson, 2011).

Before the fair the firm needs also to focus on the human resources. Trade fair participation process needs a project manager and other staff to aid in the process. Developing an internal fair team is recommended. The personnel need to be aided with the work schedules and substitutes. Quite often the marketing executive is dedicated to this task. In smaller firms it can be the CEO and in turn in larger firms there can be assigned an event manager taking care of the fair participation. Another crucial task is to train the staff and commit them to the project. By stand personnel training firms can specially enhance their information gathering abilities.

Trade fair marketing strategy should be integrated into the firm's overall marketing strategy and the media strategy and media selection for trade fairs should follow the marketing communication strategy. It is vital for the firm to reach their prospects, customers, partners and media at the fair. Therefore invitations to the trade fair should be sent in advance. For this reason and for letting customers and media know what the firm is representing at the fair it is vital for firms to concentrate on the marketing communication before the fair.

4.3.2 At-fair stage



Figure 5. At-fair stage

At-fair stage the firms need to focus on the construction, maintenance and dismantling of the stand but also on the active presence at the fair. This active presence means taking care of the planned activities as well as hosting the customers and journalists, selling to prospects and taking care of the pre-booked appointments and possible catering and dining at the stand as well as watching out for the marketing and promotional materials. It is critical to have the personal goals as well as general goals so that the message and appearance is unified. Keeping the staff motivated to do their work is also central to the fair participation. The feeling of the stand personnel comes across to the visitors and if the staff is not motivated to do their job it is a missed marketing opportunity because the face-to-face contacts are in a fundamental role. At-the fair exhibitors should always evaluate and control their activities. This can be done by having brief meetings at the end of the fair day. Visitor data about the stand, feedback, sales, inquiries, materials and overall feelings can be checked briefly before starting a new fair day.

4.3.3 Post-fair stage



Figure 6. Post-fair stage

At the *post-fair stage* the feedback from the personnel should be collected and the staff should be rewarded. The same way visitors should be remembered by thank you notes or samples. If the stand activities included competitions, all the winners should be informed. The most important of all are contacts made at the fair that need to be followed-up. Hence, the outcome should be controlled and the metrics should be tracked. A written report should include all this data so that all the learning would not be wasted and could be used when planning another trade fair participation. The trade fair participation process is an on going process. Usually the timetable in Finland settles down to a year, where the planning and booking of the next trade fair visibility starts immediately after another show ends.

4.3.4 Planning and execution process

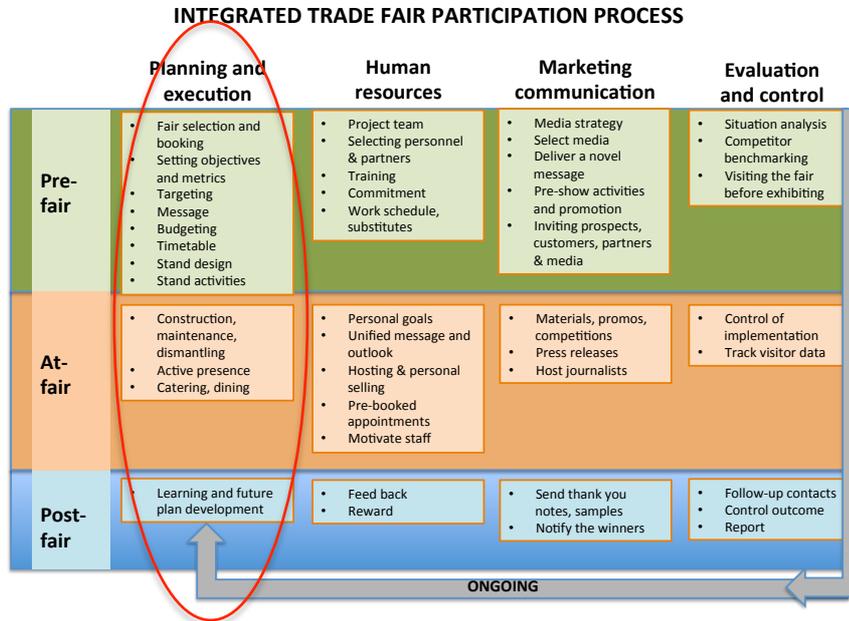


Figure 7. Planning and execution process

The planning and execution process is tightly linked to all the other processes especially the evaluation process. The careful planning at the pre-fair stage is vital to all other stages and affects all processes on the way. In order to succeed firms need to think carefully the objectives for their fair participation. The important questions are; what are the main message and the wanted end result, who they want to meet and influence and how to do it. These objectives are usually planned with the joint internal team combined mostly from sales and marketing personnel. Then the budget is determined, the products are selected, and themes, stand design and activities are chosen according to the decided objectives. Two interviewees said that the most difficult thing is to select the products to be showcased and more specifically to get them ready. So trade fair participation sets deadlines for their product development.

An important part of this planning process is the construction of a timetable. The importance of this tool was mentioned various times and by many different interviewees. Trade fair process consists of numerous different tasks that need to

be remembered to do in time. To-do lists, marketing calendars and action-log type of lists help the executives and their teams to keep these processes on schedule.

Many of the marketing executives told that they use external partners for constructing the stand but rather use their own personnel in the active presence of the fair. In any case at-fair stage, attracting visitors to the stand is one of the most important things after the decision to participate is done. Catering, stand activities and skilled personnel was said to be the success factors in tempting the customers for a stand visit. These three corner stones are described later in the study. The fact that trade fair participation is an on-going process means that planning should be done on the basis of the learning that has occurred from the previous participation as well as on the basis of active analysis of the environment, competitors and the field of marketing communications. This learning process and analysis of the outcomes helps the firms to improve their presence at the trade fair and make the most out of it. Some marketing executives referred to their experience and how it overall will ease the handling of these processes, but we need to keep in mind that this experience can also lead to routinely carried out tasks and inefficiency to get the best results if trade fair participation is done in routine like manners.

4.3.4.1 Objectives for participating a trade fair

Almost 20% of the interviewed firms did not have any specific objectives set for their trade fair participation. This indicates also the fact that they cannot truly know how trade fairs function as a marketing tool and they cannot evaluate their success appropriately. The same amount of the marketing executives also stated that one of their objectives for a trade fair participation is the fact that all the competitors are participating or that the market leadership requires them to participate. Nevertheless almost all stated that they are looking for new leads and sales from the trade fair participation. The second most important objective was building the awareness and enhancing the brand or corporate image. Two thirds of the marketing executives said that the important function of the trade fair was to

provide a place for rendezvous, thus their objective was to enhance and strengthen their current customer relationships, to share information and introduce new products and services to the market. Other less common objectives were said to be the benchmarking of the competitors, increasing the credibility, motivating the staff, recruiting, boosting the public relations, collecting a customer database and promoting exports.

Generating sales leads and sales

“All what we do, in the end aims to sales” said one of the interviewed executives, and phrases like *“sales is the beginning and the end, and should be the most important thing at any business”* and *“the acquisition of new customers is the most important”* reveal that getting new leads and sales as the end result are central issues when it comes to planning the fair participation. It is not just finding new customers and meeting the present customers but also providing a place for customers to meet each other. There was even a really substantial statement from one executive, who emphasized the role of the trade fair as a sales channel, stating that all their sales leads are from trade fairs originally. Getting new prospects from the trade fairs seemed to be a very important goal for these firms and trade fairs also seem to work for them in this respect. It is the element of customers coming to see the firms, and not vice versa that makes selling easier. Interviewees told that their sales personnel have told that trade fairs open up totally new possibilities since they attract prospects that would not have agreed to meet them otherwise. Compared to personal selling it is also faster to see customers than drive around town to meet them.

Some of the firms set specific quantifiable objectives for new leads and sales. One firm said that at least they have to be able to cover the costs associated to the fair participation from their sales. There were also statements that highlighted the element of surprise at the fairs: *“There might be gold grains among the visitors, you never know”* or *“just out of coincidence one might find life-long partners”*. However it was pointed out that it is not that easy to make deals or close sales at

the fairs any longer. Often the closing of the sales do not happen at the fair environment, but the discussions and the meetings at the fair lead to the closing of the sales later. One executive said that if you want to close a sale at the fair you have to have a good fair offer or agree on great bonuses later.

Building awareness

For new firms with scarce resources it is particularly important to build awareness among the prospects. Thus trade fairs represent a good place to let the market and the future customers know you exist. Nevertheless almost all the interviewed firms noted on the importance of building awareness, staying in the top of the mind of the customers and strengthening the brand or company image as being a central objective for participating at the trade fairs. One marketing executive noted that trade fairs are excellent places to combine both the enhancing the brand marketing as well as the company image. It was said that this objective alone is not enough. It is not easy to set specific goals for measuring the increase in the awareness created by trade fair participation, and with that being difficult the exhibitors cannot make their staff act properly. One interviewee said; “ *building the brand at the trade fair is an objective that should not be forgotten but as a single goal it is not enough*”. This objective was at a bigger role for firms whose sales actions were more and more executed online.

The interviews revealed that quite many marketing executives were talking about the brand and how it needs to have a visage and presence in the minds of the future and present customers. The comments like “*all the time it becomes more important that the brand is present, it has a face or it has a feeling, it has a foot somehow...therefore the importance of events will grow for sure*” or “*the brand needs to land physically among customers for day-to-day encounters. I find it really important*” or “*we need to talk to and meet our customers...it has significance to the brand. How we feel, look and sound*”, discloses the fact that the marketing executives want to reinforce their brand, be present and tangible to their customers and be reachable through many different marketing channels.

Enhancing the customer relationships and professional contacts

The third most important objective for these firms to join trade fairs was the possibility to enhance their current customer relationships and maintain other professional contacts. Trade fairs function as a huge hub, a place for diverse face-to-face meetings where the exhibitors can breath in the professional atmosphere. For many people trade fairs are the only place to see colleagues from other firms, old fellow students, old and current co-workers, journalists, retailers, dealers, customers, prospects, competitors and partners to name a few. For some it provides a place to meet these important contacts only once a year or even less frequently. Fairs also offer the possibility for those companies' employees who usually have no customer contacts to understand better the market and customer needs. *"Trade fairs are quite a lot of relationship marketing"*, where happy reunions happen and social relationships are maintained in a short time. This hectic character of the trade fair was the only disadvantage of the fairs. There are so many contacts and so little time. According to one executive, *"there is an average of three minutes time to update the news with the other person"*. Therefore it is especially important for the exhibitors to know their 'elevator pitch' before entering the fair grounds.

Almost two thirds of the interviewees stated that their objective is to strengthen the current customer relationships at the trade fairs. Some customers are located around Finland and trade fairs are attractive enough to get the customers on the move. This attractiveness also gets the decision-makers and the top management on the road, which delights the exhibiting firms. The interviewees told that is easier to resell and update the new offerings to the current customers, and much tougher and more expensive to get new customers. Thus, many firms inform and invite the present customers to visit the fair. One interviewee emphasized the fact that customers need to feel that they are looked after and one should carefully think which customers they want to invite. It can be vital for some customers to belong in this invited customer group. There were different kinds of tactics used in attracting the present customers such as lunch meetings or pampering with food & drink tastings. The most important thing was to make the visit for the customers

as easy as possible by providing them parking and a cloakroom free of charge. However it was stated that it is not easy to agree on appointments in advance and many interviewees prefer to keep the appointments more ad hoc type of meetings.

Building trust

Currently a lot of business is done through the Internet. Therefore is vital to be able to build trust among the prospects and the present customers. The prospects especially search for information about new products and services from the web, but they cannot be sure whether they can trust these service providers. The interviewees pointed out that anyone can present anything in the Internet but when it comes to winning the customer you need to win their trust, and trade fairs are a place where you can build trust between your firm and the customer, and assure that your company really exists and is a reckoned player at the market. One interviewee pointed out that trade fairs offer an appropriate platform to assure customers how strong player they are at the market. Participating at a trade fair year after year over 22 years can also enhance the credibility of the firm especially at the export market. *"This credibility builds trust and later on continuity"*, said one executive. At the fairs the visitor can meet the human behind the firm's web page. It is this personal contact that helps to build the trust. It was also said that in the web pages one could easily find inaccurate information as well, so these misconceptions could be straightened out at the trade fair over a face-to-face conversation. However the quality of this meeting has to be top class in order to redeem the promise that has been made through some other marketing media.

Benchmarking competitors

Benchmarking the competitors at the trade fair is one quite important objective to bear in mind. Over one third of the interviewees pointed out that they use trade fairs to find out what's happening in the industry, what new products and services are entering the market and collect facts about their competitors. The interviewees told that trade fairs are an important channel for data acquisition. They are especially interested to see the new launches and the main messages of their

competitors. Benchmarking does not limit itself to seeing the competition and collecting their materials. One executive said that at the trade fair *“you can talk with your fellow competitors and colleagues, and your understanding of the market improves, generally. Even at the level of product innovation, we can consider if we can do something together”*. Consequently at best the benchmarking and improving the market knowledge can lead to deeper conversations and collaboration with the competitors.

4.3.4.2 Attracting the visitors

There are different promotional techniques that exhibitors can use when attending visitors to their stands at the trade fairs. In my research I examined which tactics the exhibitors use and which techniques appear to work in practise. The three most important tactics were; 1) the stand activities, 2) the catering and tastings at the stand, and 3) a skilled stand staff. The extra visibility at the fair centre, the fair offers and the design of the stand were also mentioned to be useful tools to attract visitors to their stand. The stand design should be inviting, easy to approach and state the firm’s main message quite clearly. Two-storied stand raise interest of the visitors but unfortunately those are quite seldom used. All in all the research data suggests that an attracting stand is a piazza styled one offering a place for genuine encounters in a relaxed atmosphere. One firm told that they had offered neck massage for their customers at their stand and it proved to be hugely successful. They were able to combine business with pleasure.

Activities at the stand

According to the marketing executives, activities are the most important tool to stop visitors at their stands. During their stop they are able to make the necessary contact with the visitor. Very common attractions are different kinds of competitions, lotteries, auctions and giveaways at the stand. The competition or lottery prizes do not need to be big or expensive.

One interviewee told that their competition has so long traditions that their competitors already know the exact times when they should not plan anything to happen because it is so popular activity at the fair. Even the visitors start asking about the competition well before the fair dates. This company certainly has found a great attraction that works well for them. Another company told that even a small giveaway, which has a surprise effect works for tempting visitors to visit the stand. They used small different coloured balls that had rain jackets inside, visitors wondered what the balls were and it was a good conversation starter. It is also a good idea to have a competition in form of a quiz about the company or its products and services. This way when filling the questionnaire the visitors start to ask questions and learn at the same time.

Modern technology is helping the exhibitors to arrange activities at the stand. Some interviewees told that it is easy to arrange competitions now when there is no need for paper blankets when visitors can fill in the forms electronically and what is best they will have a customer register ready right after the trade fair. These digital devices and online connections make it easy to have the same competitions and auctions also available in the Internet at the same time. One great example was a food auction, which filled the stand with shouting people, and still there was an opportunity for customers outside the fair to participate via Internet as well. A huge screen reported the auction situation to all the fair visitors. Many other interviewees told that they have used iPads, smart boards, microphones and different kind of screens to support their activities. A product presentation done by using a microphone was said to get the visitors attention. Also visual effects like lights, sounds and moving images were told to be effective but still quite rarely used.

The activities at the stand should be linked to the message of the exhibitor and they definitely should have a WOW-effect. Even as small effect as rollerblading product demonstrators can draw the interest of fair visitors. Another way to increase the WOW-effect and thus increase the recall and memorability of the exhibitor is to use celebrities or live music. These tactics will provide experiences

to the visitor that normally they would pay for. Nevertheless, some companies still trust successfully in the pure b-to-b activities on the stand. They rely on interesting lecturers or reveal research findings that relate to their business at their stands. It is also quite common to build small meeting rooms at the stands and pre-book appointments with the customers. However it can be a bit disturbing and restless environment for one-to-one meetings, and it can become a challenging time management issue.

Catering and tastings

The firms stated that it is best to serve visitors something that make them stop at the stand for a short while. Within this time the exhibitor has the possibility to start the conversation and exchange business cards. Lounges that serve either coffee or champagne were noticed to work optimally. Champagne or wine lounges were said to work well because fair visitors need spaces where they can relax and have a permission to sit. A class of champagne also softens the attitudes of the visitors without getting them drunk. Exhibitors who are in the food business can combine their products with champagne and provide new experiences to their stand visitors. And especially for them, tastings and caterings provide the unique opportunity to get into the visitors mouth and affect them through their senses.

Offering free tastings at the stand does not always provide the optimal results. Some exhibitors told that they had tried serving ice cream or smoothies, but it turned out to have negative outcomes. Small edibles can mess up the stand easily and need continuous tidying. Free samples can lure unnecessary visitors, who are only after the free catering, to your stand. In the worst case they can also block the stand so that the real customers cannot be spotted or contacted any longer. Offering champagne was also said that it could have negative side effects of not getting rid of the visitors from your stand. However one interviewee told a nice story about the visitors who are just hungry for giveaways. They call these visitors by the name of "*Pipsa*". "*Pipsas*" are according to him statist actors at the stand, showing the real clients or prospects how popular their products and services can

be and how they are used. They make fun and take advantage of these “*Pipsas*” without their knowledge by placing the distribution point of the giveaways on a strategic place where it does not disturb the real business.

Skilled stand staff

Some of the interviewed executives mentioned that “*people with stage fright should be left at the office*” and “*the lines should be practised beforehand*” in order to attract visitors at the stand. Too much small talk could be in a way to get to the desired results. The people in the stand need to know why they are there and what they are expected to do. Otherwise it will easily fall into chatting with ones colleagues and acquaintances and not focusing in doing business. One marketing executive stated that “*...sometimes the conversation with less potential prospect goes side-tracked and million dollars deals can be lost elsewhere*”, the other executive pointed out the hardness of leaving a less potential customer by saying “*...you just can't say to your customer to go to hell...that I have a better client waiting for me*”. It was also stated in the interviews that the people who are at the stand should be more or less qualified and professional people. They should be able to give answers to the visitors' questions. Plain promo persons might be in place for guiding and attracting people, but there should always be company professional at reach.

4.3.5 Human resources process

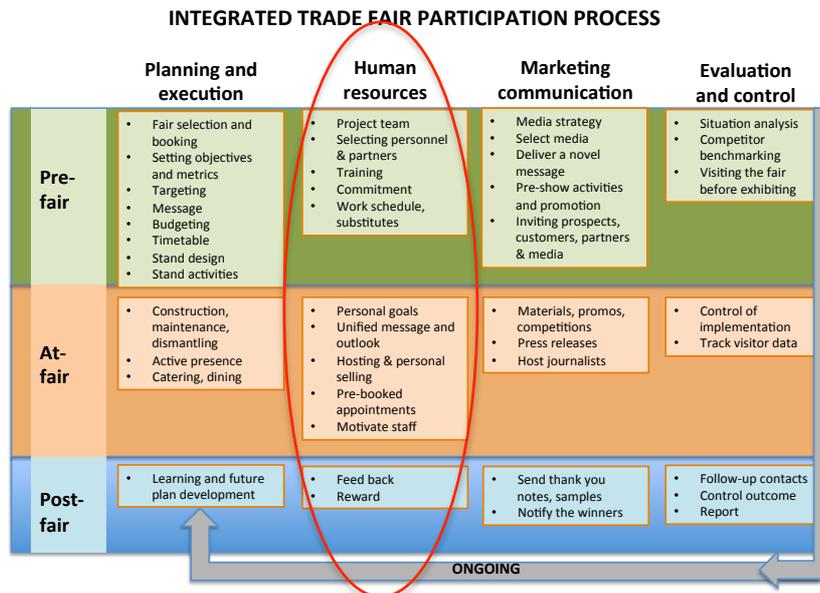


Figure 8. Human resources process

The decision to participate at the trade fair is done mainly as a joint decision within companies. Over two-thirds of the interviewed firms were making joint decisions inside the company to participate at trade fairs. The participants for these decisions were mainly from the marketing, sales and product marketing departments. The upper management was usually involved in getting the final decision and approval for the participation, and sometimes the upper management was located abroad.

Before the fair companies appoint the responsible persons and partners for the fair participation process. In any case usually the marketing department had the biggest role when it comes to taking care of the trade fair processes. However surprisingly often the decisions and the responsibilities were laying just on one man's shoulder who copes with the tasks alone or with some assistant help alongside with zillion of other tasks. Even though many interviewees said that handling trade fairs were routine business for them, the job was not described to be very eligible. One interviewee expressed her feelings by saying that *"it is not always so nice post to be the one who kicks everyone on the butt"*. Very rarely a firm had an event manager appointed who solely was responsible for arranging

the company events even though taking care of the trade fair related tasks were said to be a heavy workload especially nearer the fair dates. The roles for the actual fair participation at the trade fair, were said to be decided closer to the fair dates. Usually the tasks were divided so that the marketing department takes care of the marketing and the materials for the trade fair, and sales & business departments handle the sales related issues. Training was also stated to be critical before the fair, usually couple of days before. In the training the message will be clarified and the objectives are stated. It is also important to go through the lines what the staff will use while working at the stand.

The most important role at the fair seemed to have the sales and customer service personnel. Usually the upper management visited the fair but did not have scheduled shifts for serving at the stand. Their role was more to be visible and walk around the fair. Many interviewees stressed the importance of having experts on the stand, therefore they preferred to use their own personnel rather than external labour. Students were used for assistant type of jobs like tidying the stand and keeping eyes on the materials and catering. Selecting the right type of employees is crucial, people working on the stand should be happy and easy-going. Appointing the personnel and defining their role well in advance was recommended by the interviewees. It helps the firm to prepare the unified look and accessories for the staff. One interviewee told that it would help even more if she had been prepared for substitutes as well, since calling for substitutes at a short notice can be quite difficult.

External partners were mainly used for planning and constructing the stand. These partners were mostly advertising agencies or exhibition constructors. They were met in an early phase of the process. The competitive bidding was explained to be time consuming and it usually takes one to two months before the bidding process is ready and the partner is chosen. To ease their workload and to decrease the costs the marketing executives told that they try to plan materials and design stands so that they could be used many years. The stand design should be transformable so that it can adopt to different stand sizes. Some interviewees were

enthused about sharing the stand with their close business partners or retailers. This seemed to be working with the firms that shared the same customers but were not directly competing with their products and services. The shared participation was especially helpful with the staffing the stand as well as sharing the participation costs.

People responsible for trade fairs use checklists, duty rosters, and internal meetings before and at the fair to facilitate the fair participation. One interviewee praised her action log –list for facilitating the work. To do lists, that would include even the smallest details were seen important and called for. These lists should be easily accessible to all the exhibitors to ease their fair participation. Specific timetables and shifts were set by most of the interviewees and they were said to help with the organizing and enhancing the staff's wellbeing since being on duty and standing at the stand is quite hard work and physically tiring. Firms also indicated that they hold regular internal trade fair meetings before and at the fair. These meetings are held approximately two to four times a year where all the deadlines and tasks are planned, managed and checked. Some interviewees said that they also have short meetings before the fair days at the stand to memorize their objectives and the main message.

After the fair it is always good to reward the staff for doing their best at the stand. One marketing executive told that they use internal sales competitions at the trade fairs as motivators to increase sales and get the best out of their sales personnel. At best, working at the fair will strengthen the relationships within the personnel, raise the staff's self-esteem, provide opportunities for the personnel from different apartments to get to know each other and their jobs better and build-up the team spirit. Comments like *“It is the team spirit, that you do not face in the daily basis at work. It matters”* and *“ It will raise up a team-spirit. In that sense it is most important for the internal spirit and culture”* were showing the importance of the unified feeling that participating at the trade fair could give.

4.3.5.1 The importance of skilled stand personnel

Skilled stand personnel was said to be the third most important factor that attracts visitors to the stand. For stand personnel to be skilled they need to be managed properly. Clear instructions, shared responsibilities and targets need to be communicated to the personnel. A very good way to do this is to keep a training session before the fair and a short brief at the fair for the stand personnel to act as agreed.

There are people who like face-to-face contacts and are extroverts that are not afraid to contact the fair visitors, therefore one should never bring employees hesitantly to work at the stand. It is also always better to use ones own personnel than rent staff who cannot profoundly serve the fair visitors. There were comments from the marketing executives such as *“You should never bring people who are not skilled to make face-to-face contacts because only one person can ruin your appearance at the fair”* or *“One wrong person can cause awful damage at the stand. You should not force anyone to work at the stand, instead make people want to come and work in there. Create a nice atmosphere. And reward your staff”*. Stand personnel were described to be *“socializing officers”*, people who are naturally able to take contact and be interested about other people. People that have stage fright should be given other jobs behind the scenes. Thus, people who enjoy working with other people spread around positive feelings and attract more visitors to the stand.

Another important talent that these people need to have is to understand the quality of the contacts. They cannot waste time with visitors who are not really interested. One executive said that it is therefore really important to practise beforehand the lines that stand personnel use in order to find the wheat from the chaff. These lines can be couple of questions with what the personnel can categorize the visitors because at trade fairs there is no time for deep conversations with one person.

4.3.6 Marketing communication process

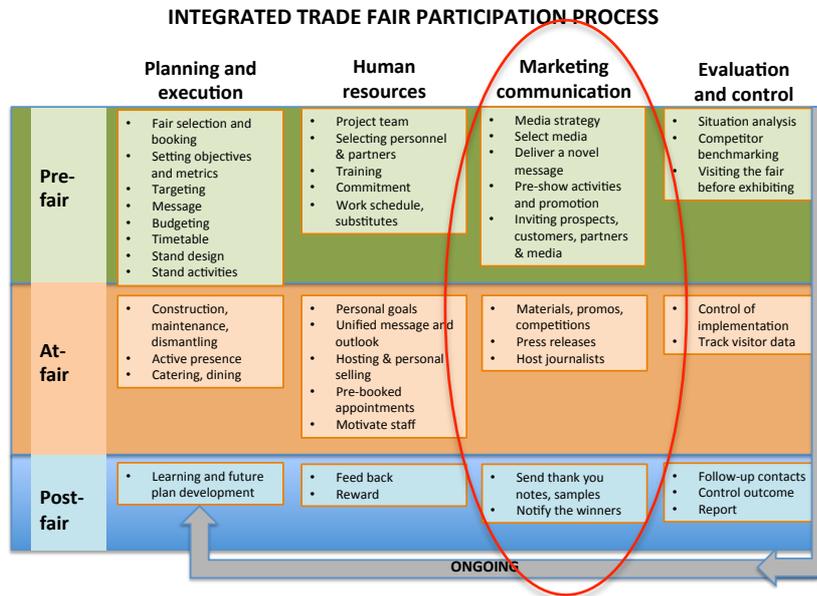


Figure 9. Marketing communication process

If the companies want to be successful they need to integrate trade fairs into their multi-channel communication strategy. To my surprise all the firms had integrated trade fairs into their overall marketing strategy and over two-thirds of the firms have made marketing plans for trade fairs especially. This showed the important role of trade fairs in their marketing portfolio. Almost half of the firms identified trade fairs as having a crucial role in their marketing communication mix. However this does not indicate the fact that their strategic and marketing plans are functional, rather it tells us that the role of trade fairs is significant and has found its place in the strategic planning.

Before the fair over two-thirds of the firms were active in inviting their customers, partners and media to visit their stands. Invitations were sent both electronically and in print. They also invited their most important customers personally. The interviewed firms also informed about their presence at the trade fair on their Internet pages and newsletters. Social media such as Twitter or Facebook was also used. Some of the firms had their own customer magazines where they marketed

their participation and some had ads on trade magazines. Some of the firms trusted that other firms and especially the trade fair organizer invites the right visitors to the fair. Comments like: *“we have not invited anyone...we participate at the fairs in order to reach the audience that is there”*, *“..we do not tell anyone that we are at the fair because we are by far the largest in Finland and everyone knows that we are there”* and *“we should not do the inviting because it will lead to the fact that some people get too many invitations and some get none...”*. Those exhibitors assume their role is simply to show up and make the most of those visitors. They also think that the decision-makers visit automatically trade fairs because it is part of their job particularly if the exhibitor firm is a market leader. Some firms admitted that they could have done pre-marketing more systematically and punctually.

All of the interviewees told that they have up-to-date marketing materials on the stands and many of them used different tactics, e.g. lotteries and competition, to attract the visitors. However the presence of media and journalist was not exploited to its fullest potential, press releases were not prepared or press conferences were not held. Some marketing executives referred to the fact that it is not easy to get media's attention at the fairs because the news offering is too enormous.

Most of the interviewees said to invest in the pre-fair and at-fair phases of marketing communications, but forget or delay the post-fair activities. This comment encapsulates the thoughts of many interviewed executives: *“...even more we should think about the post-marketing activities. Very often we are in such a hurry. So that the path...the idea...has not carried to the end. We should find a way to bind people...to get them visit the web page or something...”* There could be found many excuses for not carrying out the post-marketing activities such as the hurry or scarce resources without looking at the bigger picture of the possibilities that the fair participation could bring with a broader time scope. The post-fair campaigns were usually done to the register collected at the fair, but this was said to be often neglected opportunity. It seems that once the fair is over, the

‘normal’ work starts and the post-marketing opportunities are easily left non-utilized.

4.3.7 Evaluation and control process



Figure 10. Evaluation and control process

Evaluation and control process is critical for a successful trade fair participation even though the marketing executives stated that planning and personnel processes are more crucial. Evaluation and control seemed to be the most easily neglected process amongst the interviewees even though it could help them enormously with their participation process if done accurately. Before the trade fair firms should analyze the situation and look at the environment. What marketing tools do competitors use, which fairs do they participate in, what is the biggest fair in the business field, which fair leads to the best results – these are examples of questions that any marketing executive should ask him/herself before deciding which marketing tools and fairs to use. It is also always important to visit the fair as a fair visitor before participating. This enables the marketing executives to understand the layout, its visitors and atmosphere better, and thus make a more successful participation plan. The activities of stand personnel can be evaluated by

numerous different ways and metrics such as daily meetings, number of contacts and amount of sales. Especially important contacts were said to be those new business contacts that surprised the exhibitor. Less accurate but still valuable evaluation tools such as feedback and reclamation gathering as well as identification of the overall feelings were commonly used tools amongst the firms. Feedback should be collected from the partners, customers, stand personnel and the fair organizer at the fair or quite soon after the fair so that all the necessary things are fresh in the memory. It is also good to track the total amount of fair visitors but also the amount of the stand visitors as well as the timing of the visits. The latter amount gives the exhibitor a better evaluation of ones own performance and helps to plan the shifts for the stand staff.

After the fair all the contacts should be exploited, a debriefing meeting should be held and the outcome including the costs should be controlled via the pre-set metrics. Contacts made at the fair are a terrible waste if not followed-up immediately. Many of the interviewees said that they usually send marketing materials to the visitor register they had collected by coupons and business cards at the fair, inform the winners of the competitions, provide the additional information requested by the visitors or call them personally after the fair. The personal selling contacts are first divided regionally between the sales personnel. All these contacts should also be followed later on to fully understand the influence of trade fair marketing. However one interviewee stated that it has become more difficult to collect the visitor register because fair visitors have become alert of to whom to give their personal information in fear of junk e-mails. Getting the personal information is easier if the visitor will receive some sort of a premium for doing that. A written report always provides a good tool for the planning process of the next trade fair participation. This report should include the outcome of the fair, pictures from the trade fair as well as the feedback from different parties. The written report should be used for learning and becoming better exhibitors in the next round.

4.3.7.1 *Assessing the end results*

The three most important measurements the marketing executives use to evaluate trade fair success are; 1) the number of sales leads, 2) amount of contacts, and 3) the subjective intuitive feeling of the trade fair participation. The assessment is mainly based on these three things. Other measures were also mentioned such as the sales at the fair, the amount of materials distributed or consumed, the number of participants taking part of the lotteries and the competitions, the total amount of visitors and the number of new newsletter subscribers. However some of these other measures were said not to reveal any true results. Where do the firm need the information of how many candies were eaten except to estimate the need of candies for the next time? Or what is the reason to follow the total number of visitors visiting the fair, if the firm is not counting the visitors of their own stand? Only one firm said that they have kept the record of the amount of visitors at their stand by scanners and one indicated that they had kept the record of stand visitors with rough estimates on the notebook.

Overall it was said that it is difficult to define qualitative targets, and this of course leads to the difficulties in measuring them. The difficulties with quantifying the results lie also in the extended time phase because the trade fair participation can lead to sales months or even years after the contact is made at the fair. After that period of time it starts to be difficult to evaluate the trade fair's role in the selling process. One interviewee expressed the challenge like this: *"I have been in the business 20 years, and I have got orders that are based on the offers made four years ago at the trade fair. And it is quite common to get orders that are based on the offers made a year or two years ago."* However the more time passes by, the more difficult it is to evaluate the success of the fair. If one wants to be satisfied to the trade fair participation it should be measurable quite soon after. Three months time period after the fair was used in one firm, others had not specified the time period.

Measuring the sales leads is quite common and an easy measure to use at the trade fair. Almost half of the interviewees were using this metric but quite few actually

did any marketing actions to attract the leads to their stand beforehand, instead they trust the fair organizer or other exhibitors to do the job for them. Although sales leads are recognized as one of the best measures to trade fair exhibitors, they can be misleading if stand staffing and time spent with prospects are not taken into consideration (Herbig et al. 1997). Many set the target before the fair and count the number of leads immediately after the fair. The sales department then takes care of the leads, send the promised offers or contact the prospects. Some of the firms continued to evaluate the results by counting also the number of offers sent and the amount of sales reached in a short time. However what was surprising was the fact that some firms referred to making offers as being an overburdening job. Comments like “*we get an awfully lot of orders which employ us a lot*” and “*making offers after the fair, it is a lot*” would seem to be a positive thing but in this case it seemed to be a burden to be coped after the fair is over. It can be understandable if the tenders do not lead to business. One interviewee encapsulated: “*It is not the amount of leads we are interested in, it is the end result*”. So ultimately it is the development of sales that should be evaluated.

Another metric that was used to estimate the fair participation success, by one third of the interviewees, was the amount of contacts got from the trade fair. One interviewee told that they categorize all their contacts by orders, present customers, potential customers, partners, press and others. By categorizing the contacts they are able to compare the results to last time’s fair participation and evaluate the results. More generally the firms counted the amount of contacts from the amount of business cards, the amount of contact information collected by different forms or coupons and the amount of feedback. These days the most popular form to collect the contacts seemed to be the digital way with iPads or other tablets. Some compared the number of contacts purely to the last fair’s contacts but there were also firms that set targets according to their sales goals and make individual targets that are then followed after. The trade fair contacts are eventually after the fair divided between the personnel for post-marketing and sales.

Every third interviewed firm leaned to their subjective intuitive feelings about the trade fair participation. Some pointed out that in order to do it successfully one should have years of experience. Feelings are often summarized in the team meetings after the fair or after every fair day. The staff that is working at the stand gives their feedback about the fair, just generally expressing what was good and what was bad at the fair. These gut feelings include the information about how many new prospects were visiting the stand, what kind of discussions were made at the fair, how interested people were of the products or services and what was the overall atmosphere of the visitors. One firm emphasized that one of their trade fair objective is that visitors will leave their stand with a smile in their face. For them the fair participation is certainly not just about the hard measurable targets as the marketing executive put it: *“We have succeeded if we see that our customers smile, it is a good sign”*. They stressed the importance of being able to transform customers to be receptive and happy. It is the good moods of their visitors that they are after and with this pleasant feeling they are able to further develop their business relationships afterwards.

4.3.8 An on-going integrated process

When the firms have decided to exhibit they need to plan a minimum of one year ahead of the scheduled event and they should work closely with the fair organizer. The vast amount of the interviewees told that the decisions are made in the early stages of the fair process, usually immediately after the previous trade fair has ended. Some referred to the fact that you will get the best stand location and some special offers if you decide immediately after the fair, but many said that quite soon after they have gathered all the feedback and controlled the metrics they make the decisions for the next participation. One interviewee commented on the fact that fair organizers *‘blackmail’* the exhibitors with the early bird price advantages and the specified stand locations in order to get the decisions to participate early. Some firms stated, that they also need to make decisions early because they have to make marketing plans within their yearly budgeting and planning process which usually positions in September-October, and fair

participation decisions are finalized at the same time. However for those whose trade fairs are held in the springtime some surprises can occur if the budgets have to be cut radically in the autumn. Decisions to participate were also made early because for some firms the certain fairs have played an important role in their marketing communication mix for decades and they do not question the fact whether to participate or not, yet.

“We work all year round with the fairs. It gets more intensive when you get closer to the fair dates. And it is quite laborious and in that way different. In practise it is year-round of activities”, said one of the interviewees and it encapsulates the thoughts of other interviewees quite well. The fair participation process is an on-going process that has its busier and quieter periods. Although the fair lasts usually only a few days, it takes months to prepare for the fair. The application deadline is typically nine months prior to the actual fair and at that time the exhibitor needs to determine their overall budget, as well as the size and layout of their stand (Thomson, 2011). *“Nine months before we plan the stand and at least four months before we start our marketing communication which accelerates towards the trade fair dates. Plans have to be started quickly after the previous trade fair”*, crystallized one interviewee about the fair participation process.

The first thing that the firms do after the fair is to identify appropriate partners for their trade fair participation. The significance of finding partners is rising especially at the times of cost savings. There appears to be a short breathing break about three months where exhibitors evaluate the former fair participation, control the outcomes, analyze the situation and make plans for the next round. Half a year before the trade fair dates seemed to be the best time to start the process in full power for the majority of the marketing executives. This time is needed to select the partners and tender the exhibition stand builders as well as advertising agencies. At the same time the marketing executives need to know their main message and the possible themes for the participation in order to proceed with the planning process.

5 Success factors within the processes

5.1 Success factors in the planning process

To quote on of the interviewees the main task for firms is to make sure that they are “*at the right fair talking to the right people about the right product*”. First and foremost the marketing executives need to specify their objectives, select the trade fairs they are going to attend and the products they are going to exhibit. Over 56% of the overall success factors concerned the planning process according to the interviewees. However there is a need to look at the trade fair participation from an integrated process angle where time frames are taken into consideration. The marketing executives emphasized the following three different elements; 1) the planning process across all time phases 2) determining the objectives for the trade fair participation, and 3) differentiating ones firm from the competitors.

Participating at a trade fair is a project with many different processes and it calls for strong project management. “*The participation should be taken care properly, it is a big investment...it is not just the fair dates...it is the whole process. It should be seen as a whole*”, was crystallized by one interviewee. The other commented that “*trade fairs are not just some floating thing. It somehow ties with the tasks done before and after the fair*”. All the phases (pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair) should be considered in the planning process. According to one executive: “*The thing is that the present is not that firms just join the fairs and pout at the stands. One should rather look at it through multiple channels. Also what can be done before and after*”. Many interviewees also agreed that planning the fair should be started early enough so that all the necessary things will be done because e.g. the bidding process for choosing the partners will take time. Scheduling, budgeting and resource allocation need attention in the planning process. “*You have to plan it as managing a project because the bigger the fair, the more details to manage*”.

Firms should clarify their objectives for their fair participation. Almost half the interviewees commented that to be in a vital role for making the trade fair participation a success. *"You have to know why you are there, who you want to meet, who you want to influence. It is not enough to roll around the stand"*. The objectives can be numerical and there should also be qualitative objectives. The firms should always think what is the most important reason they participate at the fair. It could be launching a new product or service, delivering information, sales to name a few, but the central thing is to set the objectives and let everyone involved in the process to know them. If these objectives are not agreed, one executive noted that *"things will slide side-tracked, if there is no focus, it is just nose digging and standing with hands in your pocket."* With clear objectives in mind it is then much easier to think the participation from the visitors' perspective, and start planning means to get to ones goals. And once the means are found then it is vital and also easier to measure and follow-up the actions after the fair.

Almost half of the interviewees underlined that it is important to plan the fair participation so that you will be remembered. Thus it is important to stand out from the crowd and other firms at the fair, yet it is not always linked to the budget you have for the fair. *"Differentiation...that is one thing. It does not mean that you have to shout harder than others. You need to do it in a way that you will get the sympathy on your side, that you are more personal...it is the small things. It is not about money, no. And you should never hide behind the fact that we do not have the budget for things. Usually it is that way that when there's no money, the best ideas appear"*. The interviewees raised up different ways how to stand out from the competitors and give visitors a memory trace from your existence. Choosing a perfect stand location for your needs is one thing and another is to use visuals. The message of the company should be clearly seen from the stand. Many interviewees agreed that it is better to invest in few fairs properly than many fairs marginally. It is important how the firm looks and feels at the fair environment. With a clever construction it can differentiate itself better. A unified theme, clothing of the personnel and the appearance of the stand can all enhance the

differentiation and recall factor of the visitors. A couple of interviewees said that there should be some whimsical program at the stand like body painters, live crocodiles or a pole dancer, where as others thought that some minor actions would be as effective like free coffee or candies. I think that there is no right answer to what kind of program there should be at the stand. The most important is to have some activity at the stand that will engage the firms' customers positively. One interviewee put it nicely: *"You should have activities in your stand...we, importers of big industrial equipment, get really excited about some huge tin boxes that do not speak to the customers and look horrible on the stand. We should rather bring some colourful small equipment, that makes something small and colourful, which then will be delivered in small and colourful cups to small and colourful people, who then get excited about us and our products"*. As we can see different things work for different kinds of exhibitors and their target audience. The main thing is to have something special at the stand that will capture the wanted visitors and leave them with a positive memory trace of the exhibitor.

They also commented that a company should select the trade fair carefully and rather choose less fairs but invest properly to the ones selected. Some of the interviewees pointed out that one should try to keep the participation as simple as possible. The firms should focus on couple of main messages and not try to bring all the firms' products and services to the stand. A unified entity will be much more attractive than a chaotic stand with too many things in it. *"Even in the 1990s when visiting the fairs, the stands looked like the old Soviet Union. Stuffed with too many things"*, so according to one executive the key message of the stand should always be kept in mind when planning it. Firms can really harm their brand if they have not thought carefully what their message at the trade fair is. If the logo is just hanging on the wall and people look like they do not know why they are there, it was advised by the interviewees better not to participate.

5.2 Success factors in the human resource process

Two thirds of the interviewees said that the personnel at the fair and their commitment are in the key role when it comes to achieving success at the trade fair. It all starts from the proper training of the personnel. They need to know the objectives and the main message in order to act properly. One executive pointed out that it might be better for the firm to use an outside consultant to train the personnel how to behave at the fair because people should be reminded about the basic facts like how to receive negative feedback from the customers and how to avoid standing at the stand with their arms akimbo, fumbling their phones or talking with their colleagues. One executive indicated that: *“The biggest mistake stand staff can do is to socialize in small groups amongst themselves. You will always get negative feedback about that from the customers...people fall into that trap quite easily if they come around Finland and have not seen their colleagues for a while...people should remember that they are there to represent the company and its products”*. Cliques should be avoided since they do not invite the customers to join in. Instead they should be active, friendly and have a smile on their face. Thus personnel and especially the attitude of the personnel are in critical role. Nobody should be forced to work on the stand otherwise the exhibiting firm cannot create a relaxed atmosphere where visitors feel themselves welcomed. Instead firms should have genuinely skilful people on board in order to stand out positively.

5.3 Success factors in the marketing process

From the marketing process point of view the executives pointed out three success factors; the importance of the pre- and post-marketing and the significance of the marketing materials. Firms should think how they are able to reach their potential customers and invite them to visit the fair and their stand. Other important audience are the present customers, partners and own personnel, whom should be invited as well. The ways, how to invite them are numerous, so the firms need to think what way best suites them. The level of interest should be raised up already before the fair in order to make the most at the fair. The interviewees also pointed

out the significance of the marketing materials and the firms' web pages. Basically all of these should be up to date and it would be wise to consider thoroughly what materials to take to the trade fair and which amount. Thirdly, in order to be successful firms should remember the post-marketing. *"There is no point in collecting contacts if nothing is done with them...people do not remember...they visit 200 stands...you can send them an e-mail, or an invitation, or a reminder with a link to your website. Participating at the fair is too big investment if you do not capitalize it afterwards"*, was wisely encapsulated by one Marketing Executive. The contacts are far too valuable to be left without aftercare. The firms that take care of the promised contacts and remind all the new contacts of their rendezvous are most likely to get better outcome of the fair participation than others.

5.4 Success factors in the evaluation process

Successful participation insists for careful assessment already at the pre-fair stage of the evaluation process. Couple of the interviewees revealed that it is foolish not to visit the fair as a visitor before exhibiting at the fair and starting to plan one's own participation. The firms should pay attention, which firms are exhibiting at the trade fair and what is the visitor profile of the fair. If possible they should meet the fair organizer to get a broader picture of the fair. It was also pointed out that the control of outcome after the fair is critical in order to succeed. *"It is important to collect and analyze together the feedback from the trade fair...and if something is promised to the customers that should be done...the experience should be talked over...to decide whether to participate again and what to do differently. And it should be done pretty soon after the fair, because people forget things."* This comment from one interviewee highlights the importance of the evaluation after the fair. Without the evaluation it would be hard to make decisions about the incoming new fair and impossible to make improvements to the overall fair participation.

6 Discussion

6.1 Keys to successful trade fairs

Blythe (2002) used a charming metaphor of a dance ball when talking about successful trade fairs. The dance ball committee and the dance hall represent the fair organiser and the exhibition hall where the exhibitor is looking for suitable dance partners from the attendees i.e. fair visitors. This might lead to a date or even result in a romance. These face-to-face encounters can be fruitful if the exhibitor has set clear objectives and is determined to reach them, knowing ones own strengths compared to the other rivals at the floor. Blythe (2002) identified three important elements for a trade fair to be successful; 1) the trade fair organisers who assemble and manage the event, 2) the exhibitors who make the contents of the fair by exhibiting and 3) the visitors who interact with the exhibitors. Fair organisers want to have satisfied exhibitors so that they will revisit the fair and the exhibitors will return if they were able to achieve their objectives and attract high quality visitors. The fair visitors on the other hand will return to the fair if they have had an overall good experience, the quality of exhibitors was satisfying and they were able to find what they were looking for (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 2012). In my research I have focused on the factors that make the participation for the exhibiting firms a success.

According to Sashi & Perretty (1992) the keys to successful trade show participation lie in four areas: 1) setting the objectives, 2) evaluating each fair before participation, 3) professional execution, and 4) timely follow-up of leads from the fair. According to my study the success factors can be found within the four different processes (*planning & execution, human resources, marketing and evaluation*). The success factors are spread into all four fair participation processes, however almost 60% of all the success factors concerned the planning process and a single most important success factor lies in the human resource process.

The planning process is in vital role across all the time stages when talking about success in trade fair participation. Kirchgeorg et al. (2009) stated that without clear objectives the firms simply cannot evaluate their activities properly. The importance of setting objectives was clearly shown from the research data. Another important thing what comes to planning is to think carefully what makes your company stand out from the competitors. The three most important things that attract visitors to the stand according to my study were stand activities, catering at the stand and skilled stand personnel. Companies can employ various methods of attracting visitors to their booths. These methods include sampling, giveaways, product demonstrations, catering, tastings etc. Food samples or giveaways such as pens and cups are really popular. These techniques provide an incremental efficiency of about 37% (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). So it has been proofed that some techniques do provide efficiency to the attracting of visitors to the stands. Bellizzi and Lipps (1984) recommend the use of demonstrations if the exhibitors want to enhance recall and memorability. According to these researchers action always gets attention.

The single most important factor when it comes to successful trade fair participation according to this study lies in *the human resource process*. Skilful people with genuinely positive attitude will be needed at the stand in order to attract visitors and achieve the desired results. Therefore stand personnel training, motivating and rewarding become important factors that help the companies with their aspirations. In order for a company to improve its trade fair performance, it needs to focus on strengthening the pre-fair activities. Stand personnel training is more important than at-fair variables such as stand size, stand location, at-fair promotion and stand personnel density (Lee & Kim 2008). Thus, the quality of the stand personnel is more important than the number of the booth staff. The personnel need to understand their role at the stand as well as the main message and the objectives for the fair participation.

The success factors in the *marketing and communication process* according to my study emphasizes the importance of the pre- and post- marketing and highlights

the significance of the up-to-date marketing materials and websites. Lee and Kim (2008) also indicated that strategic approach of in-advance notice about firm's participation to its existing and core customers in a trade show is more important than just distributing promotional material on the stand and it encourages clients to remember and visit the firm's stand. The post-fair activity is especially important if the firm wants to increase its sales-related performance. It will also strengthen the corporate and brand image in the minds of the stand visitors.

Successful participation needs careful valuation already at the pre-fair stage of the *evaluation process*. Differentiating oneself from the crowd is easier if proper evaluation is done before the fair. It is always recommendable to visit the fair before participating as an exhibitor. It would also be sensible to study the information the fair organizers have audited about the key facts of the fairs before making the decision to participate (Bellizzi & Lipps 1984). According to Tanner Jr. and Chonko (1995) the evaluation and control are as important during the fair. If the trade fair is executed properly it can cut the costs of selling and shorten the sales cycle.

The control of trade fair participation outcome was also highlighted in the study results as a success factor in the evaluation process. The three most important measurements the marketing executives use to evaluate trade fair success are; 1) the number of sales leads, 2) amount of contacts, and 3) the subjective intuitive feeling of the trade fair participation. Statistics say that 65% of information collected by visitors at trade fairs are filed or thrown away, and for this reason it is even more important to pursue the leads by the selling firm while their exhibit and discussions are still in the mind of the visitor (Rosson & Seringhaus 1995). The collected feedback from the trade fair will aid the firms to make further decisions to use trade fair as a media for the coming years. Herbig et al. (1997) also noted that sales force should be asked qualitative questions such as what they thought of the stand location and traffic flow, did they meet the right level of prospects and were they provided with the proper marketing tools in order to enhance the trade fair performance. Measuring trade fair effectiveness is rewarding if there are

proper tracking mechanisms and the management is committed to monitor the performance. There are different measures that can be generated focusing on the audience and activities of the exhibitor (Herbig et al. 1994).

Furthermore the trade fair participation was clearly seen as a project with many different processes that requires competent project management skills. This integrated trade fair participation process was seen as *an on-going process* that starts usually directly after the trade fair participation. So it is year-around work with busier and quieter periods. The marketing executives need to decide which trade fairs to participate in about a year in advance so that all the necessary arrangements can be made (Palumbo & Herbig 2002).

In sum one can argue that successful exhibitors plan carefully their exhibition participation. Their goals are clearly stated and in-line with the whole company's targets. The best exhibitors recruit the most suitable persons to take care of the whole integrated exhibition process not forgetting the importance of marketing and evaluation. Without thorough evaluation the planning will fail and without effective marketing the results will remain poor. Hence, the exhibitors need to understand the whole integrated exhibition participation process and how those different processes are linked on different time phases (pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair) in order to successfully execute their fair participation and reach the best possible results.

6.1.1 Neglected marketing process

The results of this research showed that firms do not emphasize the marketing process as being one of the central processes when it comes to successful trade fair participation, I would want to raise the issue further. The fundamental problem trade fairs are facing is how to convert the visitors casually strolling around the exhibition centre into customers or sales leads (Berthon et al. 1996). Over two-thirds of the firms pointed out that they make mini-marketing plans for trade fairs especially and almost half of the firms identified trade fairs as having a

vital role in their marketing communication mix. This result is promising, since exhibition should not be seen as a means of communication between exhibitors and visitors in an isolation but instead a complementary media to other media used (Cunningham & White 1974). It is also evident that the more intensive the promotion efforts are before the trade fair, the more positive will be the impact on the visitor (Serinhaus & Rosson 1998). Firms should promote themselves prior to the trade fair and let their prospects and customers know they are participating. They should use lists available from the trade fair organization and own customer/prospect lists and use them to call them, e-mail them or use direct mail (Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995). Direct mail or ads in trade journals should not only stimulate prospects to attend the fairs but also to visit the company stand with pre-set objectives communicated to the stand personnel (Kijewski et al. 1993).

However some still believed in the fair organizer's and other exhibitors ability to invite the needed audience. For the image building it is important for companies to make present or potential customers to know about firm's participation and get them to visit the booth rather than simply distribute promotional material on-site to the stand visitors (Lee & Kim 2008). Advance information about the location, theme and events of the exhibitor at the trade fair is valued by the prospective and present customers, and personal invitations play an important role to visit the exhibitors stands (Rosson & Serinhaus 1995). Even though some interviewees solely trust the fair organizer and other exhibitors to do the marketing job for them, pre-marketing was clearly seen important according to the interviewees. Belizzi and Lipps (1984) argued that if pre-fair and post-fair campaigns are not made, the fair participation will probably not reach its potential. Therefore it is not only important to address the pre-marketing activities but also the post-marketing activities properly. According to the results of this study one could argue that the companies need to focus more on their post-fair marketing activities.

6.2 Managerial implications

The research data indicated that trade fairs have an important role in the world of marketing. The proposed integrated trade fair participation process will aid marketing executives and people who are using trade fairs as part of their marketing communication mix to understand the four crucial processes (planning & execution, human resources, marketing communications and evaluation & control) and their success factors, and how they are linked to the on-going participation process which consists of different phases such as pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair stages. By looking at the success factors shows that success in the trade fair participation is linked to these processes and each of them include tasks that are important for successful participation.

From the planning point of view it is important to evaluate which fairs to participate and it is also crucial to understand what type of visitors attend at these trade fairs and what their needs are (Godar & O'Connor 2001, Kerin & Cron 1987). Without this understanding the planning process will lack the essential information to base its decisions on. The knowledge about the visitor behaviour then helps the exhibitor to address what should be featured at the fair and which means (e.g. videos, social events) should be used for best results (Bello 1992). In order to gain this knowledge it is worthwhile for the executives to visit the trade fairs before the decision to participate. It was also advised by the marketing executives to visit also those trade fairs that have been left out from the yearly marketing calendar. They will function as a place where they can gain access to updated information from the industry and build relationships with colleagues from the field.

By interviewing these marketing executives it seemed that there is a definite need for better planning of the participation. For some, participating at the fair was done routinely repeating the same procedures year after year. It might make the participation easier but it will not lead to desired results. The concrete and clear goals are essential in getting out best results. The main message should be easily communicated not only to the staff but also to the visitors at the stand. Kerin &

Cron (1987) also pointed out that written objectives should be prepared, and these objectives will not only help to define the role of trade shows in the firm's marketing program, but also lead to better evaluation measures. Not forgetting that the stand personnel needs to be instructed on these objectives and obliged to provide the needed data to evaluate the results. Firms should keep the number of messages focused. According to Herbig et al. (1997) there should be no more than two to five objectives, too many will become inefficient. Thus, without clear and prioritized goals the measuring of the success becomes impossible and is based solely on the subjective feelings of individuals.

Lee & Kim (2008) argued that firms, especially the small and medium sized ones, need to concentrate on systematically training the stand personnel rather than expanding the stand size or the number of stand staff. Thus a vital aspect in using this personal face-to-face media is the personnel who are working at the fair. They are the faces of the company and thus it is really important to train them properly, give them clear targets and roles, and choose people who are people-oriented and willing to do the job. As one marketing executive said: *"they have to have courage to approach people. Activity in this area does not come naturally to everyone."* However there often is a misconception about the nature of visitors. Quite often they are categorized as leads or buyers, even though buyers are a minority of that group. Therefore Blythe (2010) suggests that the stand personnel should be qualified to engage in dialogue rather than 'sales talk'. Stand personnel should understand that students are tomorrow's purchasing managers and other visitors can be future influencers on the buying decisions, future employees or partners of the company. This dialogue could also be effective for the firms in an opposite way. They should not only occupy the stand by sales and marketing personnel but also give more room for administration and personnel department. For example trade fair participation can feed the R&D staff with stimulating ideas for months to come (Rinallo et al. 2010). In sum, the stand personnel are in a fundamental position when it comes to the success of the firms' participation. The stand personnel are able increase their knowledge about the customers and they can initiate and build relationships but also widen their perspective and

understanding of the firms various functions, and therefore lead to better co-operation between different departments.

One central issue in successful trade fair participation is how the firm communicates its brand to the prospects and customers at the fair and how it can use to its benefit all the senses the environment enables – visuals, sounds, scents, touches and tastes. The visitors appreciate the possibility to see and touch especially innovative products (Rinallo et al. 2010). If the brand is modern and fresh, the stand and its personnel with activities should reflect that, otherwise the visitors could be disappointed when their expectations are not met. The firms need to consider all the possibilities in the planning phase and then execute the participation in a way that the advantages of this highly stimulative media are exploited.

From the group of interviewed executives many admitted the absence of pre- and post-fair activities and blamed the rush. It is quite common to neglect the promotional activities and rely solely on the fair organizer's efforts. However it is central to stimulate the interest of the prospects and customers beforehand and invite them to visit the stand. This can be done by sending invitations to selected audience or just by informing the target group of the firm's existence at the fair (Herbig et al. 1997). Lee & Kim (2008) have come up with the results that show the importance of pre-fair promotion and how it induces customers to remember and visit the firm's stand. Moreover, the post-fair promotional activities are focal in enhancing the sales-related performance and building the company and brand image in the mind of the visitors. Exhibitors should use Internet marketing primarily for informational and communicational purpose in pre-show promotion and for customer service & support in post-fair follow-up (Li 2010). Thus, for a firm to improve its trade fair performance and to be able to leave a long-lasting memory trace it should focus on the marketing communication activities within all the stages of the fair process.

Today's business people have busy schedules and they are coping with the hectic environment. We have been able to read earlier that the fair environment is not always answering the physical and mental needs of the visitors. Therefore the exhibitors could try to offer 'leisure interaction opportunities' to offer a relief from the tiredness of the fair visit and enhance the relationships with the prospects, customers and partners at the same time. An exhibitor who can provide a pleasant oasis in the middle of the chaotic fair day is seen as a good partner amongst the visitors (Rinallo 2010). Firms could invite prospects and clients for coffee or cocktails, lunch or tastings, massage or manicure and other social events with some entertaining program, and thus leave a good impression.

Some of the interviewed marketing executives and managers have already taken the advantage of strategic partnerships when participating a fair or an event. This provides them a novel way to present their products and services in a collective stand and a way to make cost savings. Joining forces can also provide a more efficient means to reach the same target audience. Even if the firms would not want to collaborate in the shared stand, it was clear from the research data that the marketing executives called for more teamwork in making the trade fair participation even more successful accomplishment. As one marketing executive encapsulated: *"I wish we could work towards the common good with other exhibitors. It is important to us all, that the fair visitors feel at home"*. This mutual co-operation could occur e.g. in planning layout of the stands, or the program for the fair days or even the pre-marketing activities.

Marketing executives should also exploit the untapped and low-cost opportunity of the media presence at the trade fairs since journalists are looking for news at the trade fairs. The firm's trade fair marketing plan should contain a PR component. The results of this study tell that it is very seldom done by the exhibitors, partly because the firms think that it is difficult to get 'minor' news exceed the threshold for the news and partly because of the lack of resources. Even without special news the firms should take advantage of getting acquainted with the journalists on site (Stevens 2005).

6.3 Recommendations for the trade fair organizers

Blythe (2002) said that trade fair organizers' key challenge for the 21st century is to make them better function as a communications interface between firms. This argument can be seen supported by the study results in many ways. The interviewed marketing executives were very enthusiastic in giving advice to the fair organizers. Their major expectations for improvement lie in three areas: 1) livening up the fairgrounds, 2) prioritizing sales and customer encounters, and 3) refreshing the fair programme and visitor attractions. Other recommendations concerned about the quality of visitors, the development of new fairs, the catering at the fairs, the organizational change of The Finnish Fair Corporation as well as development of the marketing communications of the fairs.

6.3.1 Livening up the fairgrounds

Over half of the interviewees talked about livening up the fairgrounds when asking recommendations to fair organizers. Big screens, moving images and video projection (possibly 3D in the future) around the fair halls should be used to support the exhibitors' visibility at the fairs. They would make the fair experience more lively and colourful, and they could aid the exhibitors to attract the visitors to their stand. According to the interviewees these screens should showcase the program that is happening at the stands. The fair organizer could also have a walking host that could interview people at the stands and act as 'a tempter' in luring visitors to the stands. This would be especially helpful for the Finnish exhibitors who claim to be a bit stiff with their social skills. There could also be more competitions between exhibitors (the best stand, the best ambience, the best service) and these activities could be raised up to the attention of the visitors via modern technology. They would not only serve the exhibitors to increase their exhibition quality and attention at the fair ground but also as active program number for the visitors.

The marketing executives also raised their concern about the pricing of the technology and capacity for innovation of the fair technicians. The exhibitors want to encourage the technical department of the fair organization to use more imagination in bringing the white walls to life. One interviewee wondered: *“...Could it be something else that I could do instead of buying the table and a bar stool and have a bowl of candies and a poster with the firm’s name on it”*. The pricing issue was especially brought forward in terms of two-layer construction. The advice for exhibition organizers was not to over charge for constructing different kinds of stands but rather to encourage exhibitors to do something out of the ordinary, and thus enhance the wow factors at the fair grounds.

The interviewees also hoped for better facilities and more mixing up the traditional ways of placing the stands. There were many marketing executives who called for more perplexity to the fair layout. They introduced examples from retail outlets and Ikea. Fairs should be mapped out more surprisingly and squiggly. One interviewee blamed the fairground planners for being lazy and dull with the fair maps, complaining that a year after a year the same map is used. The following comments support the argument: *“Do they always have to plan the fair layout with avenues and straight lines. I have always been taught that you should never build anything so that the consumer faces an empty wall. Like in a shop there should always be something to buy. You walk against the candy shelves, you turn and you face the liver sausage...it is like a bump for motorists. You cannot run through. You need to do some turns...”* and *“...It is depressing to see fascia after fascia...exactly similar-looking stands...it would be more interesting to walk straight into a stand (like Ikea’s curves)”*. Thus the planning of the fair layout should not be so sorted and clinical, but rather more sympathetic, themed and tangled. One interviewee proposed that there should be more ‘traffic circles’ and oases for resting. The interviewees also wished for more elements that would soften up the fairground like long curtains hanging from the ceiling, narrower corridors and more comfy seating groups for the visitors to relax. As Rinallo et al. (2010) in their study pointed out that the fair visit wears people both mentally and

physically, therefore the trade fair organizers should understand the importance of designing the fairground around bodily needs of human beings and particularly resting.

6.3.2 Prioritizing sales and customer encounters

Fair organizers should understand better the increasing emphasis that exhibitors and visitors put on relationships. This means that the fair organizers should enable encounters and interaction between exhibitors and visitors (Berne & Garcia-Uceda 2008). This same aspiration was put forward by one interviewee: *“Instead of the mass and the volume, the fair organizer should start selling contacts, meetings and encounters...you can meet 20 people and it can cost you 10.000 euros...more bookings in advance...there can be people at the stands, but also people who only have prearranged appointments.”* Business people are busy and more conscious about managing time. Therefore pre-booked appointments would help both sides with their time management issues as well. For these appointments one Marketing Executive suggested that the trade fair organizers could offer small meeting rooms spaces next to their stands.

Same encounters and contacts should be facilitated between the fair organizer and the exhibitors. The message that came out from half of the interviewees was that the fair organizer should start to deal with them with value suitable manner. Customer-oriented thinking is missing and missed. One interviewee crystallized it by saying: *“...every time you have to fill in the same information. A certain customer-oriented thinking ...key account type of approach is lacking completely. The sales managers are nice and competent, I do not complain about them. But somehow I do not feel that I am just a client for the travel fair MATKA instead I feel that I am a client for the Finnish Fair Corporation”*. Another executive encapsulated the same thought by saying: *“ The Finnish Fair Corporation has structured the sales organization in a way that sales managers take care of certain fairs...it might be better that it would rather be divided by customers. Then we could sit down with the sales people from the fair organization and open*

up the yearly calendar, what events and fairs you have and what target groups we can reach.”

There were also comments that suspected there is some jealousy of clientele between the sales managers. One executive commented on that: *“...I do not know how much the sales managers hold on to their clients...because there is no information-sharing, like hey you have been exhibiting at this kind of fair...this other fair would suit you as well”*. These interviewed exhibitors were enthusiastic in learning about the whole repertoire of fairs and their target audiences. They would be eager to get more information and this could be done for example by arranging breakfast meetings at the fair premises. During these customer events the fair organization could sell their meeting and conference spaces as well.

The key account type of approach was desired in a way that the customer loyalty would be rewarded. One executive noted that they do not get any special treatments even though they have been a client for the Finnish Fair Corporation already 12 years and participated in many fairs yearly. They pointed out that almost all the other firms have customer loyalty programs and they would happily recommend that to the Finnish Fair Corporation as well. Another marketing executive said: *“Customer loyalty should be valued more, if you have a firm that has had a stand for the last 15 years, you should treat them more gently...now we all get the same treatment no matter who you are...And it does not have to be a discount, it could be something else, you could give us exemptions, like freedom to build higher stands, or get better locations...now we feel we are in a position of a mutt and that is not a positive thing”*. One interviewee pointed out also the importance of knowing the most valuable contacts from the customer firm. According to her the Finnish Fair Corporation should recognize the real decision-makers of the customers and take care of them too, not only the contact person who is in charge of the fair process within the company.

The new organizational change that has happened at the Finnish Fair Corporation got some critique in terms of contact persons. The customer has more contact persons than before to take care of things and the feeling outside is that the personnel of the Finnish Fair Corporation does not know who takes care of what. This one statement evokes a feeling that customer has been affected by the organizational changes that had been done recently: “*Now that the organization has changed, there are a lot of contact persons. Versus that we used to have Pirre or Reija...I feel the employees of the Finnish Fair Corporation do not know what they are responsible for. It terrified me when I thought about the other exhibitors...they must have the same experience, you get vague instructions, and people are bounced around...I do not think we are the only ones dissatisfied about the changes*”. The key account type of thinking would offer one solution to this dilemma. Customers want to feel special and served in every situation the easiest way possible, so the one-stop shop principle could be worth testing.

The pricing has a large effect on sales and it was criticized by couple of the interviewees. They called for simplicity, clarity and flexibility for the pricing of the fairs. “*Finnish Fair Corporation could use more package pricing even though there are many service providers...and they should not be so stiff and rigid about it, there should be some flexibility...*”. The ease of shopping was highlighted. The exhibitors value that shopping is made easy for them, they do not want to use lot of time to become familiar with what they need for their fair participation. One interviewee also proposed that fair organizers should motivate more their customers to purchase – to clarify the concept and give reasons to make the buying decisions. Some of the interviewees raised their voice about the expensiveness of the fair participation. They compared the costs with other media expenses. They understand that personal customer contacts will not be inexpensive but it is more the feeling of paying for unnecessary contacts. The following remarks back up this observation: “*As long as the costs do not explode on the eyes...there will be a threshold that it will not pay off any longer...to pay two-hundred euros per square for cement floor*” and “*...exhibitors have since long time ago started to think about the expenses of the fair participation vs. the*

profits gained". Herbig et al. (1997) also pointed out the concern the trade fair organizers might be pricing small businesses out of the affordability of exhibiting, and introduced the idea of giving special discounts and packages that would reduce trade fair exhibiting costs. Kirschgeorg et al. (2010) suggested that fair organizations should move away from selling traditional floor space and instead start to facilitate the networking and interaction of the different market players. On the basis of my study fair organizers need to be sensitive about the pricing issues altogether, realize the customer needs to be treated with one instead of multiple contact persons, treat loyal customers with some special way and start producing creative solutions for firms to participate.

6.3.3 Remembering the importance of customer-orientation

The Finnish Fair Corporation's ordering system called Fairnet got complaints from the interviewees. Comments like: "*Fairnet...it is unreal how old-fashioned system it is...they should just replace it*" and "*the only thing that needs development is Fairnet...I have experienced it to be challenging... it is stiff and difficult to use*". In order to better serve its customers The Finnish Fair Corporation should invest in its ordering system. Within the system, information search should be made easy, the program should remember the last orders and they should be easily taken into reuse. The software should also be planned in a way that it guides the customer to take the right next steps and makes suggestions for purchases that the customer might not even have thought of. Couple of interviewees also highlighted the importance of the to-do-list that could help them to survive the fair participation process. This list should be easily available on the Internet. They would like to have even the smallest details on that list like 'remember the business cards' and 'remember the stapler'.

A simple friendly smile from the doormen was also wished for. One interviewee suggested automatic scanners to the entrances in order to get rid of "*the terrible doormen*". That would solve the problem of having to smile to customers. The same guidelines for encounters, which fair organizers give to exhibitors, should be remembered by the employees and service providers of the fair organization. Fairs

are a medium for personal encounters in every aspect. These encounters should be cherished. One marketing executive hoped for get-togethers after the fair where firms that participate a year after a year would be invited and given a chance to give feedback personally and develop the fair in collaboration with the organizers.

One suggestion of customer service improvement aimed for fair organizer was to develop the coordination of collaboration between different exhibitors. The firms would like the fair organizer to be more active in finding suitable partners who could join their forces and innovate new exciting forms of existence for the fair. This activity would be too difficult for a single firm to do without the knowledge of the committed participants but would definitely increase the various forms of cooperation, for example a travel agency could combine its forces with a specific country. The same kind of coordination was wished for handling the construction of the stands. This particularly focuses on the two-layer or over height construction. Since the fair organization knows all the exhibitors that are planning to build higher stands they could act as a middleman between the firms so that a best possible solution can be reached. This would also decrease surprises and unnecessary annoyance between exhibitors just before the fair starts.

6.3.4 Refreshing the trade fair program

Trade fairs offer a wide variety of programs to attract the fair visitors. The fair organizer, its partners or the exhibitors, makes these programs. Some of the interviewees were concerned that this program attracts the visitors who should be visiting the stands instead. The interviewed executives commented passionately on behalf of reducing the program in general: “ *...there starts to be too much program and different kinds of workshops*”, “ *...exhibitors are annoyed, because there are different kinds of competitions...which take the customers away and they do not visit the stands*”, “ *...I hope that the trade fairs do not turn into traditional market events...we are a manufacturer, BtoB. It can not be in conflict with our exhibition targets*” and “ *...I would cut all the seminars and extra stuff away. From the exhibitors point of view all these seminars and competitions are just*

harmful. Visitors just disappear somewhere and some of the programme stages are too loud and interferes with our own activities there. We do not wish to have these additional programs". Thus too much program will interfere with the exhibitors' goals to attract the visitors to come to their stands and deliver their message.

The interviewed people understand that there needs to be some program to attract the visitors but this program should be something unique and highly attractive, using public characters and celebrities, instead of many different substandard ones. At present testimonials are commonly used communication tool in convincing the customers. Therefore it was suggested that trade fairs could have a 'testimonial corner' where visitors and bloggers can share their experiences about the issues at hand. Announcements should be used to inform the visitors about the program and the fair organizers should think what other ways there are to communicate about the program at the fair. One marketing executive specifically asked the fair organizers to be more active in co-operating with the exhibitors to produce the program for the fair visitors and come up together with some new bold solutions. Exhibitors get-togethers were also mentioned. The fair organizers should keep in mind that exhibitors are exhausted from the day's work but still delighted to see acquaintances. Therefore they would like those get-togethers to be easy-going and relatively tranquil meeting places where they can eat, sit and chat with each other.

6.3.5 Other suggestions for improvement

Almost 30% of the interviewees were concerned about the quality of the visitors. The message to the fair organizers was that they are more interested to reach the right target group and the decision-makers than about the total amount of the visitors visiting the trade fair. One interviewee pointed out EasyFairs as a good example of being able to attract the decision-makers, which is critical at the trade fairs. Comments like "*...we can be satisfied with less visitors if they are good*" and "*...fair organizers should not search for more visitors at any price. They*

should understand that...it is very important that visitors are the right ones” show clearly that exhibitors are more interested about the quality of the visitors. Hence the goal for the fair organizers should be to attract the right kind of audience and those decision-makers that are important for the certain field or industry, and not to be too focused on the total amount of the visitors. There were suggestions such as theming up certain time slots of the day to a certain target audience. Also young generations were missed and one of the interviewee suggested that fair organizers should build a lounge-area that would attract the youth to visit the fairs. One marketing executive brought up the idea of open-mindedly sparring together which target groups are critical for each fair and then make joint plans how to reach that audience.

The service provider for the catering aroused negative feelings amongst the interviewees. Some complained about the quality of the food and the slow delivery of the food to the stands, but mostly the complaints were about the pricing of the food. One interviewee said that they want to differentiate themselves with the serving and it is not possible because of the monopoly position of the catering firm. Thus fair organizer should think about the pricing of the catering and all its possibilities. Overpricing will freeze the catering and also have an effect on the overall atmosphere of the fair. Also new cost-effective catering ideas would be warmly welcome. One managing director said that they would happily offer hot-dogs for all of their visitors if the price would be right e.g. one euro per customer. Another executive said that Finnish Fair Corporation should follow the European example and let the exhibitors offer their own wine and drinks for example between 6-8 pm. This would internationalize the trade fairs and differentiate them from other events.

The belief in events and fairs seemed to be pretty strong. One Marketing Executive said: *”I do believe in fairs and I think there should be more. They could be executed with lower profile and be more like meets. These meets could be places where professionals could meet each other and feel the fresh winds. Every other year is too seldom...It could be three times a year with a simpler stand..it*

could be more interactive event". Thus the interviewees started to innovate the format of fairs. One interviewee suggested that fairs could be replaced by events that have fragmented according to more targeted smaller audiences. Therefore the fair organizers could try new kinds of fairs with simpler meeting idea, more focused on target groups and more modest with the implementation.

6.4 The future of marketing communication

"The need for marketing communication has stayed the same...we need to differentiate and attract the interest... it is the tools and channels that change" said one Marketing Executive. Firms seek to influence their potential and current customers and other stakeholders through their marketing communication. From these interviews four central issues; 1) the fragmentation of target segments and medias 2) the demand for more creative solutions, 3) digital vs. personal encounters, 4) more analytical, result-oriented and cost-effectiveness performance; rose to the surface when talking about the future of the marketing communication. It is vital to understand who is the target audience, what their needs are and then be able to be proactive by fulfilling these needs. There are different communication channels that firms are using in their communication, where social and mobile media seemed to be the newest ones and still relatively seldom used. New media forms, like mobile and social media, also need different kinds of skill and resources in order to be used effectively. TV, even though seen highly expensive, and radio was still considered an option by some interviewees but they emphasized the importance of program cooperation. Direct marketing has been easier through e-mails, however it was said to be old-fashioned. The most modern interviewees announced that they would change their communications to chat and other live messenger services. E-mail was alleged to be too one-way type of communication and easy to delete. The number of e-mails have got out of hands and firms need to rethink how many e-mails they will send to their customers in order to avoid being regarded as junk mail and increase the degree of irritation amongst its customers.

The exhibitors can choose from a broad range of options within the communication mix. The number of media and the associated tools to access different target audience have increased exponentially over the recent times (Kirchgeorg et al., 2010, 64). Making the most effective and efficient choice is a difficult task that requires a lot from the marketing management. All these media channels have different roles, and it takes time and trials before firms are able to find the right channels for their target groups. Working with marketing communications was displayed as working with “*a patchwork quilt*”. New creative solutions were called for from the media providers and marketing agencies.

As we were able to read from before, the exhibitors also would like to be introduced to new ways of participation at the trade fairs. Similarly they expect the media and marketing agencies to come up with new and cost-effective ways to reach their target audience. The digital marketing has been increasing enormously at the expense of the print media, and all of the interviewed firms were investing in the e-marketing whereas the investments in the traditional media such as print, TV and outdoor, were said to be diminishing radically. However they pointed out the importance of networks and personal encounters that are needed side by side with the digital contacts. There is a growing importance of new media, which will blend with traditional tools of communication. This however can be seen as positive for the future of trade fairs (Kirchgeorg et al. 2008). In fact the Internet can be used to make events much more valuable in using e-media for promotion, registration and adding value to attendees in the form of social networks and at-fair planning (Silber 2008).

What comes to the digital marketing, quite many of the interviewed executives pointed out that they have given up using e-banners, which irritate people more than attract, but instead invest on the search engines, web site optimization and the functionality of their own web pages. In turn the role of social media was seen growing but somewhat unclear at the moment. Some firms already used Facebook, Twitter and blogs to simply entertain their target group or share news,

ideas and opinions. The power of testimonials was predicted to intensify. The flip sides of the social media were mentioned to be its uncontrollability and the fact that firms need different kind of skills in order to be actively involved. A small niche-marketing channel, ‘ambient marketing’, was mentioned by one interviewee. They would like to be more involved with marketing events like ‘the restaurant day’ in the future; these smaller pop-up kinds of events could be useful in building the firms’ image.

According to Skov (2006) the first decades of the 20th century focused on the trade fair as a long-distance market. Then at the middle of the century trade fairs were taken over by other technologies of travel and communication, and now the fairs are seen as an aid to helping to hold economic networks together. The events industry has continued to produce strong performance even as traditional print advertising dollars have drifted to e-media. The dotcom boom of 1999-2000 predicted the decline of events. However the visitors and exhibitors still value the face-to-face experience, the ability the network, to learn in person and to interact with colleagues and suppliers (Silber 2008). The current exhibitors and marketing executives, who use fairs as part of their marketing communication palette, have quite a positive attitude towards trade fairs in general. Some of them even welcomed the idea of having more events to participate in and highlighted the importance of customer encounters that should be increased. The following comments from the marketing executives reinforce the thought that there should be even more fairs and events: “ *We are going to put 80% of our resources to Internet and things we do around there. However we do not want to forget the personal encounters. We want to find a partner with whom we could do once a month a personalized event for our customers*” and “*I believe in fairs and I think there should be more of them. The fairs could be arranged with lower profile...like three times a year...with a simple stand*”. Nevertheless, the current recession makes firms to think carefully about their marketing resources and the fair organizers need to be alert of the exhibitors’ buying threshold. According to them the trade fairs strengths, the personal touch, the interactivity and the dialogue it enables and the experiences it can offer, are needed in the times when

almost all other communication with the customers is digitalized. Face-to-face contact between buyers and sellers and the ability for them to touch and feel products are the two reasons why trade fairs will continue to be successful in the future. First-hand experience helps the exhibitors to sell their products (Horn 2002).

The customers tend to use Internet as a tool for the information search but they come to trade fairs to deepen their knowledge, get reassurance and build trust and relationships with the company and its employees. At these modern times when videoconferences, e-mails, chats etc. have taken place from travelling and personal meetings, trade fairs seem to be the place where people still can meet face-to-face, reinforce their networks and update the news. Thus the role of personal selling is essential. Couple of the marketing executives pointed out that *“one should never forget that there is a person behind every decision”* and that *“you need a person to take care of a person”*. For couple of the interviewees trade fairs role was also important because of its link to the product development and recruitment. Trade fair deadlines keep the company under control with its own deadlines. Therefore trade fairs set the pace, provide the desired contacts and keep up the dynamics of the companies.

Measurability and cost-effectiveness were also emphasized when talking about the future of marketing communications. *“Marketing communication has to be goal-oriented and measurable otherwise you should not do anything...and if you measure it you should not measure it through single channels but through the overall marketing actions”* was indicated by one marketing executive. It is evident that the recession is putting a challenge for the marketing experts for getting more with less. Their marketing money is more strictly monitored and results-oriented by the management. Already Palumbo & Herbig (2002) stated that trade fairs are an effective way of getting as many as ten meetings within one day at times when buyers are typically less accessible and hard to reach.

Gopalakrishna and Lilien (2012) argued that shopping malls are not disappearing even though lot of shopping is done online, and the same applies for trade fairs. People still have the need to talk to other people face-to-face and touch the products. There is a technological revolution going on, but still the Internet is not displacing face-to-face events. Trade fairs are becoming more and more important for building trustable relationships and enhancing the image of the companies (Jyh-Shen et al. 2007). The demand for face-to-face encounters grows as the Internet enables different kinds of opportunities. People might buy low-priced things online, but they will not buy 12 million dollars piece of heavy equipment on the Internet (Klein 2012). According to Palumbo and Herbig (2002) 80% of a decision may be based on discussions or demonstrations seen at the trade fair and it seems that communication technology has even increased the value of fairs as a platform for personal communication. To sum up trade fairs still have a valuable role in marketing and there seems to be an order for even more events and exhibitions for years to come. However there is more demand for measurement and accountability methods. Internet and other digital media tools are increasing their market shares but not solely as alternative tools but as supporting tools in the firms' overall marketing communication.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Theoretical implications

As noted in the beginning of this research the objective of this study was two-folded. The objective was to get an overall picture of what is trade fairs role in the firms' marketing communication palette now and in the future, and to understand which processes lead to successful trade fair participation. More accurately, I investigated different processes related to the overall trade fair participation process and studied the success factors of these different processes. My study has also enlightened the understanding of trade fairs' role as part of the firm's overall marketing communication mix. A qualitative research with grounded theory method was used with 21 interviews of marketing executives in different business fields. In my study I investigated how the companies had integrated trade fairs as part of their' over all marketing communication. I also addressed the reasons why trade fairs are used as a marketing tool, how fairs support the companies' relationship building process and how firms make use of other marketing communication tools to support their fair participation. My research supports the previous research that has highlighted the wide use and growing meaning of trade fairs in the marketing communication mix and verifies the work of Vallo and Häyrinen (2012) by showing the need for integrating trade fairs into the multi-channel communication strategy in order to succeed in their participation. My study also build's on the Andersen's (2001) work and brings forward the capabilities of trade fairs in building the relationships in all its phases. Trade fairs can be used successfully as a communication tactic when increasing awareness, convincing customers and increasing commitment.

However, it seems that many exhibitors are not taking the maximum advantage out of the trade fairs. Earlier research has focused on the role of trade fair, single processes, success factors, advantages and limitations, importance of stand personnel, the efficiency and value of fairs or time-lined type of research. None of the earlier research has combined the different processes into one integrated on-

going trade fair participation process. Even though Lee and Kim (2008) had introduced one conceptual model, which takes into consideration pre-, at- and post-show activities and their links to trade fair performance. The integrated trade fair participation process introduced in this study helps the exhibitors to concentrate on planning, execution, human resources, marketing communication and evaluation at different levels pre-fair, at-fair and post-fair. Hence, understanding these processes and their success factors will result in more successful outcome of the trade fairs as a marketing medium.

Thus, this research has provided both a new integrated conceptual framework and some useful empirical results that can help to understand, assess and improve the processes of the trade fair participation. This research will also support the researchers for advancing their studies in understanding the role of trade fairs within the marketing communication palette and the different processes that are involved in the successful trade fair participation. It will also increase the understanding of marketing executives on how to get the best marketing results out of their trade fair participation and gives guidelines to trade fair organizers on how to reinforce the power of trade fair media in the future. In sum, this study has managed to expand our current understanding and give a more holistic approach of the phenomenon.

7.2 Limitations and further research

There is a risk of potential effect of my personal biases and background of working many years in the exhibition organizer's side. My personal view towards trade fairs can be more positive than a person's who has not worked within the field. However I would like to say that the results of this study surprised me and they were more positive towards trade fairs than what I was expecting.

The context of my study limits to Finnish companies and thus the results cannot be translated globally, and the generalizations in global context would have to be tested. It is also possible that the results would differ across industries. In my

research I studied firms from many different fields, and thus the results are a heterogeneous cross-section of exhibitors. To understand better the needs of exhibitors from certain industries, further studies that would dive deeper into the specific fields are needed.

The economic situation is quite unstable and we are in a regression phase of the economy. This fact can also affect the results since firms are in tough financial situations, trying to find cost savings for survival. It would be interesting to see if the results about the future of marketing communication palette would be similar at a different economic situation.

Further research should be indicated to understanding why firms give less value to the marketing communications and evaluation processes. One reason might be that it is not an easy task and there are not proper tools for measuring the results of the trade fair participation. Hence more research and tools are needed to give better instruments to assess the trade fair participation properly and lengthen the impact of the trade fair marketing operations.

8 References

Andersen, Paul Houman 2001. Relationship Development and Marketing Communication: An Integrative Model. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 16, No 3 2001, pp. 167-182. MCB University Press.

Atkinson, William 2011. New Equipment Digest, Nov. 2011, Vol. 76, Issue 11, PD-E, 2 p.

Banting, Peter M. & Blenkhorn, David L. 1974. The role of industrial trade shows. *Industrial Marketing Management* 3, pp. 285–295.

Bellizzi, Joseph A. & Lipps, Delilah J. 1984. Managerial guidelines for trade show effectiveness. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 13, Issue 1, February 1984, Pages 49-52.

Bello, Daniel C. 1992. Industrial Buyer Behavior at Trade Shows - Implications for Selling Effectiveness. *Journal of Business Research* 25, 59-80.

Bello, Daniel C. & Barksdale Jr., Hiram C., 1986. Exporting at Industrial Trade Shows. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 15, Issue 3, August 1986, Pages 197-206.

Bello, Daniel C. & Lohtia, Ritu 1993. Improving Trade Show Effectiveness by Analyzing Attendees. *Industrial Marketing Management* 22, 311-318.

Berne, Carmen & García-Uceda M.E. 2008. Criteria involved in evaluation of trade shows to visit. *Industrial Marketing Management* 37 (2008) 565–579.

Berthon, Pierre & Pitt, Leyland & Watson, Richard T. 1996. Marketing Communication And The World Wide Web. *Business Horizons* September-October 1996.

- Blythe, Jim 2010. Trade fairs as communication: a new model. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 Iss: 1 pp. 57 – 62.
- Blythe, Jim 2002. Using trade fairs in key account management. *Industrial Marketing Management* 31 (2002) 627-635.
- Blythe, Jim 1999. Visitor and exhibitor expectations and outcomes at trade exhibitions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 17 Iss: 2 pp. 100 – 110.
- Blythe, Jim 1999. Learning by doing - frequency of exhibiting at UK trade exhibitions. *Journal Of Marketing Communications*, 5(4), 207-221.
- Bonoma, T.V. 1983. Get more out of your trade shows. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 61, January-February, pp. 75-83.
- Bryant, Sue 1995. Fine art and fair trade. *Marketing* (Mar 30, 1995). Haymarket Business publications Ltd.
- Cavanaugh, S. 1976. Setting Objectives and Evaluating the Effectiveness of Trade Show Exhibits. *Journal Of Marketing*, 40(4), 100-103.
- Charmaz, Kathy 2013. 8 Grounded Theory. Objectivist and Constructivist Methods, pp. 249-251. From the book by Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln 2013. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Sage 13.2.2013.
- Cunningham, M.T. & White, J.G. 1974. The role of exhibitions in industrial marketing – An evaluation of the international machine tool exhibition. *Industrial Marketing Management* 3 (1974) 229-242.
- Damgaard, Torben & Freytag, Per V. & Darmer, Per 2000. Qualitative methods in business studies, Arch G. Woodside, in (ed.) *Getting Better at Sensemaking*.

Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing, Volume 9, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 143 – 186.

Garret, Christopher 1993. Show Business. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 80 Iss: 7 pp. 12-14.

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. 2009. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Fourth paperback printing. Copyright 1967 by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss.

Godar, Susan H. & O'Connor, Patricia J. 2001. Same Time Next Year— Buyer Trade Show Motives. *Industrial Marketing Management* 30, 77–86.

Gopalakrishna, Srinath & Lilien, Gary L. 2012. Trade shows in the business marketing communications mix. *Handbook of business-to-business marketing*, pp. 226-245.

Gopalakrishna, Srinath & Lilien, Gary L. 1995. A Three-Stage Model of Industrial trade Show performance. *Marketing Science*, Vol. 14, No.1, Winter 1995.

Gopalakrishna, Srinath & Williams, Jerome D. 1992. Planning and performance assessment of industrial trade shows: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Volume 9, Issue 3, August 1992, Pages 207–224.

Gopalakrishna, S. & Lilien, G. L. & Williams, J. D. & Sequeira, I. K. 1995. Do trade shows pay off? *Journal Of Marketing*, 59(3), 75.

Goulding, Christina 1998. Grounded theory: the missing methodology on the interpretivist agenda. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 1 Iss: 1 pp. 50 – 57.

Goulding, Christina 2005. Grounded Theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 39, Iss: 3 pp. 294- 308.

Gummesson, Evert 2005. Qualitative research in marketing: Road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 39 Iss: 3 pp. 309 – 327.

Hansen, Kåre 1996. The dual motives of participants at international trade shows. An empirical investigation of exhibitors and visitors with selling motives. *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 13, No.2, 1996, pp. 39-53.

Herbig, Paul & O'Hara, Bradley & Palumbo, Fred 1994. Measuring trade show effectiveness: An effective exercise? *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 23, Issue 2, April 1994, Pages 165-170.

Herbig, Paul & O'Hara, Brad & Palumbo, Frederick A. 1997. Differences between trade show exhibitors and non-exhibitors. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 12 Iss: 6 pp. 368 – 382

Herbig, Paul & O'Hara, Bradley & Palumbo, Frederick A. 1998. Trade show: who, what, why. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 16 Iss: 7 pp. 425 – 435.

Horn, Lisa 2002. Making Trade Shows Pay Off: Utilizing Promotional Gifts Rather Than Giveaways. *Journal Of Promotion Management*, 8(1), 127.

Häyrinen, Eija & Vallo, Helena 2012. Tapahtuma on tilaisuus. Tapahtumamarkkinointi ja tapahtuman järjestäminen. *Tietosanoma Oy*, 2012.

Jones, Robert & Noble, Gary 2007. Grounded theory and management research: a lack of integrity? *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 2 Iss: 2 pp. 84 – 103.

Jyh-Shen, C. & Chia-Hung, H. & Chung-Chi, S. 2007. Product Innovativeness, Trade Show Strategy and Trade Show Performance: The Case of Taiwanese Global Information Technology Firms. *Journal Of Global Marketing*, 20(2/3), 31-42.

Kerin, R. A. & Cron, W. L. 1987. Assessing Trade Show Functions and Performance: An Exploratory Study. *Journal Of Marketing*, 51(3), 87-94.

Kijewski, Valerie & Yoon, Eunsang & Young, Gary 1993. How Exhibitors Select Trade Shows. *Industrial Marketing Management* 22, 287-298.

Kirchgeorg, M. & Springer, C. & Kästner, E. 2009. Objectives for successfully participating in trade shows. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 25(1), 63-72.

Kirchgeorg, M. & Jung, K. & Klante, O. 2010. The future of trade shows: Insights from a scenario analysis. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 25(4), 301-312.

Klein, Karen E. 2012. Wring the most out of a Trade Show. Internet reference: <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-04-12/wring-the-most-out-of-a-trade-show>

Kotler, Philip 1999. Muuttuva markkinointi – luo, voita ja hallitse markkinoita. From an original Kotler on marketing: how to create, win and dominate markets. Suomentanut Maarit Tillman. *WSOY Kirjapainoyksikkö*. Porvoo 1999.

Lee, Chang Hyun & Kim, Sang Yong 2008. Differential effects of determinants on multi-dimensions of trade show performance: By three stages of pre-show, at-show, and post-show activities. *Industrial Marketing Management* 37, 784–796.

- Lee-Kelley, Liz & Gilbert, David & Al-Shehabi, Nada F. 2004. Virtual exhibitions: an exploratory study of Middle East exhibitors' dispositions. *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 21 Iss: 6 pp. 634 – 644.
- Li, Ling-ye 2006. Relationship learning at trade shows: Its antecedents and consequences. *Industrial Marketing Management* 35 (2006) 166-177.
- Li, Ling-ye 2007. Marketing resources and performance of exhibitor firms in trade shows: A contingent resource perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 36, Issue 3, April 2007, Pages 360–370.
- Li, Ling-ye 2010. Antecedents and effect of internet implementation for trade shows. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 25 Iss: 4 pp. 272 – 283.
- Lippincott, G. 2003. Something in motion and something to eat attract the crowd: Cooking with science at the 1893 World's Fair. *Journal Of Technical Writing & Communication*, 33(2), 141.
- Martin, Vivian B. & Gynnild, Astrid 2011. Grounded Theory: The Philosophy, Method and Work of Barney Glaser. Universal- Publishers, 2011.
- Mitchell, Ian 2007. The Changing Role of Fairs in the Long Eighteenth Century: Evidence from the North Midlands. *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 545-573.
- Munuera, José L. & Salvador, Ruiz 1999. Trade fairs as services: a look at visitors' objectives in Spain. *Journal of Business Research* 44.1 (1999): 17-24.
- Mäkelä, Markus M. 2004. The Grounded Theory Method: Field Work, Analysis and Reaching Results. Helsinki University of Technology Software Business and Engineering Institute Preprints 4. Espoo 2004.

Palumbo, F. & Herbig, P. A. 2002. Trade Shows and Fairs: An Important Part of the International Promotion Mix. *Journal Of Promotion Management*, 8(1), 93.

Pickton, David & Broderick, Amanda (2005). *Integrated Marketing Communications*. Second Edition. Pearson Education Limited 2005.

Rathmell, J. M. 1954. The Commercial Exhibit. *Journal Of Marketing*. 18(3), 271-281.

Reyhav, Iris. 2009. Knowledge sharing in a trade show. A learning spiral model. *The Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems*. Vol. 39 No.2, 2009 pp.143-158. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Richards, Greg & Richards, Bill 1994. Developing corporate business for hotels through conferences and exhibitions. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. January 1994; vol. 1, 1: pp. 61-69.

Rinallo, Diego & Borghini, Stefania & Golfetto, Francesca 2010. Exploring visitor experiences at trade shows. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. Vol. 25 Iss: 4 pp. 249 – 258.

Rintamäki, Jukka 2009. Tapahtumamarkkinoinnin merkitys globaalille yritykselle: Case-tutkimus B2B-tapahtumamarkkinoinnista. Maisterintutkinnon tutkielma. Markkinoinnin ja johtamisen laitos. *Helsingin Kauppakorkeakoulu*.

Rope, Timo 1995. Markkinointiosaaminen. KY-palvelu. *Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan painolaitokset*. Keuruu 1995.

Rosson, Philip J. & Seringhaus, Rolf F.H. 1995. Visitor and Exhibitor Interaction at Industrial Trade Fairs. *Journal of Business Research* 32, 81-90 (1995).

- Sashi, C.M. & Perretty, Jim 1992. Do trade shows provide value? *Industrial Marketing Management*. Volume 21, Issue 3, August 1992, Pages 249-255.
- Seringhaus, Rolf & Rosson, Philip J. 1998. Management and performance of international trade fair exhibitors: government stands vs. independent stands. *International Marketing Review*. Vol. 15 No. 5, 1998, pp. 398-412. MCB University Press.
- Sharland, Alex & Balogh, Peter 1996. The value of non-selling activities at international trade shows. *Industrial Marketing Management* 25, 59-66.
- Shoham, Aviv 1992. Selecting and Evaluating Trade Shows. *Industrial Marketing Management* 21, 335-341.
- Silber, Tony 2008. Report: Events industry will enjoy robust growth through 2011. *The Magazine for Magazine Management*, Oct.2008, Vol.37, Issue 10.
- Siukosaari, Asko 1999. Markkinointiviestinnän johtaminen. Markkinointi-instituutin kirjasarja N:o 47. WSOY, Toinen painos, Porvoo 1999.
- Skov, Lise. 2006. The Role of Trade Fairs in the Global Fashion Business. *Current Sociology*, Vol.54(5): 764-783. International Sociological Association.
- Smith, T. M. & Gopalakrishna, S. & Smith, P. M. 2004. The complementary effect of trade shows on personal selling. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21(1), 61-76.
- Stevens, Ruth P. 2005. Trade Show and Event Marketing. Plan, Promote & Profit. Thomson.
- Strauss, Anselm & Corbin, Juliet 1990. Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Strauss, Anselm & Corbin, Juliet 1998. Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. 2nd ed. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Tan, Jin 2010. Grounded theory in practice: issues and discussion for new qualitative researchers. *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 66 Iss: 1 pp. 93 – 112.
- Tanner Jr., J.F. 2000. Leveling the playing field: factors influencing trade show success for small companies. *Industrial Marketing Management* 31 (2002) 229–239.
- Tanner Jr., J.F. & Chonko, L.B. 1995. Trade Show Objectives, Management and Staffing Practices. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Volume 24, Issue 4, August 1995, Pages 257-264.
- Tanner JR., J. F. & Chonko, L. B. 2002. Using Trade Shows Throughout the Product Life Cycle. *Journal Of Promotion Management*, 8(1), 109.
- Thompson, Emily 2011. The Growth and Evolution of Art Basel, Miami Beach. American University, Washington D.C., 2011.
- Tongren, Hale N. & Thompson, James P. 1981. The Trade Show in Marketing Education. *Journal of Marketing Education* 1981 3: 28.
- UFI 2012. The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. Global Exhibition Industry Statistics. November 2012. Internet reference:
http://www.ufi.org/Medias/pdf/thetradefairsector/surveys/2012_exhibiton_industry_statistics_b.pdf , 9.2.2013

UFI 2012. The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. Media release: UFI's 9th Global Barometer survey confirms stability in exhibition media performance. Internet reference: <http://www.ufi.org/Public/publications/> 9.2.2013

UFI 2013. The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. Industry Info. Basic knowledge. <http://www.ufi.org>

UFI 2013. The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. UFI's 10th Global Barometer of the Exhibition Industry for 2013. Internet reference: http://www.ufi.org/Medias/pdf/thetradefairsector/surveys/ufi_global_exhibition_barometer_december_2012.pdf, 9.2.2013.

Wedemeyer Moore, Ellen 1988. The Fairs of Medieval England: An Introductory Study. *Medieval Academy of America*. Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr., 1988), pp. 443-445.

9 Interview Data

9.1 List of interviewees

	Position in the company	The company	Date	Venue
1	Area Director Finland	Enterprise Estonia	18.3.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
2	Managing Director	Helsingin Laatumatkat Oy	21.3.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
3	Travel Manager	Porvoon kaupunki	21.3.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
4	Sales Manager	Eckerö Line Ab Oy	25.3.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
5	Brand Manager	Matkatoimisto Area Oy	25.3.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
6	Marketing Manager	Luottokunta Oy	26.3.2013	Teollisuuskatu 21, Helsinki
7	Managing Director	GolfResepti	26.3.2013	Hitsaajankatu 22, Helsinki
8	Managing Director	Woodnotes Oy	28.3.2013	Tallberginkatu 1 B, Helsinki
9	Training Manager	Lääkäriliitto	8.4.2013	Mäkelänkatu 2 A, Helsinki
10	Commercial Manager	Kilroy Finland Oy	8.4.2013	Kaivokatu 10, Helsinki
11	Horeca Business Manager	Gustav Paulig Oy	9.4.2013	Satamakaari 20, Helsinki
12	MarkCom Manager	Hammasväline Oy	11.4.2013	Orionintie 5, Espoo
13	Marketing Manager	Orion Pharma Oy	12.4.2013	Kalkkipellontie 2, Espoo
14	Managing Director	Primulator Oy	12.4.2013	Messukeskus, Helsinki
15	Director, HK Pro	HK Ruokatalo Oy	15.4.2013	Väinö Tannerin tie 1, Vantaa
16	Account Manager	Fazer Makeiset Oy	16.4.2013	Fazerintie 6, Vantaa
17	Marketing Director	Terveystalo Oy	19.4.2013	Jaakonkatu 3 B, Helsinki
18	Sales Manager	Berner Oy	19.4.2013	Sahaajankatu 24, Helsinki
19	Marketing Manager	Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava	23.4.2013	Uudenmaankatu 10, Helsinki
20	Marketing Director	Tallink Silja Oy	25.4.2013	Cafe Aalto, Stockmann, Helsinki
21	Marketing Manager	Dieta Oy	21.5.2013	Holkkitie 8 A, Helsinki

9.2 Interview form (in Finnish)

HAASTATTELULOMAKE

1. Messut osana yrityksen markkinointiviestintää

Miten kuvailisit yrityksenne markkinointiviestintää? Mitä medioita/markkinoinnin työkaluja käytätte ja missä suhteessa toisiinsa?

Mikä rooli messuilla on osana yrityksenne markkinointiviestintää?

Mitkä ovat messumedian vahvuudet?

Mitkä ovat messumedian heikkoudet?

Miksi osallistutte messuille?

Miten päätätte sen osallistuuko yrityksenne messuille?

Millä kriteereillä valitsette messut joihin osallistutte?

Kertokaa messuprosessistanne? (tavoitteet, suunnittelu, toteutus, follow-up)

Kuinka paljon markkinointibudjetistanne käytätte messuihin?

Miten asetatte tavoitteet messuille? (kuka, minkälaisia)

Millaisia resursseja käytätte messujen toteuttamiseen? (suunnitteluvaihe, toteutus, seuranta)

Kuinka seuraatte messutavoitteisiin pääsemistä?

Miten näytteilleasettaja messuista voi saada parhaan mahdollisen hyödyn irti?

2. Markkinointiviestintä ja messut tulevaisuudessa

Mikä ja millainen on tulevaisuuden media? Miksi?

Mihin medioihin te yrityksenä panostatte tulevaisuudessa? Miksi?

Onko messumedialla tulevaisuutta? Miksi?

Näetkö, että jatkossakin yrityksenne käyttää messumediaa osana markkinointiportfoliotanne? Miten? Ja jos ei, niin miksi ei?

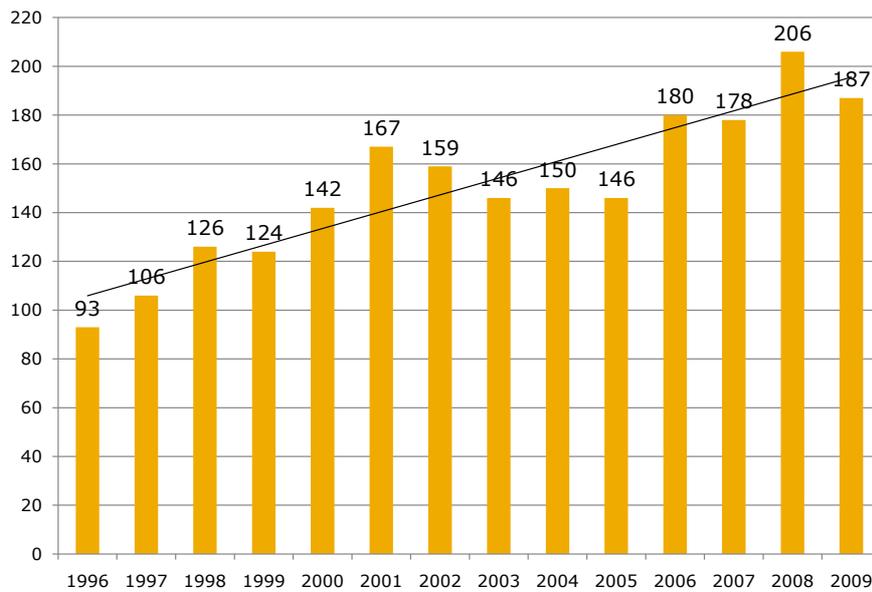
Miten aiotte itse parantaa/muuttaa messuosallistumistanne tulevaisuudessa?

Miten messumediaa tulisi mielestänne kehittää? Miten messujärjestäjä voisi paremmin auttaa pääsemään tavoitteisiin?

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Exhibition investments in Finland (M€), in 1996-2009

Messupanostukset (milj.€), v. 1996-2009 Suomessa

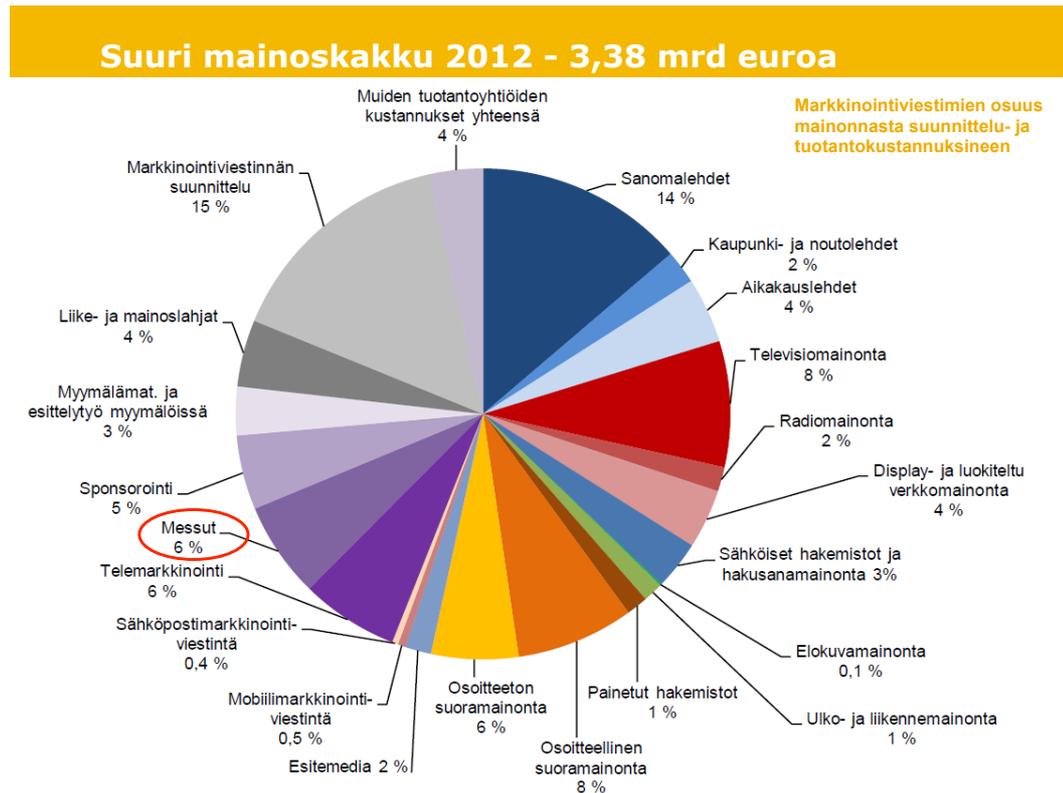


Lähde 2007-2009: Markkinointiviestinnän määrä tutkimus, Mainonnan neuvottelukunta & TNS Gallup
Lähde 1996-2006: Mainonnan määrä tutkimus

Source: Mainonnan määrä tutkimus, Mainonnan neuvottelukunta and TNS Gallup. From the presentation of the Finnish Fair Corporation / TNS Gallup.

10.2 Appendix 2: The great advertising pie 2012 – 3,38 mrd €

The share of different marketing communication tools from the total advertising costs including design and production costs in 2013 (the so-called “great advertising pie”), all together 3,38 mrd euros. The share of fair media was 6%.



Internet source: TNS Gallup

http://www.mainostajat.fi/mlitto/sivut/markkinointiviestinnan_maara_2012_tiedote_13062013.pdf