

The relevance of educational fairs in the 21st century – decision matrix for exhibitors and visitors to participate

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to consider why exhibitors and visitors participate in educational fairs and whether these kinds of trade fairs are important for the professional and study orientation of young professionals. The main content of the article is to demonstrate the relevance of educational fairs and their opportunities and to show a basis for decision-making for exhibitors on how to determine whether a cost-intensive participation in an educational fair is worthwhile.

In principle, the analysis of current literature has shown that education fairs take place in large numbers, especially in Germany, and there is a desire for such presence and direct contact with target groups, especially under the current limitations of the Corona pandemic.

Based on research using expert interviews and an online survey, results were generated as to what information provides, why exhibitors and visitors use educational fairs. In conjunction with the literature research, criteria of exhibitors and visitors were compared for participation in the educational fair and then the decision criteria were merged into a pestel analysis. Finally, necessary decisions were summarised on educational fair planning, exhibition execution and educational fair analysis.

Educational fairs give exhibitors the possibility of direct contact with target groups and feedback. For visitors, educational fairs provide an overview of offers, possibly new impetus for educational offers or by practical testing the consolidation of the career wish.

It is to be expected that educational fairs will remain an important marketing tool in the future, possibly establishing hybrid formats.

1 Introduction

As part of professional and study orientation, students of the graduates are looking for a professional perspective after school. This can be study, training, year abroad or voluntary service. Education fairs are an important guide in the jungle of education. Visitors can get an overview of the variety of offers and, if necessary, get to know unknown possibilities.

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Educational fairs usually only show part of the overall offer, but give orientation and can awaken interests. The educational fairs are among the trade fairs with a regional catchment area. This includes an investigation by the ifo Institute published by AUMA (Exhibition and Exhibition Committee of the German Business Association) consisting of six million visitors and 52,000 stand exhibitors in Germany in 2018. The effects on the site are also highlighted in particular, as exhibitors and visitors make expenses on the spot, among other things. [1-3]

The research question in this article is as follows: Why do exhibitors and visitors use educational fairs and what criteria should a decision be taken to participate in the trade fair?

2 State of the problem in literature

Major events in the field of education are mainly fairs and, if necessary, congresses, symposia or specialist congresses. According to Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon, a trade fair is an event or event with a market character. The fair can be divided/classified as follows (trade fair typology): time (once a year or several times), spatial classification (regional, national, international as well as location), mobility (stationary, mobile), organisation by trade fair organisers, both in the pre- and post-processing and implementation influence on marketing.

The European Institute for ConferencesWirtschaft GmbH (EITW) at the Harz University of Applied Sciences in Germany annually examines the event market in Germany with the Meeting and Event Barometer, including the trade fairs. The types of events are distinguished according to professionally motivated events, events, international events or sports and cultural events, with only a few mentioned here, as the concentration is related to. Trade fairs and major events in this article are based on professionally motivated events and events. In the context of the above-mentioned study, 4,000 venues (more than 100 seats) were included in Germany for the year 2017 and 8,000 organisers were interviewed worldwide, with a return rate of 7.1 %. [4] A total of 405 million participants participated in the events (up 2.8 % year-on-year), of which 2.97 million attended professionally motivated events and events. [4] It is interesting that the events of conference hotels are shifting more and more towards event centers (such as exhibition halls) or event locations. The total number of participants grows by 2.8 percent. The proportion of professionally motivated events is very high at 66.9 percent. Among the professionally motivated events, the medium-sized events in particular show increases in participants (51-100 participants), a decline in large events up to 5,000 participants. [4]

As education fairs in Germany, fairs dealing with the topics of education, education and occupation are summarised. [5, 6] Over 150 educational fairs are recorded for 2019 (without claim to completeness and missing data from two Länder). The regional difference between the federal states or city states is striking. North Rhine-Westphalia and Brandenburg have about the same territory. In North Rhine-Westphalia, however, there are 38 trade fairs in the field of education and only six in Brandenburg. [6] With more than 150 study and training fairs, this type of information on educational offers is of high importance in Germany. In comparison, the search for the same trade fairs only includes an offer from a trade fair organiser in the Slovak Republic: Job Forum at the Expo Center Trenčín (October 24-25, 2019). [7] It can be assumed that further decentralised trade fairs will take place at schools or universities. [8, 9] The Slovak Republic is certainly the smaller country with about 5.4 million inhabitants compared to Germany with 83.5 million inhabitants. On the other hand, there is a clear focus on the marketing instrument Education Fair in Germany and the use as a business model.

3 Research design

The analysis of current literature has shown that in Germany there are numerous offers in the field of educational fairs, which are also attended in large numbers. Educational fairs are organised either by private trade fair organisers or by municipalities/schools etc. But why is this marketing instrument perceived by exhibitors and visitors?

Therefore, primary data are collected in research activities and associated with secondary data from existing studies or literature. The focus is on the primary survey of qualitative (Research Phase I: Expert interviews) and quantitative data (Research Phase II: Questioning). The main players involved in education fairs will be involved: Exhibitors or visitors. The focus in the collection of primary data lies with the trade fair organisers and exhibitors.

The primary data were evaluated and then connected to the secondary data. The aim is to answer the research question (see introduction) in order to gain insights into how the marketing instrument education fairs will be used in the future by exhibitors and visitors or how a decision can be made for or against an educational fair.

4 Results of research

Five expert interviews with key players for German education fairs were conducted to obtain the following results: Trade fair organisers/economic promotions, municipal or institutional representatives of the location marketing, such as the Chamber of Crafts or Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as other actors dealing with educational fairs or the transition of young people to study or training. The interviews for trade fair organisers and institutional representatives are in the parts: General data, preparation, exhibition execution and follow-up of trade fairs. The Messer Preparation section focuses on the selection of the location as well as the promotion of the trade fair as well as the financing. The exhibition implementation section focuses on the effects of educational fairs for exhibitors and visitors, as well as the further development of this marketing instrument and the effects on the location. The trade fair follow-up is the fourth part of the interview with the focus on evaluation and cost-effectiveness analyses as well as the wishes regarding the linking of the trade fair location, city/region and the education fair. [10-12] The expert questionnaire for other stakeholders is structured in a similar way, but is not broken down into the above sections. Relevant questions were taken from each section on the organisation of educational fairs, future development and the interaction between the educational fair and the venue.

According to the respondents (classification scale 1 most important, 10 least important), visitors use trade fairs mainly because there are direct and personal discussions on site and many suppliers are in one place. Apart from that, networking (making contacts) and experiencing/trying out professions followed by checking out the study and career aspirations are particularly emphasised.

It is interesting to note that companies feel that trying things out at the stand is not very important, while trade fair organisers feel that making contacts among the exhibitors is particularly important.



Fig. 1. Why do visitors use educational fairs? [Own presentation]

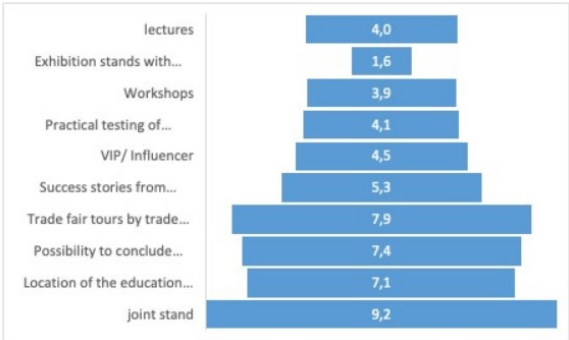


Fig. 2. What does trade fair visitors speak to? [Own presentation]

Respondents should assess (most importantly) on a scale of 1 (most important) to 10 (most unimportant) what particularly appeals to trade fair visitors. The trade fair stand was clearly underlined with personal advice, workshops, lectures and practical testing of professions and courses of study.

Education fairs are therefore an important tool for exhibitors to attract young talent and an important place for network maintenance. In particular, however, the contribution to the more targeted career or study choice is confirmed.

Exhibitors and visitors use the educational fairs for different and identical motives. In the following overview, the results of the expert interviews are highlighted in order to find support in the decision for or against an educational fair.

Table 1. Expectations Exhibitors and visitors at educational fairs.

Expectation	Exhibitor	Visitors
Particularly important	Direct and personal target group approach Getting to know the target group/ “feeling”	many offers and exhibitors in one place/overview provide active /personal conversation direct information
Important	increase recognition company Network Making Advertising for the company feedback by Visitor Regional Orientation/Connection	parents advise participation Prescription/vocation or study request check career/studies choice obligatory event school
Less important	competititors are also there/show presence training must be made/ secure knowledge concrete job interviews arrange company proximity to the trade fair location	Making contacts experience and trying out professions

[Own presentation]

The most important match of the expectations of exhibitors and visitors is to obtain direct/personal contact as well as direct information. The first motive in the decision examination of the use of an educational fair as a marketing tool for exhibitors is the possibility of direct contact with potential junior staff as well as direct contact with target groups.

With the help of the PESTEL analysis, decision criteria for participation as an exhibitor at an educational fair resulting from the expert interviews and the online survey can be summarized.



Fig. 3. Pestel analysis Decision criteria Participation Exhibitors [Own presentation]

A number of factors must or should be included as an exhibitor before taking part in an educational fair. Gartner's CMO Spend Survey 2018-2019 surveyed over 600 marketing managers in the UK and North America for their assessment of the development of marketing activities, spending, or innovation. About 5 percent of the marketing budget is invested in events (including trade fairs). [13] Marketing managers are asked to constantly review their used instruments and to decide on their use. [13] It is described as essential here the examination of known instruments ("we have always done this") and the linking of indicators such as turnover and return in investment (ROI) as far as this is possible and measurable in marketing. [13]

Also educational fairs as part of the toolbox marketing should be planned, prepared and evaluated. The following factors shall be taken into account.

1. Objectives of participation in an educational fair
 - What do I want to achieve with my trade fair presence?
 - Which target groups do I address?
 - What alternative marketing tools can I use?
2. Market observation
 - Data and facts of comparable and previous educational fairs
 - Target Groups and Concept of the Education Fair – Does my target group use the trade fair?
 - Current research results on trade fairs in the field of education/trends
 - Which exhibitors will be on site? (There may be a "compulsion of participation")
3. Budget planning
 - Existing budget/share of total budget
 - Stand fees and related costs (Internet connection, electricity, furniture, entrance fees, parking tickets, supply, garbage/cleaning, etc.)
 - Exhibition equipment (stand construction, exhibition stand, equipment with company materials)
 - Trends such as augmented reality, practical offers at the exhibition stand
 - Trade fair personnel
 - Logistics: Delivery to the fair and associated costs
 - Costs of own application of participation in the trade fair
4. Examination of contractual conditions and trade fair booking
5. Implementation of the fair
 - Assembling materials, planning assembling and dismantling
 - Survey Number of trade fair conversations and possibly conversational data (if possible under data protection law), duration of talks, type of conversation, abnormalities
 - Feedback on the trade fair from stand personnel or survey participants
 - Testing of other measurement methods: GPS or Wifi tracking (visitor streams)
6. Evaluation (evaluation of the trade fair afterwards)
 - Have I achieved my goals?
 - How did the trade fair go compared to previous years? (Number and quality conversations, development costs etc.)
 - Which trade fair visitors subsequently applied? Has the number of applications increased? Have I enrolled more students than last year?



Fig. 4. 6-point plan - decision-making participation education fair exhibitors [Own presentation]

The above-mentioned 6-point plan illustrates that some points must be considered before taking part in an education fair and that educational fairs can also be evaluated. However, the evaluation is mainly qualitatively and less quantitatively possible.

Finally, participation in educational fairs as an exhibitor is merely an instrument of the marketing toolbox and often a detailed evaluation or quantitative impact, for example, on applicant numbers can only be traced back to the fair to a limited extent. However, through direct target group approach and direct feedback/impression of the target group, trade fairs are an essential part of marketing.

Philip Harting (Chairman of the AUMA Trade Fair Association) also confirms the impact of personal contact on presence fairs. Offers can also be presented virtually and the visitor gets an overview, but cannot “test” or touch the product. In particular, the personal persuasive power of the trade fair exhibitor is lost. [14] 35 percent of respondents declared interest or already the use of online trade fairs. This has changed or strengthened due to the Corona pandemic around Covid-19, which started shortly after the survey. The survey was completed in March 2020, for example virtual Vocatium fairs or the study fair ERZ (Annaberg-Buchholz) took place in July 2020. Harting (see above) confirms this: 165 trade fairs could not be held in 2020 (current June 2020), 110 even failed. [14]

The trade fair location should above all have sufficient space for the exhibitors and good connection to the public after transport. In particular, the municipal role was seen as important or expandable, with regard to: Financing (trade fair should also remain business model with profit intention), own stand presentation, job and training/study offers on site, promotion of the trade fair, link between company and trade fair and advantage that visitors spend locally. In addition, according to the respondents, the trade fair contributes to the local acquisition of skilled workers, less to the company’s location. The regional catchment area was underlined. The companies themselves consider themselves responsible for the acquisition of skilled workers.

It is undisputed that education fairs play an important role in helping young people’s careers and their important personal contact.

5 Discussion and summary

In spite of the intensive development of digital formats, educational fairs are still of high relevance as a presence offer. Talking personally with a consultant at the trade fair or anonymously gaining an overview of the range of services is also an important marketing

tool in the 21st century. Visitors and exhibitors also receive direct feedback from their counterpart and exhibitors learn a lot about the target group. In the opinion of the experts surveyed, this will continue to exist in the future. [15, 16] It is expected to develop more qualitatively with additional offers rather than quantitatively.

Further research should strategically assess the long-term impact of the Corona pandemic on education fairs. Will more hybrid trade fair offers persist or will there be a return to the previous situation with almost exclusive presence fairs?

Exhibitors should combine concrete goals with the participation of the trade fair and beforehand also deal with the measurability of these, in order to evaluate the trade fair later. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine how the trade fair has developed in previous years and how competitors use this trade fair.

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