

# Considering a Career in the Exhibitions and Events Industry?



International Association  
of Exhibitions and Events™

## Industry Overview

The first question asked by those not familiar with the exhibitions and events industry generally runs along the lines of: *What exactly does that mean?* If you are considering entering this line of work, your next question might be: *So what would I be doing?*

The fundamental purpose of exhibitions and events is to bring the buyer and seller together. Whether you are dealing in a corporate or non-profit environment, you will most likely have some kind of product/service to offer, and people who are interested in it or people who you want to be interested in it. Exhibitions are unique experiential marketing events. Unlike any other marketing communications media, exhibitions and events allow the engagement of all five senses: touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste. They allow interested parties to ask questions, try products, and see and compare all products/services. In addition, social opportunities create the perfect networking environment for both the buyer and the seller.

Your job as an exhibitions and events organizer (also referred to as a show organizer or convention planner) is to create a great experience for the attendees and exhibitors who participate in your event(s). A typical exhibition may include:

- ▶ General learning sessions
- ▶ Receptions
- ▶ Awards presentations
- ▶ Industry keynote speech
- ▶ Workshop education sessions
- ▶ Board of Directors and other committee meetings
- ▶ Recreational activities such as golf and tennis

## It Helps to Like...

People – lots and lots of people. As an organizer you will be interacting with staff, upper management, hotel representatives, etc.... You must be super organized and detail-oriented when planning events. You will be held accountable for everything – yes, EVERYTHING! – that happens before, during and after your event(s). Travel is a vital part of the job although the amount will depend on the number of events, staff available to travel, etc.

## Why It is Worth It...

As an organizer, you get to be part of a large, yet tight-knit, industry. According to a survey conducted by *Convene*, the magazine of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), the majority of respondents have 10-20 years of experience (49.3 percent), followed by more than 20 years (23.7 percent). Respondents with 6-9 years made up 15.8 percent of the total, 3-5 years totaled 7.9 percent and only 3.3 percent of respondents had less than three years of experience. Veterans of the industry are well-known among their peers and often deferred to for advice. Which brings to the forefront another good trait of this industry; this is a field full of “people” people who tend to be friendly and outgoing.

Remember that any industry that brings buyers and sellers will most likely involve exhibitions/events. That is a broad range! You could be involved in just about any field as part of your work as an organizer, depending on the company you join. If you work for a company that specializes in organizing exhibitions/events, the industry may depend on the client. Versatility is one of the best assets of this industry, as you can mold your career based on your interests and/or goals.

## Background/Education/Salary

The professional backgrounds of those involved in the industry are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some enter the industry through a direct route, such as with a degree in convention management or hospitality. Others enter through related fields such as sales, marketing/communications/public relations, business administration, legal, information technologies, etc. And yet many come from completely unrelated careers such as teaching and human resources. It all depends on the needs of the company doing the hiring and the position being filled. Usually these individuals start their careers at an entry level and progress with hands-on experience.

According to *Convene's* survey, more than three-quarters (76 percent) of the respondents have a college degree and 22 percent have some post-graduate education or an advanced degree. Salary ranges from \$42,300 to \$100,700 for positions ranging from Assistant/Coordinator to Vice President.

## Certified in Exhibition Management (CEM)

Memberships to organizations like the International Association of Exhibitions and Events™ (IAEE) is highly encouraged since they offer a direct link to others in your field and the ongoings of the industry itself. Many industry-associated groups also offer certification programs, such as IAEE's Certified in Exhibition Management (CEM) Learning Program. The CEM designation was created in 1975 to provide a professional designation for individuals in the exhibition industry. The designation was formed to raise professional standards and is recognized throughout the industry as the premier mark of professional achievement.

To earn the designation, participants must complete a nine-part program within three years. The program is composed of seven mandatory courses and two courses chosen from five available electives. Advanced-level courses are also available for CEMs to continue their professional education and obtain re-certification. Courses are offered throughout the year at various locations and online.

## Industry Outlook

Exhibitions and events drive a growth industry, seeing as just about every business market sector requires methods in which to bring its buyers and sellers together. The Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR, [www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org)) reports on this growth in its annual *CEIR Index*. The *CEIR Index* provides exhibition industry performance across 11 key industry sectors: Professional Business Services; Consumer and Retail Trade; Sports and Entertainment; Food; Government; Building and Construction; Industrial and Manufacturing; Communications and Information Technology; Medical and Health Care; Raw Materials and Science; and Transportation. The basis for this universe is the Exhibition Industry Census, which has catalogued more than 13,000 events with at least 3,000 net square feet of exhibit space. Approximately 10,000 of these events are business-to-business exhibitions and the remaining 3,000+ events are business-to-consumer shows.

In early 2007, the latest *CEIR Index* reported the exhibition industry grew 4.8 percent in 2006 over 2005 levels, just slightly below the 5.8 percent gain posted by the industry in 2005 versus 2004, but marking the fourth consecutive year of industry growth. Over the course of the period covered by this report (2000-2006), all four exhibition industry metrics rose on a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) basis: Net Square Feet (+3.6 percent); Revenue (+2.6 percent); Attendees (+1.6 percent); and Exhibitors (+1.5 percent).

## Straight from the Organizer's Mouth

Bonnie King is senior conference manager for World of Concrete, one of the top 20 trade show events in the country. She came to the industry from a teaching background, joining Hanley Wood Exhibitions in Irving, Texas in 1994. In her capacity as senior conference manager, she is in charge of developing the education program, which contains more than 150 seminars. In 1996, she was the recipient of IAEE's Rookie of the Year, Show Manager Award for her outstanding work. Below is some advice she gives to a person considering pursuing a career in the industry.

### Q: What is it like to work as an organizer?

**A:** There is a high level of anticipation as you literally work months to plan, organize and implement strategic components that come to fruition during your trade show. The reward of seeing all your hard work, your creative ideas, your processes and systems come to life is unlike no other.

### Q: What would I be doing in this industry?

**A:** You are in a perpetual state of doing research, creating needs/analysis, meeting production deadlines and continuing professional development. This industry inspires people to be creative, efficient, organized, and in constant growth mode.

### Q: What should I be good at?

**A:** You need to be tenacious, think outside the box, handle multi-tasking, be very organized – know what you want and be willing to go after it – be a risk taker.

### Q: What should I enjoy doing? If do not like this or that maybe this is not for me...

**A:** You have got to enjoy taking ownership of projects – be in charge of all elements while surrounding yourself with the best resources available. You have got to be a team player in this industry with a truck load of patience, persistency and a great sense of humor!

### Q: How should I prepare?

**A:** When attending events, meetings, trade shows, etc. be observant – everything you see and experience is the result of someone's planning. You could be that planner!

### Q: How would I go about advancing my career?

**A:** Taking event planning related courses, of course, is a great plus. You can also join associations and search the Internet. Volunteer to help plan events at your work, church, school.

## **A Day in the Life on Show Site**

As the organizer you will oversee every aspect of the event, including accommodations and travel arrangements associated with the event which means the work starts months, sometimes even years, before the actual show. Every show has its own specifications, but here's a general look at what a typical day on show site holds at Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual Meeting & Exhibition as told by IAEE's Director of Conventions & Exhibitions Karen Rothrock, CMP, CEM.

- 4:30 AM Rise and shine – it's Opening Day!
- 5:30 AM Arrive at Show Office; check electronic signage for the day's activities
- 6:00 AM Check to make sure breakfast is ready and waiting for the Golfers as they get on the bus
- 6:15 AM Load buses for golf tournament
- 6:30 AM Staff Meeting to go over the day's events, announce any changes in the schedule, etc.
- 6:45 AM Check the lounges and media room to make sure that the rooms are set and catering has been delivered
- 7:00 AM Check on Speaker Check-In, Cyber Center, etc. to make sure everything is open and ready to go. Registration opens – monitor crowds
- 7:30 AM Check meeting room sets
- 8:00 AM Check on Continental Breakfast set-up; Rehearsal begins for afternoon Opening General Session; Exhibitor Move-in – make sure that security is posted and checks for proper credentials; Pavilion set-up begins; loads buses for tennis tournament
- 8:15 AM Make sure that First Aid has arrived
- 8:30 AM All Day Sessions begin – monitor hallway for any issues
- 9:00 AM Meet with general service contractor to review schedule for the next day.
- 10:00 AM Meet with catering to determine locations on the exhibitor floor to place food stations
- 11:00 AM Check in with Exhibition manager for any issues
- 11:30 AM Check on Staff Lunch set-up; Prep room for First Timers' Orientation
- 11:45 AM Check-in on rehearsals; make sure lunch is delivered for stage crew

- 12:00 PM Check room sets for afternoon committee/board meetings; monitor electronic signage for the day's activities
- 1:30 PM Workshops begins – monitor hallway for any issues
- 2:30 PM Check in on exhibit hall set-up
- 4:00 PM Make sure catering has been delivered to the Green Room; aisle carpet to begin
- 4:15 PM On headset to monitor General Session Production
- 5:00 PM Doors opens for General Session
- 5:15 PM Opening General Session begins
- 6:30 PM Make sure that "human arrows" are in place to direct attendees to the Reception
- 7:00 PM Monitor the Opening Reception
- 9:00 PM Check in on exhibit hall – aisle carpet down and vacuuming
- 11:00 PM Back in hotel room – wind down and try to sleep before the 4:30 AM alarm goes off!

**See what Bonnie King  
and others have to  
say about working in  
the industry!**

**A full video, as well  
as other valuable  
information is  
available at IAEE's  
Web site at:**

**[www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)**