

② Choosing the right trade fair

This chapter proposes methods to assist readers in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their own enterprise, investigating markets and locating potential customers. Finally, simple systems are presented to help in the selection of the most suitable trade fair for the products of an enterprise.

Choosing a trade fair in which to exhibit may prove more complicated than would appear at first sight. For example, artisans making ceramic tableware for sale in their own country cannot simply assume that their products will necessarily sell in an export market. Before considering participation in any fair, it is essential to establish the capabilities of the producer's own enterprise. Only then is it possible to say whether there is a market for this category of product in a particular country or region.

Box 2

Four tasks to undertake before choosing a trade fair

- Define the capabilities of the crafts enterprise (see the section below)
- Search for a potential market for product (see Market Research section)
- Identify product adaptation or development needed (see Identifying Products section)
- Identify the fair itself, and if possible visit the fair before making a final decision to exhibit (see Evaluation and Selection section)

Defining the capabilities of the crafts enterprise

Before undertaking searches for new markets to approach or new products to develop, interested enterprises should clearly define their present and potential capacity in technical and business operations. A clear grasp of the following is essential to making sound business decisions (see Checklist and Box 3 below).



Checklist of capabilities for exporting crafts enterprises

1. Production skills and equipment

- Production technology and volume capacities
- Reliability and quality of labour
- Levels of reliability in utilities supply
- Levels of reliability in raw material supply, pricing and quality
- Quality control systems and efficiency

2. Market strategies and planning

- Understanding market research methods
- Identifying the enterprise's place in the export market
- Identifying the enterprise's product and ranges for planning
- Awareness of financial costs of test and export marketing

3. Product design and development

- Capability of developing the product brief from market information
- Identifying financial costs of sample-making programmes
- Operation in international export trading systems

4. Financial management

- Capability of accurate financial forecasting, budgeting, costing and pricing
- Access to short-term finance, tax exemption entitlements, government incentives
- Stability of interest rates and foreign-currency exchange rates

5. Transportation

- Level of reliability of national transportation of goods
- Knowledge of export procedures
- Understanding of transport packaging requirements
- Knowledge of international shipping and transportation systems

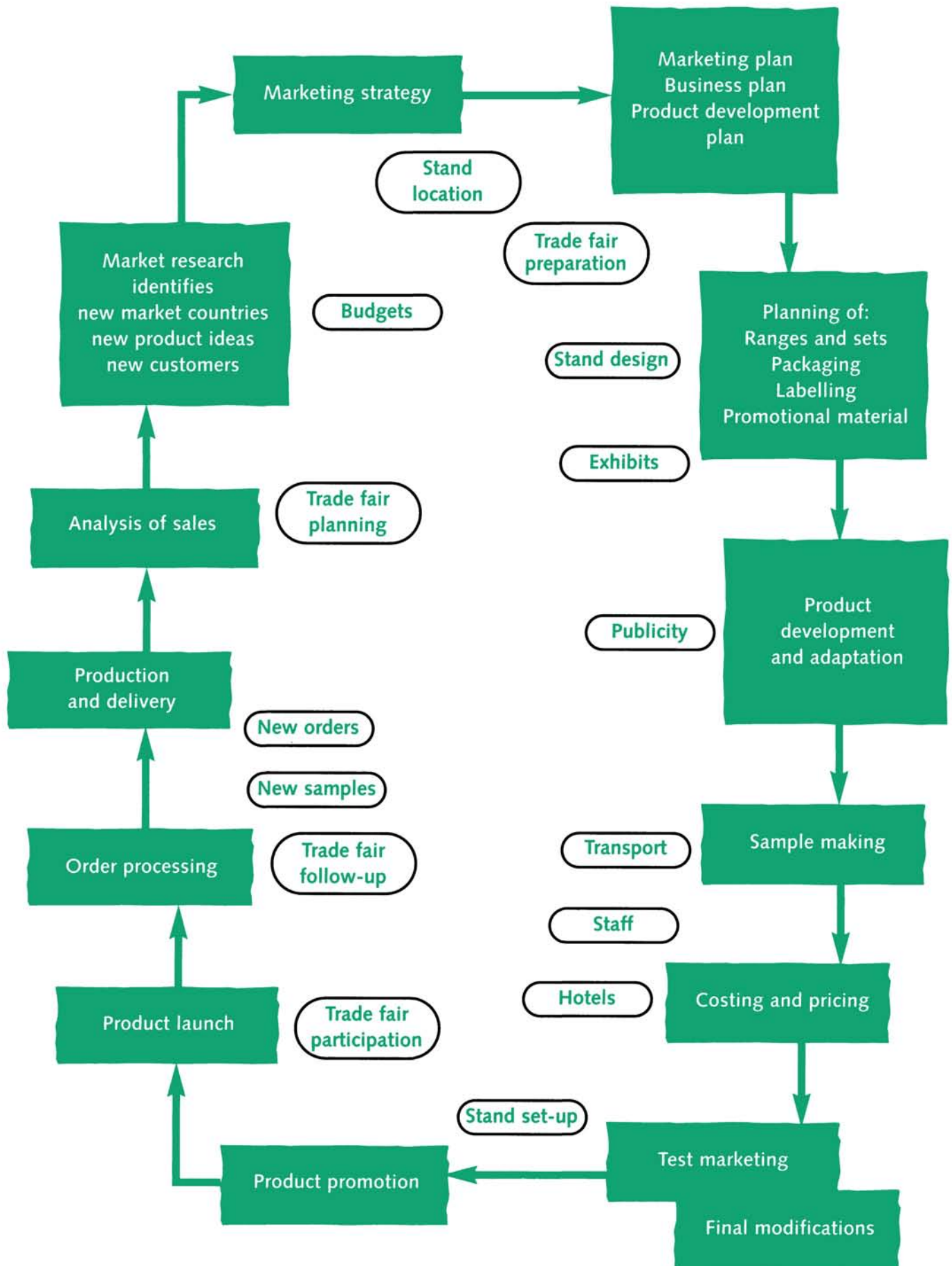
6. Export market awareness

- Sources of information on international customs, tariffs and quota systems, and legal, health and safety regulations
 - Sources of information on market trends
-

If a craft enterprise wishes to enter the export market, then it must establish the issues to be studied before making any attempt to establish trading links. Failure to learn about systems and procedures could involve a producer or exporter in expensive mistakes. For example, an enterprise making hand-embroidered table linen might make limited sales if it entered a target market with synthetic fabric materials and chemical dyes. It would certainly generate more business if the current target market trends indicated that hand-loomed cotton fabric with vegetable-dyed embroidery were the current need in the trade. The study of trends in the market place is one of the key factors in successful participation.

Typical business cycle for exporting crafts enterprises

showing relationship with trade fair participation cycle



Market research

Why market research?

It is financially risky to develop a product without any reference to the market situation. Because the market is complex, systems and methods of research have been developed that can assist crafts enterprises in identifying new product types for market niches that need filling, new consumer groups and market segments. Finding markets requires study and, in certain cases, the use of systematic techniques which are too detailed to cover in depth in this book. (Useful sources of information on marketing are given in Annex 1.) The points indicated below should be considered when preparing to carry out market research. Here are two methods of acquiring knowledge about any market.

Market information systems

In the course of daily business activity, any enterprise should actively search for information within both the target market-place and the work environment. This information is very diverse: a new store opens, a new technology appears, unusual products are seen in shops and new materials are found in products. All this information should be recorded and filed for reference as part of decision-making activities. At the same time, it is essential that the involved enterprise should update information about its current and planned production and management capabilities.

The maintenance of market information systems should be a continuous activity, wherever and whenever the enterprise is in the public environment.

Market research techniques

Market information systems are a general and useful mechanism to maintain awareness of the market. But there are occasions when it is advisable and indeed possible to study the target market very closely. This might be during a visit made to a city in one's own country or when travelling abroad on business or for pleasure. Specially planned market study tours are advisable. During these special tours it is essential to plan activity to provide a maximum of accurate information about the market. It is also possible to carry out research studies in the home country to determine whether a target country is a suitable market for products. If preliminary research can be done in the home country, then it is possible to avoid expensive and unfruitful visits to countries that have no potential market.

A maker of alpaca knitwear in Peru wishes to increase exports. She is led to believe by a colleague that Singapore would be a good market to enter. Reading available market information about Singapore in libraries and institutes in Lima, she learns that the population of Singapore enjoy high salary levels and can afford to purchase her products. But she also learns that the climate of Singapore is far too humid and tropical for large sales of knitwear to the local population. Further study gives her the names of businesses in Singapore which specialize in selling high-priced knitwear in specialist retail outlets in major tourist shopping malls. She decides to contact these companies by mail, avoiding an expensive and possibly wasteful trip – unless of course some retailers show great interest in the garments she makes.

Defining the research subjects. A list of marketing problems to be studied should be prepared by the enterprise before any travel abroad. For example: What kind of product should be developed? Are there customers in the target market for existing products? Where are they? How can they be contacted? With a list of questions, try to think of possible answers to the problems.

Developing possible solutions. It is worth noting down every conceivable solution to problems. Poor solutions can be discarded later. But prepare a list of answers to the problems as defined. Perhaps customers for products may be found only in beach resorts? Some products may only be purchased by male industrial workers or female farm-workers? Some products will never easily sell in certain market countries, but excellently in other locations? Keep the list of possible answers available during the trip.

Collecting data

Home country research

Learning about the target country is essential. It is possible to find a good deal of information about target market countries before leaving the home country. Much sound information can be found in the libraries of embassy trade missions and cultural institutions in the capital cities of most home countries. Valuable time can be saved if visits can be made to such institutions to study trade and association journals, government publications and popular fashion and household interest magazines from the countries concerned.

Local information sources in most capital cities

- Embassy trade missions, foreign cultural centre libraries
- Local ministries of commerce and trade, chambers of commerce, TSIs, local craft NGOs
- Professional and association journals
- Local government publications
- Popular fashion magazines, household interest magazines
- The Internet

With this information prepared before departure, very specific market research can be done in target countries that might be suitable for new business. Give careful thought to cultural, social and economic aspects of the markets. Commercial market research agencies in most market countries can provide study figures for a fee. Public libraries in market countries have information available, but this takes time to find and extract. The more that can be learnt before departure, the better prepared the researcher will be.

Target country research during fairs

During participation in a trade fair, time can be found to get away and explore the exhibition halls and surrounding market-place. Carry a notebook constantly, and record everything of interest. If possible, plan to leave additional time during any trip to visit libraries and other institutions in the market country which might supply useful

information. Using information gained and plans prepared in the home country, start by observing and noting down important points. Look for competitors' products, checking and comparing qualities, prices, finishes and materials. Try to meet sales or buying staff. If possible, inquire about sales and customer type.

Check competitors' products for prices and quality of:

- manufactured finish of product
- packaging and labelling
- raw materials
- functional and aesthetic design

Physical surveys. Questionnaires, random sample surveys and telephone interviews all provide valuable data to assist in marketing decisions. Much of this information is available in the form of statistics in public libraries or is referred to in trade publications.

The visiting entrepreneur must study the market-place directly, visiting different types of store, meeting buyers, showing samples and trying to get feedback. It is important to keep good records of information, because such material helps to ensure that decisions are based on facts. Surveys will clarify which target market group is best for the researching enterprise; all questions should relate to the original enterprise capability profile which was made before departure from home.

Identifying market channels

The consumer is the end user of most manufactured products. Consumer tastes and desires are guided by a large number of magazines and advertisements describing fashion trends, media advertising and the fashion industry. It is consumers' bodies that clothes have to suit. It is in their homes and gardens that carpets, curtains, bedspreads, tools and utensils are to be placed. It is they who stand in stores, touching, looking and wondering whether they want such and such a product. Any company that can predict what the consumer will be wanting next has a better chance of success.

Consumer categories. Consumer types can be identified by common factors in any population. These social and economic facts include age, gender, race, religion, income, profession, interests and hobbies, life-style, purchasing preferences, attitudes, politics and geographical location by continent, region, country, city, town and village. This information can be graded to give a marketing picture of a community, known as socio-economic classification grouping, which is also part of the market segment definition. Consumers can be classified as being from upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, skilled working class, working class, or those at the lowest level of subsistence.

These classifications help exporters and retailing managers to work out whether or not certain products can be sold in a particular target community. Statistics for this grading can be found in public or trade libraries and may be used to plan an enterprise's promotion campaign or develop a marketing strategy.

It is important to be sure of the category in which intermediaries in the producer-to-consumer chain are operating, because it affects how business is conducted. For example, it would not be a practical decision to develop a very cheap range of ceramic tableware which is to be offered for sale to a target consumer group identified as being mainly a high-income group shopping in exclusive stores selling mainly expensive fine china merchandise from world-famous brand name producers. Whatever the type of customer, each has a position in the market system. For example, at the high end of the giftware retailing business, there are expensive quality stores which may be exclusive. At the low end of the same market segment, many gift stores throughout a country may be owned by a chain-store marketing company selling large quantities of cheap products of poor quality. Each type of company group or market segment has high- and low-end quality ranking, and any enterprise wishing to enter a particular market must try and identify the market segment to which a potential customer belongs.

Wholesalers. Wholesalers are companies that purchase quantities of goods with the sole intention of reselling them to companies that sell directly to consumers. Wholesalers frequently buy large consignments of goods that are often pre-packed into bales of smaller quantities which are in turn sold unopened to retailers. Some wholesalers also undertake their own retail operation.

Retailers. Retailers are people or companies who sell direct to the public. There are different types of retailer. Some are individuals running their own shop, or selling products in the street. In many countries, crafts are sold in boutiques, gift shops and craft centres which are also used by artisans as their manufacturing centres. Some companies operate a number of shops in different locations. Larger versions of these companies are known as chain stores because the company controls a 'chain' of shops scattered throughout a country or region. In this category are found shoe, garment and accessory shops. Some companies operate department stores which sell very wide ranges of merchandise. Specialist companies, mail-order firms and franchise operations have special requirements from their suppliers.

Entrepreneurs and importers. Many companies do not make products. Some do not even handle the goods they sell to other customers. These 'entrepreneurs' are middlemen, investing money in selling products to other traders, both in domestic and export markets. They are experienced in the processes and systems through which products must pass to reach the market. They provide market contacts to many crafts producers who have no marketing operation of their own. They distribute orders to manufacturers and organize the consolidation of consignments, customs clearance and shipping dispatch.

Mail-order companies. Mail-order companies sell their merchandise direct to consumers using national mail networks as the channel for marketing and distribution. Many types of catalogues are distributed to a network of customers on company records, known as the mailing list. The catalogue is usually sold to the consumer if it is expensive to produce. The products offered for sale are very tightly controlled in standards of colour, size and appearance, because strict regulations prevent companies from misleading consumers

with photographs that do not resemble the delivered product. These companies usually require individual mailing packages for the products that they order. Special labelling is applied in the workshop in many cases, to reduce costs in the customer's warehouse. Because of careful planning for the launch date of each new catalogue, such companies have very tightly controlled delivery schedules for their products, which can cause difficulties for suppliers; they sometimes send out three catalogues per year.

Some mail-order companies buy heavily discounted merchandise, relying on many small mailing shots each year. They change their product lines frequently in very rapid reaction to sales results. They use a catalogue system based upon a collection of postcard-sized advertisements which they can change very quickly and cheaply.

Some larger mail-order houses have set up their own retail outlets known as catalogue stores. There are also specific companies who only sell through catalogue shops. Consumers select products from catalogues on view at the front of a warehouse. There is usually a display of the products in the same location. The products are ordered, paid for and taken away by the purchaser, or delivered to the customer's home. This is an efficient low-cost process, where less money is spent on the outlet itself.

Museum and art gallery shops. Museum shops are specialist shops located in various museums and art galleries. They tend to develop their own ranges of merchandise related to the material on exhibition in the museum. For example, museums of natural history worldwide invested heavily in the making of dinosaur models, following the spectacular success of the film *Jurassic Park*. Certain museums purchase replicas of famous items in their collections. These are specially made to exact specifications in moderate quantities.

Department stores. These are part of the merchandising chain company group. The stores are large, and sub-divided into many departments, hence their name. Such departments include: household furnishing*; household and fashion fabrics*; male and female adult and children's fashion; kitchen and garden items*; jewellery and giftware*; cosmetics; sports and games, and foodstuffs.

Many crafts exporters will find products similar to their own in the departments marked with an asterisk* in the examples above. But it is still essential to visit as many departments as possible. For example, a producer of hand-made paper products normally selling stationery to a department store could possibly find very good business providing luxury paper packaging for the foodstuffs or cosmetics departments. Lacemakers and embroidery producers could possibly find business in both household furnishing and children's fashion departments. Spending time in every department might provide ideas for new products or customers.

These stores are usually located in urban shopping districts, because the turnover needed to maintain large premises requires busy shopping locations. Many department stores are now also leasing spaces to smaller specialist retailers from fashion and allied businesses. Department stores buy medium to large quantities of goods, which they may wish to

market exclusively under their brand name. This presents difficulties to manufacturers working in countries where copyright is sometimes disregarded. Department stores also design and commission special products for themselves.

Gift shops. The giftware market is a fast-growing part of the overall trading scene. International giftware exhibitions are held in every major market in the developed world, lasting one to two weeks, with hundreds of individual and corporate exhibitors. It is at these exhibitions that craft enterprises can see what the market and their competitors are doing. It is a very good place to learn about products, carry out market research and market their own products. Giftware retailers range from individuals selling one category of product from one country in one city shop, to small and medium retailing companies, to large import companies that have many stores in major towns and cities. Manufacturers searching for retailers at the smaller end of the market frequently have difficulty in locating customers, because these are hard to trace. The volume of direct trade with small-scale gift retailers makes it necessary to have many customers to be economically viable. The larger chains of giftware shops have inventories of many varied products which they import in very large quantities.

Discount stores. These are specialist stores having high-volume purchases of products which they sell on at prices which are often well below the market norm. Some of their products come from the craft sector.

Specialist shops. There are an increasing number of specialist stores. Many of these are set up to cater to a particular short-term market interest, and disappear when that interest dies. As an example, shops selling only hand-made candles and aroma-therapy products are a response to a surge in consumer demand in the late 1990s. Specialist stores can be one shop unique to one city or town, or a chain of stores throughout a country. They trade in a narrow specific range of products such as basketry, cane furniture, imported carpets, ethnic garment boutiques, traditional ceramics, futon stores, wooden sculptures, silk garments and reproduction antiques. In the crafts business some shops only deal with a single type of product from one country.

Ethnic stores. The ethnic store is one specializing in traditional products from a country in Africa, Asia or Latin America. An alternative is the store that specializes in exotic products from a number of countries. Some of these stores are part of a chain network and purchase medium to large quantities of merchandise which they then distribute. For many manufacturers, these companies provide a good niche market for unusual or expensive products. They are frequently difficult to locate, except during the trade fair and exhibition season.

Alternative trading organizations. These are established by charitable or non-governmental agencies working in social development or relief and rehabilitation programmes in developing countries. Their purchasing power is quite large, and they tend to retail through chains of shops run by volunteers and/or a mail-order activity. Many of these agencies purchase their merchandise from groups of producers involved in formal and informal development programmes.

Franchising businesses. Some importing companies sell their products through shops run by franchisees. The franchising company controls the image and merchandise of the outlet, maintaining a strong corporate identity in the market-place. Body Shop is one such company operating in many countries. The companies have their own designers who work with manufacturers to develop integrated product ranges, labels and packaging.

Shopping malls. The shopping mall is a purpose-built shopping environment in which many retailers, large chains and individual shops rent shop space from the mall owner. In most malls, large retailing chains and restaurants are the major occupiers because of the high rental charges common in these locations. The mall is an excellent location for observing competitors' merchandise.

Direct sales

Traditional methods of direct selling

Direct selling to the consumer is the traditional way for makers of craft products to sell to the consumer. The original methods included house-to-house visits by artisans, carrying their products either on their person or using carts. In most cities and towns around the world there continues to be a very strong tradition of daily or weekly markets where artisans may sell products from a stall or space which they rent in a location which may be a public street, or a market hall constructed specially for the purpose. For example, the world's largest traditional open-air market in which crafts may be purchased is located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It is reputed to cover many square kilometres in one area of the city, and has been operating for centuries. Other fairs occur on a regular basis, that is, weekly, monthly or even once or twice a year. For such events many artisans will travel great distances to participate. These fairs may also be linked to religious festivals and public holidays.

There are major tourist industries in countries such as Kenya, Mexico and Nepal. Tourists are an ever-changing group of customers. They tend to purchase traditional products of cultural interest which they see during their visits; enterprises wishing to enter this special-needs market should study the trends in this category.

Some of the international fairs listed in the Directory (Annex 1) are 'general' or 'consumer' fairs where sales to the general public normally take place. Some craft enterprises have successfully adopted this form of direct selling and attend such events on every occasion.

Marketing on the Internet: e-commerce

Promoting and direct selling of crafts on the Internet is emerging as another method that can be used by exporters and artisans to offer their merchandise on the world market. While many technical aspects have yet to obtain customer confidence, product sales via the World Wide Web are already substantial. Some of the larger corporations that have invested heavily in Internet technology are studying the possibility of running full-time web portals through which customers will then access manufacturers' own websites from which products may be purchased. Such a system creates a virtual market-place from which trade and retail customers purchase items all year round.

Box 4

Market channels

- Wholesalers
- Retailers
- Entrepreneurs
- Mail-order companies
- Museum and art gallery shops
- Department stores
- Independent retailers
- Gift shops
- Discount stores
- Specialist shops
- Alternative trading organizations
- Franchising businesses
- Shopping malls
- Direct selling
- Internet market-place: e-commerce
- Boutiques
- Vendors in the street or at the roadside
- Craft products can be found in all channels

Identifying products

Once research has clearly identified market channels with the most opportunities for business, it is essential to establish which products are most likely to succeed in a highly competitive market.

While studying the market it is necessary to closely examine competitors' products on display. Most merchandising agencies now make products available in ranges and sets. It may be possible to spot a gap in the market into which a craft exporter may be able to introduce a product. This is a product niche.

Product ranges and sets. Products are sold in ranges because customers' have different preferences for size, colour and material finishes. The broader the range on offer, the more potential sales to a wider variety of customers. Products are sold in sets for much the same reason. Usually sets are a group of products in the same finishes but of different sizes.

Product adaptation. It is possible to observe how competitors use product development as a key tool in business. Any craft enterprise can do the same by producing variations or adapting existing products. This is far cheaper than designing a completely new item. But in many market countries it is a criminal offence to copy products. Competitors are very sensitive to the intellectual property rights they may have on their products. Care must be taken not to infringe national or international copyrights when studying the market. But it is still important for artisan producers to study their own range of merchandise to see if there are any product niches that can be filled by broadening or adapting the ranges and sets.

Comparing solutions with data

When time permits, it is important to bring together planning papers and research information for study. Market information resulting from visits brings common factors into focus. For example, a silversmith having discussions with different jewellery buyers might reveal that jewellery has to be packed in special boxes for sales in a particular market segment. The silversmith can then plan to fill that need immediately by providing jewellery in new packaging. All these common factors can be used to compare with earlier information, problems and solutions. The comparison will upgrade original strategies. Ideas that are proved by facts or observation to be a waste of effort can be dropped. Useful information will be gained for the design of new or adapted products.

Analysing the information. At the end of the market research phase, the following key questions should have been answered:

- Is the market sufficiently important and receptive to the style and quality of the products?
- Do the products meet market requirements and tastes and satisfy consumer legislation?
- Do data on customs, tariffs and procedures reveal any serious barriers to commencement of a market approach via a trade fair?
- Will demand exceed the artisan's ability to supply?
- Will trade-fair participation be the most profitable or cost-effective way to achieve market penetration?

All these questions are likely to be answered as a result of taking part in a trade fair, but researching them in advance will certainly increase confidence for successful participation.

New trends in trading

While most aspects of international trade are easily visible, new and complex changes are emerging. Such changes are becoming more common in practice, so crafts exporters and manufacturers should ensure that they are aware of these trends, too.

Ethical marketing/Fair trade issues. For many years there was a belief in the developed world that some production units in developing countries were unhealthy and exploitative towards their workers. Examples were found of poor and sometimes dangerous working conditions in workshops supplying the export market. Some enterprises took advantage of restrictive or lax labour laws and low wage conditions prevalent in the producer country. Many extreme examples have been exposed by various agencies in both market and producing countries, bringing about improvements in

working conditions. As a result of this exposure, significant changes have occurred. In the past decade ethical marketing has emerged on a more formal and structured basis in the major market countries. Fair trade organizations are increasing in number. Several major retail companies in the United States and Europe have signed commitments to buy their merchandise only from producers who agree to provide reasonable wages, safe working conditions and other benefits to their workforce. Initial results indicate that improvements are on the rise.

Producers should be aware that conditions inside their own workshops can have a bearing on their trading relationships with consumer markets.

Quality-of-life index. There has been a growth in public and government awareness that auditing economic improvements alone does not necessarily result in a significant improvement in people's real quality of life. It is also essential to measure people's access to adequate housing, health, social welfare and education services, if a true assessment is to be made of improvement in overall living conditions. This led to the establishment of a Real Quality-of-Life Index and the use of the Social Audit as measuring devices. While there is no clear evidence that consumer markets understand the details of this index, many retailers in market countries know that consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the social and working conditions of producers in developing countries who make the products they purchase. Organizations committed to improving working conditions in their suppliers' workshops will probably include queries about these conditions in their business terms.

Environmental issues. Also incorporated in these commitments are government and corporate attitudes to environmental and ecological issues. For example, wood-product manufacturers are being requested to provide official certification that their timber is obtained from an ecological and environmentally sustainable source. Paper-based and cardboard carton packaging now tends to contain a larger percentage of recycled material, and is clearly labelled as being made from recycled material. Other producers using chemicals to treat textiles, wood and metal are being encouraged to use more environmentally friendly processes, or being taught to develop safe disposal methods for their waste chemicals.

Producers should be aware of social, environmental and ecological issues in the target market-place.

Business partnerships. The relationship between buyer and producer is shifting. For years, importers paid little or no attention to the production environment, being interested only in the cheapest product in the correct quantity on the right delivery date. If the producer complained, the buyer went elsewhere. Producers receiving this kind of treatment from buyers developed a counter-strategy. Samples would be excellent and priced attractively. Once an order was obtained, it could be completed poorly and

delivered late. Patterns of mutual distrust generated images of greedy importers and uncaring producers on a global basis. And these patterns still exist to some degree.

But market competitiveness increasingly shows that the best quality products and prices emerge from a relationship with producers that is mutually confident, supportive and advantageous.

More and more importers are building serious, long-term relationships with a limited number of suppliers. They invest both time and finance in the development of their suppliers. In doing this they expect commitment to improved efficiency and quality on the part of the producer. Larger buyers now provide producers with some of the following: regular market-trend intelligence information; regular visits to the consumer country and market outlets, to increase producers' market awareness; training and guidance on product development, placing their own designers in the producer's workplace; health-and- safety training for craft producer management and workforce, and contributions to social and economic benefit inputs for the producer's workforce.

Change is slow, but large international agencies are looking to commercial business to behave sensitively in all aspects of their trading relationships, showing respect equally to the consumer, buyer, producer, production workshop and the environment.

**The benefits of trade fairs do not come automatically.
The best results are frequently achieved by:**

- ensuring that the enterprise possesses the capabilities needed to enter the export market
- identifying a potential target market through inquiries and local investigation
- undertaking thorough market research in the home country as well as the target market
- knowing that commitment to long-term strategy can bring significant results
- participating in the same fair over several consecutive years in order to help build credibility in a market.



Checklist of information for market research

1. Are the enterprise's capabilities, strengths and weaknesses known?

2. Home country research – sources of information

- Embassies, trade commissions, cultural centre libraries
- Local government, TSIs, professional associations, public libraries
- Foreign magazines, trade association and government publications
- The Internet

3. Target country research

Product categories

- Identify producer's product categories in retail market-place
- Study competitive products for diversity, quality and trend
- Note packaging and labelling requirements for transportation and display
- Investigate product range, collection and set patterns within the market-place
- Note product diversification/adaptation within current capacity of producer's manufacturing capabilities

Market channels

- Identify market channels selling most product categories made by the producer
- Study high- and low-level outlets within each interesting market channel
- Note potential target customers for special product development and direct contact on future visits

Market conditions

- Identify importing, customs clearance and forwarding agencies
 - Identify major cargo terminals and freight forwarding companies
 - Study import regulations, tariffs and quotas, customs and excise regulations and procedures applicable in the country
 - Collect latest information on ethical trading and environmental issues
 - Note legal requirements in terms of health, safety, packaging and labelling
-

Evaluation and selection

Identifying the trade fair

Having established that there is an interest in attempting to enter a particular market, it is necessary to clearly identify an appropriate trade fair in that market. Apart from the market interest there are other factors which influence the choice of a particular trade fair.

Product categories and themes. The chief question in any exhibitor's mind is whether the products will fit in with the general image or theme of the exhibition. It would be a wrong decision if makers of machine-woven plastic floor mats found themselves in an exhibition of specialist hand-tufted carpets.

Timing. Timing is a vital factor, as there is little point in exhibiting in an event if the companies cannot be ready by the show dates or meet resulting orders on time. Artisan enterprises producing seasonal decorations or gifts have to be aware that their exhibiting time must coincide when there is the greatest interest in the market.

Costs. Costs of participation are a third key consideration. The decision whether to exhibit depends on availability of funding, either from within the participant enterprise or from an external source. Participation in group or national stands can be supported by a subsidized craft industry group or national or international funding.

Fair profile. An in-depth assessment of the quality, reputation and precise suitability of a trade fair for a particular product calls for reliable research. There is usually no clear-cut qualitative answer as to whether a trade fair is right, but it is a good idea to visit it before the decision is made to participate. This is the best way of judging what chance the product could have at the next show, and the best locations and size of stands and decorations required.

Try to visit a trade fair before making a decision.

Information sources on trade fairs

If a visit cannot be made, some of the following information sources should be studied.

Catalogues of previous fairs and other printed material. These can often be found in public libraries in the country where the fair is held. The fair organizers may also be contacted to see whether they are willing to provide any publications from previous exhibitions. These catalogues contain a good deal of information about the 'exhibitor profile' – the numbers and types of organizations that exhibited on previous occasions. There are also advertisements for individual exhibitors which inform about the type of merchandise on display. The type and quality of the exhibitors will give an indication of the reputation of the event.

Organizers' published data. Information about the buying power of the audience is also needed. Audience figures alone are not enough, although for many events they are still the only statistical information provided to the potential exhibitor. Some organizers carry out more useful research and publish audience figures categorized by broad job title, industry sector, nationality and so on – because trade-fair organizers are selling sales opportunities, not just floor space.

Independent data. In several major market countries, independently published statistical material enables the exhibitor to compare one fair with another using identical criteria. Much of this material can be found in the reference section of public libraries in major cities. The most meaningful statistics apply to visitors and their buying power. Figures of

space occupied, countries of origin and the numbers of exhibitors can provide useful insights to the researcher.

Contact with the fair organizers. Questions should be asked which apply to the individual marketing problem and the answers should indicate whether the event is suitable. For example, in what specific media is the trade fair being advertised?

Advice from exhibitors and visitors. Finally, it is worth listening to recommendations from personal contacts who either exhibited or visited the event previously.



Checklist to evaluate a trade fair (for use with market research data)

1. Products exhibited

- Study the product theme of the fair
- Assess number of companies exhibiting similar products to investigating enterprise
- Check hall arrangements by product category

2. Visitors' profiles

- Note categories: non-business (general public, collectors, researchers, students), or business (by trade and by job functions within the visiting company)
- Record type of visiting companies (buying offices, retailers, other intermediaries, alternative trading organizations, architects, interior designers and decorators, corporations, institutions, etc.)
- Identify nationality/geographic characteristics (countries, province, cities, neighbourhoods) and, if possible, demographic characteristics (on the basis of age, gender, economic bracket, racial mix)

3. Exhibitors' profiles

- Obtain numbers and types of exhibiting companies (and, if possible, their importance within the sector or branch)
- Break down by local or foreign (by country)
- Break down by corporate national stands (and, if possible, by other indirect exhibitors and direct exhibitors by country)

4. Fair profile

- History (number of past exhibitions), reputation and ranking within the sector or branch (i.e. according to mass-media reporting, articles in specialized trade journals, assessment of experienced trade and professional contacts)
- Admission and registration policies (trade or consumer fair), national or international, detailed contractual registration terms and delays, as well as cost of space, furnishings, stand average size/options/construction/local attendance/maintenance and/or cleaning – if and when applicable, transportation, other services, etc.
- Detailed information on promotion, publicity and other services provided by the show organizer (including trade-fair catalogues and statistical/qualitative evaluation of past exhibitions)

5. Other

- Availability and review of competing fairs (including period, dates, locations)
 - Possibilities for obtaining government or other support, or sharing space with other exhibitors
-