The importance of customer journey analysis for exhibition success

Developed in partnership with:

AMR International.
The ability to drive long-term value for exhibitors is particularly important for event organisers because ROI is not as demonstrable or attributable as other services that compete for the same spend, such as digital marketing. The direction for tradeshows is to position themselves as the long-term strategic partner of exhibitors rather than the short-term, tactical partner. Achieving this requires organisers to focus on what exhibitors value the most: high visitor quality and high visitor numbers.

To drive visitor quality and numbers, it is crucial that organisers form relationships with their visitors. Effective marketing strategies are key to creating these relationships. One way of creating effective marketing campaigns is to personalise them. A proven approach to get there is to create a small number of ‘personas’ that represent the bulk of their visitors. By understanding the needs and wants of these personas they can personalise communications appropriately. This is a proven marketing approach that leads to:

- **Increased conversion** – This could be especially powerful in events where a huge amount is invested in getting visitors to the event
- **Reduced churn** – The cost of recruiting a new visitor is multiple times that of retaining an existing one and churn in events can be high
- **Utility for the customer which enables cut-through for the sender** – Personalised emails receive more engagement than traditional non-personalised email

However, with a growing number of channels through which to communicate, and nuanced campaigns required for each persona, marketing campaigns can become very complex. Customer journeys can help marketers approach this tangled web of information in a structured way, unpicking where it fails and where it adds value.

**Understanding what customers want and how our exhibition offer compares**

For any marketer, there are three key questions:

1. What is the actual customer journey that potential visitors go through before coming to the show?
2. How effective and how efficient are marketing activities as part of that journey?
3. What drives the non-visitor decision not to come?

The starting point to answer all these questions is to create a customer journey map. Customer journey maps represent the complete set of experiences which customers go through when interacting with a company or brand using internal data, quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews. They look at what customers are trying to achieve with each set of interactions and whether or not they can achieve this in a satisfactory way. They also highlight points of frustration, broken processes and whether the internal workings of the organisation support the customer’s end goals. In practice, they are best underpinned by analysis that enables the company to quantify where improvements will drive the most value and prioritise resources accordingly.
Customer journeys are made up of four parts:

- **Touchpoint inventory** – Maps all interactions between the customer and the organiser. Data comes from internal sources e.g. website analytics and insights help inform channel and marketing strategies *(answers question 1)*

- **Customer pain points** – Identifies areas of customer pain across touch points. Data comes from qualitative customer interviews and quantitative evaluation of each transition leading to immediately implementable actions *(answers question 2)*

- **Behavioral stages** – Flips the touchpoints so they are viewed as customer goals along the journey and highlights where current functionality and internal processes enable or inhibit achieving these goals *(answers question 2)*

- **Customer considerations** – Associates customer emotions to these goals; areas of most frustration lead to churn *(answers question 3)*

Producing customer journey maps is not straightforward for the simple reason that understanding what customers want is very different to understanding what companies think customers want. Objectivity is crucial and it is important that organisers try and ignore their instincts and experience, and instead listen to what customers tell them.

For example, if one conclusion is that customers lack information at the point at which they arrive at an event, the first reaction might be that ‘they haven’t read the emails.’ This makes sense because there is likely a whole team of people internally who are responsible for the emails and that can work on trying to improve this problem. However, a better place to start would be “is email the channel customers want us to use?” While it may lead to a better answer, it is a harder question because its influence reaches far beyond email opens and into the realms of the organisational structure. But, if organisers are serious about driving value to customers in the longer term, these are the difficult questions they must answer.

---

**Using customer journeys to help with attribution**

One of the most important requirements of customer journey analysis is to triangulate data from several sources. This ensures that not only can organisers understand what is and isn’t working, they can also understand *why*.

Understanding visitor motives can add depth to analysis that couldn’t be found elsewhere. Contextual insights from market studies and internal databases can shed light on questions such as:

- How do visitors gather professional information, especially with regards to trade shows?
- Which touchpoints are decisive in terms of visitors’ final decision on attending a certain show?
- How do they prepare for a trade show visit?
- Which of our advertising do they recognise and how do they evaluate our touchpoints?

Insights like this are crucial for solving one of the biggest headaches for marketers – attribution. If marketers understand *when* and *how* a visitor makes a decision to attend, they can select an attribution model that reflects this and therefore more accurately understand the ROI of their activity.
How effective is our programmatic advertising campaign?

Quantitative survey
- Recall & recognition by registered/ potential attendees
- Relevance in terms of registration
- Quantitative evaluation of campaign

Qualitative survey
- Qualitative evaluation of banners
- Likes/ dislikes
- Associations

Internal sources of information
- KPI’s incl. impressions, CTR/ VTR, ticket conversion
- Spendings
- Marketing plan incl. timing, objectives

Since triangulation integrates several data sources, insights become more conclusive and detailed

Looking at real world examples

It is clear that change is underway when it begins to impact established institutions and as in other industries, organisers need to shift to a customer-first thinking. We are seeing challenger events within the industry and one point of differentiation is customer experience.

Messe Munich is, for example, placing more focus on visitors. As a result they have begun to analyse in-depth the customer journeys for some of their tradeshows to understand where improvements can be made. Two examples of a journey specific to a persona are given on the following page.

The outcomes of these analyses range from general insights like usage scenarios of social media in a certain industry to tangible details like reasons why a certain ad was not associated well enough with the respective trade fair. Actions taken are mainly related to marketing planning (e.g. shifts in budget allocation, new/ adjusted activities) and implementation (e.g. changes to CD or emailing content, UX based website optimisation).
Visitor journey mappings combined with personas help to illustrate and differentiate segments and their requirements

Mr. Li
45 Years old
• Head of R&D in a mid-sized, Chinese company in Shanghai
• First-time visitor
• Learning about the show on social media
• Looking for technical solutions and new suppliers

Alice
42 Years old
• Head of sales in a large, German company
• Loyal, regular visitor
• Looking to network with key accounts, refresh existing leads
Better customer journeys improve retention

Improved visitor journeys increase visitor satisfaction thanks to better effectiveness and efficiency of visit, especially pre-show and on-site.

Another advantage to creating the best possible customer journey is that it increases the chances of new visitors hearing positive feedback about the event, which in turn increases their chances of attending.

To conclude, visitor journey thinking should therefore become a cornerstone of exhibition marketing practices, aided by the upskilling of marketing teams and the continuous improvement in on – and off-line visitor behaviour tracking technologies. The improvement in effectiveness of marketing efforts and spend through a bespoke marketing strategy for each event will generate better outcomes for participants and organisers alike.

About AMR International

AMR International is the world leader in strategy consulting for the events industry. This incredibly diverse and highly profitable industry is facing unprecedented change, as attendees expect a more connected and compelling experience. AMR’s role is to create lasting value for its clients, while guiding the transformation of the events industry. AMR supports every aspect of event and organizer transformation, from group and market entry strategy, acquisition search, commercial due diligence and performance improvement through to pricing, digital strategy, and data analytics.

About Messe Munich

Messe Munich is one of the leading exhibition organizers worldwide with more than 50 of its own trade shows for capital goods, consumer goods and new technologies. As well as the 200 events held annually at the exhibition center in Munich, Messe Munich has a global presence, with a network of associated companies in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.

This White Paper was written by AMR International and Messe Munich

For further information please contact:

**AMR International**

Florent Jarry  
Head of Global Events Practice  
florent.jarry@amrinternational.com  
+44 20 7534 3609 / +33 6 2880 6509

Ailis McKernan  
Head of Digital  
aillis.mckernan@amrinternational.com  
+1 646 465 5978

**Messe Munich**

Stefan Reiser  
Head of Market Research  
stefan.reiser@messe-muenchen.de  
+49 89 949 20980 / +49 162 255 3690

Dr. Nina Schniering  
Head of Corporate Development  
nina.schniering@messe-muenchen.de  
+49 89 949 20035