



Why there's no business like **SHOW** business

Trade shows, exhibitions and fairs have been a fixture of business life for more than a century. But are they still relevant in our digital age? Bruno Bouygues, CEO of industrial and international automotive products company GYS, argues that today these events are more important than ever - but for very different reasons.

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The technological revolution has brought undoubted benefits to manufacturers. It has changed not only how we make things, but also how we do business.

Previously, potential customers either visited our facilities, or we came to them. Exhibitions became an efficient way to showcase our latest products while reaching potentially thousands of prospects and expanding our markets. Visitors would often attend shows for several days, busy learning about the latest technologies and applications in their sector.

Then the internet happened. Companies could highlight their innovations on increasingly sophisticated websites, post training videos on YouTube, and interact with customers on social networks. Virtual exhibitions sprang up, catering to those looking for an online marketplace. Perhaps – some observers suggested – the days of the trade show were numbered.

Shifting focus

How wrong they were. Today, there are more international, regional and national industry events than ever before, with participants and visitors from around the globe. But their primary purpose has changed, with the focus shifting from products to people.

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Therefore, the discussion has now moved from manufacturers explaining their products to buyers relating their specific needs. In the process, the direct correlation between shows and sales has gone. The emphasis is less to impress with spectacular stands. The dynamics have changed to a more fluid and sophisticated interaction between visitor and exhibitor.

Responding to needs

Trade shows give buyers an opportunity to compare competitors at first hand by the quality of responses to their needs. Brand loyalty means less in this environment than the ability to listen, understand and adapt to the changing needs of customers. Buyers want to partner with strong, adaptable companies that have a stake in the future.

Fifteen years ago, our company had perhaps 30 to 50 competitors worldwide. Today, as the GYS product range has extended and we have entered more markets, there are over two hundred. The competitive landscape has exploded. Small wonder, then, that potential clients are getting back to basics.

Clients want to do business person to person, judging a supplier by not only the product it provides but the service it offers and how well it understands its issues. International trade shows, wherever they are held, give every participant the opportunity to impress.

It's certainly where we will continue to find our clients, old and new, and where they expect us to be. Exchanging ideas, sharing experiences over a coffee, and helping people solve their problems.

Who is Bruno Bouygues?

Before graduating in 2002 from INSEAD with an MBA, Bruno attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where in 1999 he obtained an MSc.

Included in his work experience are three years in the Mergers & Acquisitions department of Merrill Lynch in London; a position within the Corporate Finance department of Société Générale in New York; two years of management consulting at Oliver Wyman in France, and nine years as the CEO of GYS, an industrial group, headquartered in France.

With 750 employees in five countries (France, UK, Germany, Italy and China), GYS engineers and manufactures welding equipment, automotive battery chargers, and automotive collision repair equipment.