

# Expo Industry Associations and their Approach to Globalization

*by Larry Kulchawik*

It has been said that the trade show industry in North America contributes nearly \$100 billion to the GNP of the economy. Of this \$100 billion, exhibit organizers, show contractors, and exhibit suppliers contribute nearly \$21 billion. To support this segment, there are 35 Industry associations dedicated (in one form or another) to the success of meetings, conferences, tradeshow and events. The 35 associations represent specialty segments range from show



organizers, venues, show contractors, exhibit suppliers, and exhibitors. Each association has been formed to support their members who represent a specific piece of the expo pie we call the Meeting, Events, and Exposition Industry.

Why all the expo associations? Networking with peers and sharing knowledge helps nearly everyone do what they do better. The benefits of association membership can range from staying abreast of new technology, design trends, and international opportunities to finding new customers and partners to grow your business. The value in association membership is gained by getting involved in the industry. The secondary value demonstrates your support of the expo industry and to promote its continued success.

A recent trend, that all associations are addressing, has been “how to effectively expand your business internationally.” For 30 years, a group called GLOBALSTRAT has been collecting independent data on how international associations are approaching global membership, programs and engagement. The information and insights are used to help associations make better informed decisions when developing their international strategies and business plans. They recently published a survey called Association Global Growth Trends.

According to Terrance Barkan, CAE at GLOBALSTRAT, “Associations are entering a period of great opportunity to grow globally as the world continues to become more closely connected and as information technologies give even the smallest organizations the ability to reach members almost anywhere in the world. This is especially true considering that the global population is projected to expand by approximately 2 billion people between now and 2050. The association surveys we have taken over the years help us to better understand how associations are approaching international development and allows other associations to learn and compare their own approaches.”

The survey asked the questions:

### *How international are you today?*

One of the areas GLOBALSTRAT wanted to explore and understand was just how “international” associations are and whether there is a difference in outcomes for those that have a more international dimension to their membership. The survey revealed that the more international (members and revenue) the association, the more likely it was to experience faster overall growth.

### *As an international association, what are the major obstacles you face?*

International associations face a long list of potential obstacles and challenges when trying to grow their organizations. A full half of all associations that responded to the latest survey stated that “determining the appropriate business model” was a major obstacle.

This is incredibly important since the “business model” determines how an organization sustains itself. Other important obstacles included; identifying qualified partners and suppliers, accurately estimating a market’s potential, legal and registration issues, language and culture, and competition from other associations.

### *Does a strategy make a difference?*

Another area that GLOBALSTRAT wanted to explore was whether having a dedicated international growth strategy really makes a difference? The difference could not be more clear. Associations that not only had a strategy, but are implementing it, were much more likely to experience association member growth. In fact, having a strategy was the single most important factor for a successful association and for meeting attendance at events that are held internationally.

The exposition industry is now truly global. As exhibit supplier companies, and the expo associations who support them become better connected with the world marketplace they ensure success for the future growth of face to face marketing.

## National & World Meeting and Exhibition Industry Associations :

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| AMA (American Marketing Association)          | ASAE (Association of Associations)           |
| CEMA (Corporate Event Marketing Assoc)        | CEMA (Corporate Event Marketing Association) |
| CIC (Convention Industry Council)             | EDPA (Exhibit Designers & Producers Assoc)   |
| EPA (Event Planners Assoc)                    | ESCA (Exhibition Service Contractors)        |
| ESPA (Event Services Professionals)           | EACA (Exhibit Appointed Contractors)         |
| GMIC (General Meeting Industry Council)       | GMIC (Green Meeting Industry Council)        |
| GTP (Global Travel Professionals)             | HCEA (Healthcare Exhibitors Assoc)           |
| IAAM (Assoc for Auditorium Managers)          | IAEE (Int'l Assoc Exhibitions & Events)      |
| IAVM (Association of Venue Managers)          | ICCA (Congress & Convention Assoc)           |
| ICCA ( Int'l Congress & Convention Assoc)     | IELA (Int'l Exposition logistics Assoc)      |
| IFEA (Festivals & Events)                     | IFES (Federation of Exhibition Services)     |
| ILEA (Int'l Live Events Association)          | ISES (Int'l Special Events)                  |
| MPI (Meeting Professionals)                   | NACE (Association for Catering and Events))  |
| NCBMP (Coalition for Black Meeting Planners). | PCMA (Professional Convention Management)    |
| SGMP ( Government Meeting Professionals)      | SISO (Society Independent Show Organizers)   |
| UFI (World Expo Industry Association)         | TEA (The Exhibitor Advocate Association)     |
| EIC (Events Industry Council)                 | ACOM (Convention Operation Management)       |