

Historical Traces and Contemporary Approaches regarding Fairs and Exhibitions, as complex Instruments in Marketing

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Abstract

Fairs have evolved permanently since their appearance until now, in terms of content, forms of organization, means and techniques of realization. The organization's concerns to promote their offer more efficiently led to an increase of the role and importance of fairs, as marketing tools. "Fairs and exhibitions", an expression used in theory, but also in practice, can be used in every area of activity, of all companies, regardless their size and activity field, ensuring a tailored marketing, able to assure economic success and a positive image to all participants in these events.

The technological progress in all areas of activity, specific for the last 50-60 years, influenced in many ways, also the "fair and exhibitions industry."

In this paper we propose to analyze the general evolution of fairs and how they became, in time, tools of intern and international marketing.

Key words: fairs, direct communication, business success

J.E.L. classification: M10, M31, M37, Z10

1. Introduction

In Romanian language, the term „fair” received over time, a large number of senses/meanings, of which we have selected some, considering them representative for the aspects that we seek to present in the content of this article. By "fair" it was referred to a closed, delimited place from a locality, where they sold cattle, grain, wood and others, or a public place where they sold various products for consumption; in other situations, the fair served as a trade center between products made in the mountain regions and the plain regions.

Understood as a place for trading goods (which, at first, was realized as bartering and then as an act of sale-purchase), the fair was considered synonymous with the cattle fair, the mart, the marketplace. In the urban context, the term of fair was used to define a human settlement, smaller or larger (thus we explain why it appears in the names of several localities, like: Targu-Neamt, Targu-Jiu, Targu-Mures, Targu-Frumos) or in order to mark off the downtown of the city, namely the area where there were shops, in other words, where it was located the shopping center. In the same time, in everyday speech, the term "fair" is used to refer to a series of actions / activities: arrangement, agreement, understanding, bargain, combination, haggle, convention, discussion, amounts of money given and received, contract, deal concluded, transaction, sale and purchase. (Scrisul romanesc, 1929; Academia Republicii Populare Romane, 1955-1957; Universidad de la Laguna, 1958-1966; Litera International, 2002; Univers enciclopedic, 1998; Univers enciclopedic Gold, 1998).

2. The history of fairs

Internationally, it is known that fairs existed since ancient times. It is mentioned that in the

middle ages, fairs were organized in the major cities of France, England, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland and were considered the most important forms of European trade in those times (Constantin, 2014). Taking into account that, in that period, travel possibilities were difficult and expensive, the fairs were organized annually and represented the only possibility to purchase procured goods/products at great distances (Zamfir, 1997).

In our country, we won't find too many precise information related to the appearance of fairs, and the chroniclers remembered in their writings more information about wars, the erection of churches and monasteries. It can be assumed that the organization of popular and religious celebrations, which were gathering lots of people, was exploited by traders/merchants, who came in the respective places with their offer of goods (thus we explain why they were also called „townfolks”) (Bucurescu, 2009). It is known that the first administrative organization of fairs was made by Alexandru Lapusneanu in 1561 (Universidad de la Laguna, 1958-1966), and on May 20, 1865 was held in Bucharest the first national exhibition of agricultural and industrial products, due to the initiative of two distinguished scientists: Ion Ionescu de la Brad and Petre S. Aurelian. This event was considered to be the expression of tradition ... "annual organizing of dozens and perhaps hundreds of fairs, marts, in all the areas of the country, where buyers and sellers meet to satisfy their needs ... leaving particular traces in people's and authorities mentality, occasions on which the first signs of later exhibition and trade dialogue were blossomed." (Zamfir, 1997, p. 24)

The activity of fairs began to be supported also by various publications. Thus, in 1988 the weekly newspaper called „Expozantul” appeared, addressed especially to those interested in participating in fairs and exhibitions. Some years later, in 1906, on the occasion of the opening of the first national exhibition entitled „Luna Bucurestilor”, it was released the first number of the newspaper „Adevarul de la Expoziție”, considered to be ... "the only newspaper approved by the Exhibition's Commissary" (Zamfir, 1997, p. 24). In various works of the Romanian literature (we recall only the writings signed by Creanga, Alecsandri, Vlahuta, Caragiale (Universidad de la Laguna, 1958-1966), it is referred to fairs, being described the activities that occurred during a fair, the state of mind that it was created, the importance/significance that the fair had for the life of a community.

In the publication "Moftul roman", from May 18, 1901, an outstanding personality of the Romanian literature, the dramatist I.L. Caragiale, done (without knowing the elements of marketing) a market study, detailed enough, regarding "Targul de Mosi" (from Bucharest): ... 'ginger bread – panoramas – tricolours – braga – balloons – soldiers – suburbanite – lampions – lemonade – tailcoats – decorations – decorated – ladies – menageries – provincials – whistles - beggars – tubs – bagpipes – children – ministers – pickpockets – gapers – babysitters – nannies – buckboards – music – fireworks – snapshots – comedy – raffles – pots – flags - barrel organs - vanilla ice cream – steaks – calicos – mugs – wormwood – ponies – bicycles – horses – cows - oxen – gendarmes – nieces – aunts – uncles – cousins – widows – orphans – butchers – wheat – coats – mattresses – coverlets – flowers – chairs – beds – tables – mirrors – earrings – rings - coffee pots – Turkish" (Bucurescu, 2009). In all the entire description, which some might consider it chaotic and senseless, reference is made to: fair participants (sellers, potential buyers, visitors, service providers); goods diversity; attraction, environment and ambience created by the fair; purpose/purposes of participants (some wanted to sell, others to buy, some wanted to be noticed, others came just for a walk). Aspects of verbal and nonverbal behaviour of participants at the fair (especially those related to clothing, gestures, attitude and other elements captured in various photo-audio-visual materials) can be considered elements that express the culture of a nation at a certain time, while the structure of goods offer and the technical-material endowment of the fair reflected the level of economic development of an area or country.

3. Fairs – marketing tools

In marketing literature, it can be noticed that, most often, the expression "fairs and exhibitions" is used to define all the promotional events through which profit-making organizations (and more recently also non-profit ones) from various fields, present their varied offer (in a continuous process of diversification and innovation) to the public. Some experts believe that between fairs and exhibitions would not be substantive differences, while others confine the two concepts, by

their characteristics. According to this point of view, the fairs gather, in a balanced formula, the commercial and communication function, while exhibitions focus on the communication function (Adascalitei, 2003)

Within fairs and exhibitions, there are three main categories of participants: the exhibitors, the professional visitors and the organizers of the fair. In this study we intend to analyze the fair as a marketing tool, used in particular by exhibitors. When referring to the interests of the three categories, regarding the participation in fairs and exhibitions, it might be thought that, to some extent, there are discrepancies between them, because each one aims to achieve its objectives. But, in the marketing approach, it has to be taken into account to be ensured the convergence of their interests just as a condition to assure the success of the fair as a marketing tool for all participants.

Since their appearance, fairs combined the commercial function with the communication function. Over the time, these two functions have recorded changes regarding their role and how each one manifests. Of all the issues presented in the part of history of fairs, it can be said that predominant in terms of importance, was the commercial function of fairs (they were considered the main forms of purchasing products, for different categories of buyers).

Even in this situation, the communication function was present and aimed to support the act of sale. Perhaps, as the degree of civilization, the level of socio-economic development, the diversification of the offer and the possibility of choosing goods increased, it would have been created the conditions for a resetting of the importance of the two roles of fairs. In addressing this issue, we believe it can not be discussed about a possible competition or substitution of their roles. Is it accurate to understand that, in the evolution of the concept of fair, each function sustains the other one, they are compatible and for an accurate marketing approach, we shall interpret them only together.

It is appreciated that fairs represent a complex marketing tool, which can not be replaced with any other promotional technique. By participating in the fair, the producing company/exhibitor, directly presents its offer and sends information (verbal or using a variety of written or audio-video materials), about: product features; manufacturing technology; way of functioning and of usage or consumption. (Zamfir, 1997)

Also, through the information submitted, it can be pursued the attraction of new clients or to bring into notice through what aspects the offer of a company is different from the competitors offers. In the process of preparing to participate in a fair, the exhibiting company involves and combines all the components of its marketing activity, from selecting the products that are going to be presented at the fair/exhibition, fixing the price or alternatives of prices, choosing the distribution means, conceiving the merchandising at the exhibition's location, editing promotional materials (catalogues, brochures, booklets, etc.), conceiving audio-visual materials, preparation of various actions of promotion at the sale/exhibit place. Participation in exhibition events also represents occasions for gathering information about visitors and competitors behavior, in order to shape a database, needed for the future direction of the activity of all categories of participants.

The purpose of the participation of exhibitors in a fair, is not, for a long time, just selling products or services. The current dimension of a fair, as a marketing tool, includes a variety of actions and benefits for the company, among which we shall mention: meeting and direct communication with a large number of potential business partners, in one place and in a short time, ensuring the premises for developing partnerships, increasing the number of signed contracts and of the volume of sales; launching new products; testing new products; organizing tastings and/or demonstrations of the use and operation of the products; implementation of marketing research into how products are accepted by buyer/consumers; observing their behavior towards their own offer, but also towards the competitors offer; getting information about current and potential competitors, direct or indirect; gathering information about trends in their field of activity, etc. (Constantin, 2014; Zamfir, 1997; Adascalitei, 2003)

Correlated with the aspects listed above, various studies highlight, that in practice, approximately 40% of the marketing budget of a company is allocated for participation in fairs and exhibitions, which comes to underline the importance and effectiveness of using this tool of marketing activity by any exhibiting company (Constantin, 2014). At the same time, inside companies, is emphasized the idea to form an integrated marketing strategy through fairs and exhibitions, starting from educating the conception that fairs can fulfill multiple functions in the

global marketing strategy. It was demonstrated, also through research, that companies participating in fairs based on objectives set by the sales department, are registering weaker results compared to those obtained by companies that address fairs in an integrated way, in marketing strategy. In this context, it can be considered that participation in fairs and exhibitions can be a waste of time and money for companies that are limited to setting goals related to sales. In the same time, the success from participating in a fair depends on how resources are targeted and managed and not especially in the amount of invested resources (Barbu, 2015).

It can be said that for exhibitors, fairs represent a unique opportunity, through which they can use all the marketing tools they have and which they can valorize, in order to ensure their company's success. Due to these issues, which highlight the increasing role of fairs, the decisions related to selecting, preparing and organizing the participation in fairs have passed, currently, in the charge of the marketing department of the company.

Practice shows that, increasingly more, direct communication, face to face dialogue with current and potential partners, became the main advantage of participating in fairs and exhibitions. A good communication in business ensures the increase of sales and the promotion of the image of the exhibiting company. Also, the presence in a fair of the representatives of a producing company (as exhibitors), may represent an opportunity of communicating (to the visitors) the identity, the culture and confidence in that respective brand. With all the performances recorded in information technology, it seems that direct interaction between partners can not be replaced, remaining an asset of fairs and exhibitions (Constantin, 2014). The communication ensured by participating in a fair, represents for exhibitors an exchange of information and news, that can be used in guiding the efficiency of the company's activity. In the same time, direct communication is reflected in the quality of the business relationship, an element that participants at the fairs appreciate more and more (Naumof). We shall also remember that, in the specialty literature is being discussed (since 1983, by the specialist L. Berry) the concept of relationship marketing, as a new approach of relations between business partners (participants in the exchange process), based on high trust and mutual engagement. Relationship marketing expresses a new way of thinking in marketing and is considered to be comprised of a variety of relationships, networks and interactions, through which is aimed creating, maintaining and developing the relationships with business partners (Popescu, 2003). Regarding this approach, we believe attending fairs contributes to the development of relationship marketing and increases business success.

4. The influence of the technical progress on fairs and exhibitions

The ways of organizing exhibition events are in a continuous process of evolution, determined by the outcome of technical progress in all activity fields. The prestigious exhibition centers are, nowadays, modern, imposing buildings, that have advanced technical endowments, capable of ensuring the best conditions of exhibit and product presentation and of offering the possibility of effective communication to attain the objectives pursued by each category of participants. The appearance of the Internet and the increased need to obtain more quickly, accurate information, for taking decisions, in a very dynamic environment, are the main factors that have generated the concern to create virtual fairs and exhibitions. It is believed that virtual events are designed to provide online information about the products and services of exhibitors. Most often, they can be linked with real events, but they can also be active after closing the real event, for periods of several months (Stoica and Rosu, 2010). Online events can be considered complementary or extensions of traditional events, that bring benefits due to the specific advantages they offer to both visitors and exhibitors. Thus, online events can be visited at any moment of the day, from any location, without travelling, giving the opportunity to see the entire event (fair/exhibition), people being able to participate in demonstrations/products testing and to communicate with exhibitors. In the same time, exhibitors can participate in a unlimited number of online events, permanently updating the information provided. It also eliminates the constraint of participants selection, present in the traditional events, due to the level of costs. (Stoica and Rosu, 2010).

We believe that the fear, that participation in traditional events may decrease, as extending the organization of online-events, is groundless. The reality shows that the organization of virtual fairs and exhibitions constitutes a common practice currently, in US, extending in countries in the

western Europe. It is confirmed the opinion of some specialists that online events are complementary and that they support traditional events. In Romania, online events are, for now, relatively narrowed. Few organizers understand or have the capability to be involved in such events.

5. Conclusions

Fairs and exhibitions have been assimilated by the science and the marketing practice as distinct promotional techniques. Regarding fairs, they have emerged as expressions of the exchange of goods and time have demonstrated their ability to mix the selling function with the communication function, becoming (together with the exhibitions) a complex marketing tool.

Without communication no company can exist in the nowadays business environment. From this reason, companies have become more concerned to invest in people who are able to promote the activity of the company and to develop the relationship with customers and other business partners. The reality highlights the increasing interest of companies to participate in fairs and exhibitions, understanding the advantages they can obtain using this marketing tool.

It is expected that the process of evolution of fairs, in terms of forms, methods and techniques of organization and development, will continue, being conditioned by the technical progress and by the concern of participants to realize, as well as they can, the objectives pursued.

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