



ACER Exhibits and Exhibit Express Succeed with Teamwork

by John Otten

In an increasingly competitive world, it is not a new revelation to say that strong relationships are the foundation to a successful business. But when it comes to building those strategic partnerships, answering the question "with whom?" or "how?" isn't always easy. Smart thinking and effective teamwork are needed to make the right decision and find partners with shared business values.

"Communication is the key to any successful operation," said Mark Crane, President of ACER Exhibits in Baltimore, MD. "The need for strong teamwork between two companies is as important as that between an exhibitor and an attendee."

Collaboration Makes It Work

When the need arose to hire a transportation company to deliver, unload, and help set up L3 Communications' high-tech military and surveillance systems exhibit at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station Complex in Maryland, ACER looked to Exhibit Express, a family-owned Allied Van Lines moving agent in Woburn, MA. The synergy between the two companies was the key to a successful move with an

exhibition that brought many unique challenges.

"L3 Communications is a multibillion dollar company specializing in defense electronics and communications," said Michael Dunne, vice president of ACER Exhibits, a full service custom tradeshow exhibit designer and manufacturer. "We had to reconfigure and design an exhibit representing more than 27 of L3's divisions, and we had to make it fit in an office atrium, an area much different than the usual exhibition space. Having a relationship with a company like Exhibit Express, who understands the business and has a commitment to success, makes doing business much easier."

ACER worked with Exhibit Express to execute the exhibition set up. Following extensive planning and communication with ACER, Exhibit Express coordinated the shipping, loading and unloading of L3's exhibit, which included shipping pallets that weighed between 200 and 500 pounds each and more than 120 display panels and banners. This was in coordination with ACER's installation and dismantling crew.

L3's exhibition lasted only a day and a half, so ACER and Exhibit Express had to work fast. Arriving at 5 am the day before the event, the Exhibit Express drivers each underwent a thorough background check and cargo search at Pax River Station due to the heightened security measures at the base. Unloading and set-up of the exhibit took six hours. Exhibit Express loaded all the empty containers and stored them for repacking. The Allied agent also installed a Masonite floor so the exhibit wouldn't scratch the existing floor. The event teardown went just as quickly. With the help of Exhibit Express, the boxes and pallets were returned to the exhibit and loaded onto the trucks in less than five hours.

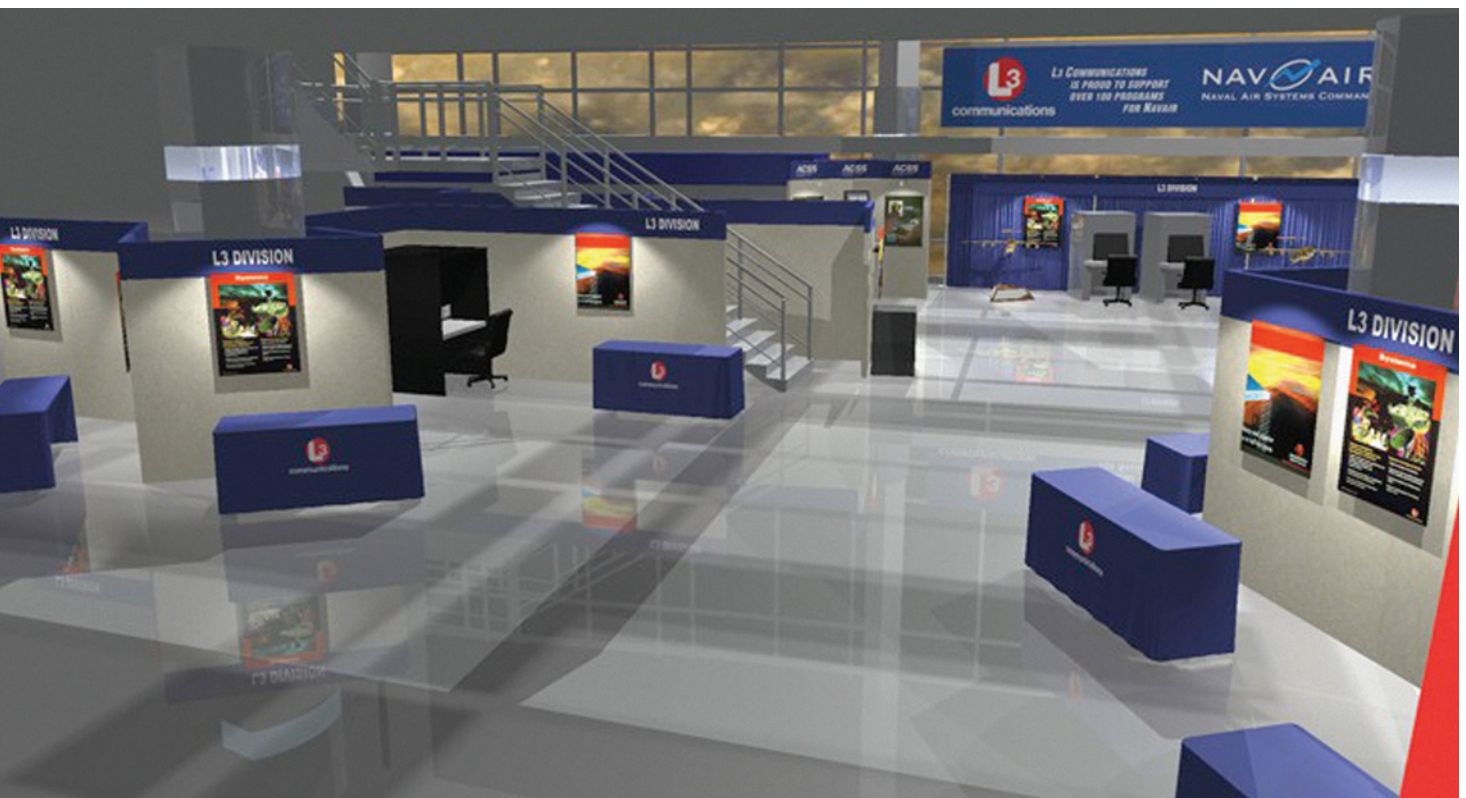
"One team of two drivers/van foremen and two skilled laborers was at ACER's and L3's beck and call," said Carmela Petruzzello, director of operations at Exhibit Express. "They were in Maryland for over a period of six days to carefully plan the strategy for the quick turnaround challenge and to provide expert assistance throughout the project. We all have

knowledge of how an exhibition needs to be moved, but I am confident L3's move was such a success because of the open communication between our three companies at all stages of the project. We were able to assure that everything was taken care of, our drivers were aware of the project details and there were no issues at the exhibition site."

Going The Distance

Petruzzello's commitment to communication is just one of the reasons her company is successful, and one of the reasons why her business relationship with ACER has the potential to grow and prosper. "I get an e-mail message detailing all the stops and arrivals of the trucks. The communication between her, her drivers and her customers is outstanding," said ACER Account Manager Susan Malizia.

"Our goal with our clients is to feel like an extension of their staff, rather than their vendor. We enjoy working with our customers and treat each shipment as our own precious cargo," Petruzzello *continued on page 41*



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mechanism in place for tallying which sales result from a given show versus other methods of solicitation.

Actions Speak Loudly

No matter what approach you take, you're bound to fail if your exhibit staff is ineffective, or worse, does more harm than good. At the least, it's a good idea to familiarize the people who'll be working in the booth with the way shows work, and to mix tradeshow vets with tradeshow neophytes. There are many companies that offer tradeshow staff training, and a wealth of printed and video material about at-show sales. Exhibitors need to realize that the best way to ready the booth staff and avoid gaffes is to use common sense. For instance, having to go to a tradeshow should never be used as a punishment. If you're planning to have a training session for potential booth personnel, don't rob them of good sales time to do so. Often, salespeople are already leery of shows as a waste of time.

Time is Relative

Some things to remind your tradeshow sales staff about, and some quick tips: • Time is different at a tradeshow. You only have a few seconds to engage a potential buyer, decide if they really are one, and pitch them. The tradeshow day is long; the atmosphere in halls can be weird and otherworldly after a few hours. Exhibit personnel need to pace themselves to avoid going off half cocked on the next attendee or falling into a stupor. • Goals for selling at shows, or whatever the primary function of a given show, need to be clearly spelled out so that booth people understand what's expected of them. Expectations from in-booth staff have to be reasonable, fluid, and fulfillable. • Booth people should know what they're selling. One of the most common irritants for attendees is when company reps don't know enough about the items being shown or sold. Your company will look awful if in-booth sales reps can't answer basic questions or have to keep running to others in the booth. • A system of rewards for sales or for gathering leads seems like a swell idea, but if you're offering incentives based on number of leads collected, you can be sure that booth people will stuff the ballots, so to speak. • If you're promoting highly technical products, make sure there's a pro in the booth who can do a credible job of explaining the product. • As noted above, show hours are long. As such, give booth personnel time away from the exhibit. If you don't, booth employees will wind up ignoring attendees and complaining to each other. There's nothing worse than approaching a booth and being summarily ignored. • Conversely, strong-arm tactics aren't appreciated. • Many companies, at least in my experience, swing the opposite way and overdo it when it comes to rules for booth deportment. Your people aren't automatons. No one really cares if someone's tie is loose as much as they do about getting good solid information about what's in the booth or what your company is promoting. Participating in shows needn't be rocket science. Know why your company is there, have a practical booth that does the job you plan for it, and staff your booth with friendly, knowledgeable people and you should be on solid ground.



Les Plesko, Editor

ACER Exhibits continued from page 12 explained. "We make it a priority to handle and care for exhibit moves as best as humanly possible. That's why Allied Van Lines as well as Exhibit Express' service goes above and beyond to protect our customers' valued property."

Exhibit Express began working with ACER in December of 2003. Since then, Exhibit Express has handled more than 100 shipments for ACER including airfreight deliveries.

"It's like they say - If you purchase something of lesser value, it won't last as long. If you pay a little more and get the best, it will last a lifetime," Petruzzello said. "This is why Exhibit Express' customer base has a loyalty of more than 10 to 15 years for most customers. We hope to add ACER Exhibits to that list!"

The two companies enjoy a valued partnership dedicated to the shared goals of unmatched customer satisfaction. These values are evident in not only their commitment to their customers, but their commitment to each other that the job will get done on time, without problems, and will be performed in a way that none of their competitors can match. Now that's teamwork!

For more information on Exhibit Express contact exhi.com. For info on ACER contact acerexhibits.com. For info on Allied Van Lines, contact allied.com.

John Otten is with Allied Van Lines.

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