

WHITE PAPER

# Take Control of Your Booth Budget

A Practical Guide for Exhibitors Using Custom & Rental Booth Designs



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*the*  
**TRADESHOW NETWORK**  
MARKETING GROUP

For many exhibitors, trade shows remain one of the most powerful opportunities to connect with buyers, distributors, and decision-makers. But creating an effective booth experience takes more than great design — it requires strategic budgeting, early planning, and a clear understanding of show requirements.

At The Tradeshow Network, we help exhibitors maximize every dollar of their investment through flexible custom and rental exhibit solutions, smart logistics planning, and budget-friendly design strategies. Whether you're preparing for a 10×10 inline or a 20×30 island, controlling your costs starts long before your booth hits the show floor.

Here's how to take full control of your exhibit budget and get the most value out of every show.

## Start With the Exhibitor Services Manual (ESM)

Before designing your booth or estimating expenses, review the Exhibitor Services Manual provided by the General Services Contractor (GSC). This document outlines everything that can impact your booth budget:

- Venue rules and regulations
- Target move-in/move-out schedules
- Material handling (drayage) rates
- Electrical, rigging, and plumbing requirements
- Height limits and structural restrictions
- Approved or required vendors
- Labor jurisdictions
- Discount deadlines for ordering services

**Pro Tip:** Many exhibitors save 10–25% simply by ordering services before early-bird deadlines listed in the ESM.

Understanding these guidelines ensures your booth design aligns with show requirements — and helps avoid costly last-minute changes.

## Four Steps to Take Control of Your Exhibit Budget

### 1. Stay Current on Industry Insights



Trade show costs evolve every year — from drayage rates to rigging fees. Staying informed helps you set a realistic budget and avoid surprises.

Our team tracks updates for major shows including PACK Expo, CES, IMTS, Automate, NRA, and RSNA, allowing clients to make better planning decisions.

### 2. Prepare Early to Avoid Unnecessary Costs

Unexpected charges often come from:

- Missed shipping deadlines
- Choosing heavy, oversized materials
- Last-minute graphic changes
- Underestimating electrical or AV needs
- Not reviewing union labor rules

Early planning with your exhibit partner allows you to design strategically and avoid rush fees, overtime labor, or costly reprints.

### 3. Stay Flexible as Your Program Evolves

Exhibit needs change — new products launch, booth sizes shift, and budgets fluctuate. Choosing rental booths or hybrid custom-rental solutions gives exhibitors cost-efficient flexibility:

- Scale up or down between shows
- Swap graphics or configurations easily
- Avoid long-term storage costs
- Refresh the look each season without rebuilding

Flexibility is one of the keys to staying on budget across multiple events.



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#### 4. Understand What Drives Your Booth Costs

Every component of your exhibit impacts your total investment, including:

- Booth structure or frame
- Graphics and branding
- Flooring
- Lighting and electrical
- AV equipment
- Furniture
- Shipping
- Material handling
- Labor
- Add-on services (Wi-Fi, catering, cleaning, etc.)

Knowing how each item is charged helps you allocate your budget to high-impact areas — and reduce spending on items that matter less.

#### Booth Structure: Custom vs. Rental

Your structure usually makes up about one-third of your total exhibit budget. Choosing the right approach depends on your goals.

##### Custom Booths

- Fully tailored architecture

- Maximum creativity and brand presence
- Ideal for flagship shows or immersive experiences

##### Rental Booths

- Lower upfront cost
- Fast turnaround times
- No storage or maintenance
- Ability to redesign annually using the same structure
- Great for multi-city show schedules

*Pro Tip: Ask about multi-show rental discounts or hybrid custom-rental builds to maximize value.*

#### Graphics & Branding: Where You Can Save

Graphics are one of the easiest areas to overspend — but also one of the easiest areas to optimize. Consider:

- SEG fabric graphics that can be reused across several shows
- Modular graphic walls instead of one large mural
- Digital screens for flexible messaging
- Lightweight materials that reduce shipping and drayage costs

Smart graphic planning pays off all season long.

#### Labor: The Hidden Budget Variable

Trade shows involve multiple labor categories, each with its own cost structure:

- Installation & dismantle (I&D) labor
- Rigging for overhead signs and lighting
- Electrical labor for power drops and wiring
- Forklift operators for heavy materials
- Plumbing if your booth requires water

Venue city, union rules, overtime windows, and show hours can all dramatically impact final labor costs. Designing a booth that minimizes complex labor needs can save thousands.



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## Shipping & Material Handling (Drayage)

Two major cost components exhibitors often underestimate:

- Shipping (Transportation)
- Freight carriers move your booth from storage or your location to the advanced warehouse or show site.

Choose an experienced trade show carrier to avoid:

- Split shipments
- Missed target time fees
- Re-deliveries
- Damaged crates
- Lead retrieval devices
- Furniture rental
- Sponsorship placements

## Material Handling (Drayage)

This covers movement of your freight from the loading dock to your booth space. Costs depend on weight, timing, and handling requirements.

Check your ESM for:

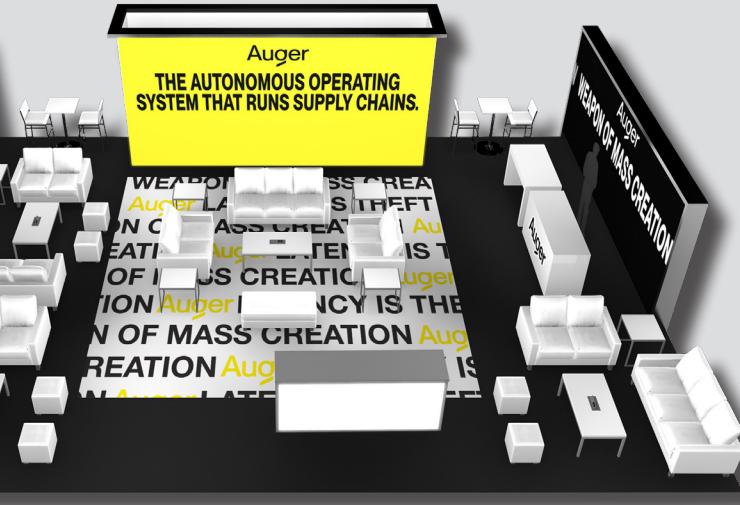
- Overtime surcharges
- Special handling classifications
- Marshaling yard rules
- Return shipment procedures

Understanding these factors helps prevent surprise costs on your final invoice.

## Additional Services That Impact Your Budget

Examples of venue-specific add-ons that can vary widely:

- Wi-Fi and internet service
- Catering, coffee, or branded snacks
- Cleaning and nightly trash removal
- AV equipment and LED walls



These line items often catch exhibitors by surprise — reviewing pricing early lets you prioritize what truly matters.

## Your Path to Exhibit Success

Controlling your exhibit budget isn't about cutting corners — it's about making intentional choices that align with your brand goals. Every dollar you spend should:

- Create a meaningful attendee experience
- Support your messaging
- Improve your visibility on the show floor
- Generate high-value leads
- Strengthen your long-term trade show program

At The Tradeshow Network, we help exhibitors build smarter, spend smarter, and show smarter — with custom and rental booth solutions that deliver impact without inflating your budget.

## Ready to plan your next cost-efficient exhibit?

*Whether you need a custom-designed 20x20 island, a flexible rental for a multi-show season, or a strategic budget review, our team is here to help.*

## ABOUT THE TRADESHOW NETWORK MARKETING GROUP

The Tradeshow Network Marketing Group is a full-service, trade show display company based in Chicago, Illinois, which serves clients nationally and internationally. Products include custom exhibit designs, modular exhibit displays, fabric booths, portable designs, custom rental exhibits, and accessories. The Tradeshow Network Marketing Group specializes in custom rental exhibits, drawing from its own display inventory to configure modular exhibits to fit all budgets and booth sizes, from 10 x 20 inline booths to 20 x 20 and larger island spaces. Their comprehensive trade show services include exhibit design, booth installation and dismantle, shipping and logistics, exhibit storage, exhibit management, online inventory and show management tools for clients, and marketing services such as market research, branding, graphic design and messaging.

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