

# A beginner's guide to Web Summit – 7 tips for trade fairs' newbies

Alex Orlinski, Head of Product Marketing and Partnerships UK/US at Tilkee shares his tips for getting the most out of trade fairs and reminisces about life on the road. Let's get your first trade shows started!

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Some time ago, while applying for a visa for a certain Central Asian country to attend one of their trade shows, I was asked to “list all the countries I visited in the past 10 years” on the visa application form. What’s not to love about bureaucracy, right? But since beggars can’t be choosers and as I really wanted to visit “Tazbekistan”, I calmly carried on the task.

The first 30 names came easy, around country number 50 I dug up my old passport and started skimming through the pages looking for the stamps from long-forgotten business trips and trade fairs. I finally accomplished the task when my list got to 60-something names and that’s when I also came to the sad realization that I will probably never see all the countries in the world in my lifetime.

Going to trade fairs reminds me of travelling the world and my “Tazbekistan” visa experience. The ambience at trade shows bears a strong resemblance to that of Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar, Cairo’s Khan el-Khalili or the souks of Marrakech where vendors try anything to get my attention and all offer something “very special” and “just for me”. What’s more, the “You can’t see it all” realization always comes to mind when I think of booth-hopping at events

like TechDay, VivaTech or Web Summit...

Speaking of Web Summit, another one of the biggest trade fairs, has just come to an end. And just like in the past years, the conference and the accompanying expo brought Fortune 500 companies, groundbreaking startups and world-class speakers to Lisbon. Web Summit 2019 in a nutshell? More than 1,200 speakers, 2,000 journalists, 11,000 CEOs, and some 70,000 attendees from more than 160 countries – including myself. Easy to get distracted, easy to get carried away, and even easier to get overwhelmed. Assuming you don't go to trade fairs just to take a walk down the aisles and fill up your bag with freebies, how do you stay focused on your goals?

It's all about research, planning, and time management. Are you selling or are you buying? Are you there to grow your business? Are you just trying to catch up with the latest technology or are you going to be there to do some serious industrial espionage? It boils down to asking yourself "What exactly do I want to accomplish?" And you can start asking this prior to the event when the first preliminary lists of exhibitors and attendees start to be published. Once you have your answer, follow the below steps:

## Do your homework

Who's exhibiting in these trade fairs? Who's attending? Can you see any familiar business names? Do your research on the unfamiliar. Remember, when Amazon or Apple first started coming to trade shows, there probably weren't too many who had heard of them.

## Try to schedule your meetings with investors and exhibitors as soon as you can

If the event organizers make this opportunity available to you – at Web Summit this is done via the Investor Meetings Program – it most likely will be on the "first come, first served" basis. The sooner you act, the better.

*Read also*

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[10 Fashion Tech companies to watch in 2020](#)

# Plan trade fairs ahead

Have the organizers already released the floor plan or provided some details about its various areas? Try to locate the businesses that you have found interesting during your research. How far apart are they? Will you need to factor in some time for getting from one booth to another during this type of trade fairs?

# Try not to get too distracted or overwhelmed during trade shows

Trust me, I know what I'm talking about. Not only do I attend trade fairs, but the startup where I work exhibits at plenty of them. We want your attention and we know how to get it! A couple of years back, our CEO could be seen bouncing on the exhibition floor at Web Summit wearing a fox costume. At [VivaTech](#) earlier this year, one of my talented colleagues became an instant sensation, mesmerising the crowds by showing off his mad juggling skills. You get the idea.

# Don't waste your time at trade fairs

I'm fortunate to have access to the business-card-scanning and document-tracking apps from Tilkee. Essentially, what this means is that I don't have to do any of the cumbersome administrative post-event work. I can actually just enjoy my time or try to schedule even more meetings if I happen to be in a workaholic mood that day. All I need to do is scan the business card and the app takes care of the rest: it automatically sends a thank you email to my new contact, it notifies me when they have finished reading the presentation that I had included, it tells me how much time they spent looking at each page of it, and transfers their contact information to a spreadsheet ready to be uploaded to Salesforce, our CRM system... Pretty nifty, right?

# Stay in touch

Don't be shy, get in touch with your new contacts! Send an email after trade shows. Approach them on LinkedIn. Two or three months after the event, ask what they are up to. If it is the product you were after, check if they have come up with something new in the meantime. If you have found that particular event interesting, ask if they know of similar ones.

# Remember to have fun

No-one wants to hang around with a Debbie Downer. Whether you are exhibiting or attending, whether you come to trade shows for the products or for the people, having some fun and staying positive will help you – and those around you! – get through the long hours at the event.

*Read also*

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[How to conduct useful market research](#)

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