

# THE ROLE OF B2B VIRTUAL TRADE SHOWS AND THEIR EFFECT ON SHOW PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

Many businesses are employing online technologies to search for, communicate, and exchange with trading partners. Virtual trade shows are an example of an emerging online technology that may affect the current B2B trade show process, yet there has not been any work on this phenomenon. This research draws on the virtual reality and trade show literature for developing a conceptual model and propositions for examining the role of virtual trade shows and their impact on trade show performance. Traditional trade shows are a key component of the B2B marketing mix and are second only to personal selling for business expenditures. With mounting pressure on marketing managers to provide accountability and demonstrate return on investment, a virtual trade show is very appealing due to its convenience, low cost, flexibility, personalization, data tracking capabilities, and archived exhibits. Some exhibitors are using virtual trade shows as a promotional tool for upcoming physical trade shows by creating interest in the company and its products. Other companies are using virtual shows to complement their traditional trade show efforts. It is not clear what role virtual trade shows will play in the trade show process, what their impact will be on physical trade shows, or their effect on post-show selling efficiency.

This paper has two objectives, first to explore the impact of virtual trade shows on traditional trade show performance. Trade show performance has been defined in the literature as a multidimensional construct consisting of both selling and non-selling activities (relationship-building, information-gathering, image-building, and sales force motivation; Hansen 2004). A second objective is to investigate the role of virtual trade shows in the current three-stage (pre-show, at-show, post-show) trade show process proposed by Gopalakrishna and Lilien (1995). A conceptual framework is developed for examining the antecedents and outcomes of virtual trade show performance. It is proposed in this paper that the goals of the exhibitor (transactional, relational; see Cavanaugh 1976) will influence virtual trade show performance, and that this relationship is moderated by perceived virtual trade show quality (i.e., diagnosticity, telepresence, socialness; see Hoffman and Novak 1996; Jiang and Benbasat 2005; Wang et al 2007). When the exhibitors' goals are congruent with the virtual trade show experience then virtual trade show performance may be enhanced. It is also proposed that virtual trade show performance has a direct effect on each stage of the physical trade show process (pre-show, at-show, post-show). Key findings from the trade show literature indicate that pre-show promotions enhance trade show performance, and trade shows enhance post-show selling efficiency (Gopalakrishna et al 1995). The role of virtual trade shows as complementary to traditional trade show events or as promotional tools is investigated. It is suggested that future research empirically investigate the determinants of virtual trade show performance and their effect on the traditional trade show process.

References Available on Request.