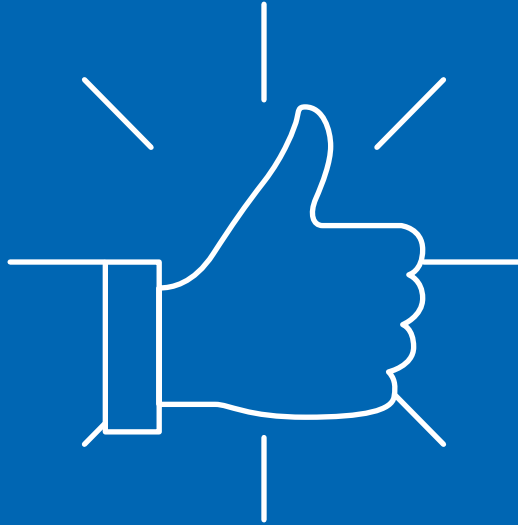


# *designing success*

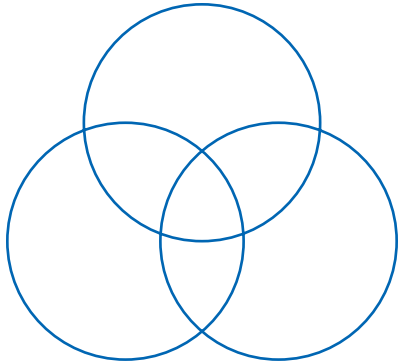
**Creative Floor Plans That Deliver a Better Experience**





*Satisfying the needs and desires of an entire industry during a three-day conference can be a challenge for many organizations.*

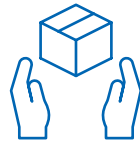
It's hard enough to design an event that embodies the character of a market segment or brand, but it must also meet the objectives of organizers and their customers. Experiential design delivers a strategic approach, as well as the creativity and discipline to translate objectives into action.



## Objectives and the Trade Show Ecosystem

The most successful shows set multiple goals. As an expression of the industries and brands they represent, they drive evolution and move the industry forward, conveying essential messages, providing valuable training and learning opportunities, and debuting innovations that deliver measurable impact. As a marketing channel, they meet the purchasing and educational needs of attendees, help exhibitors and sponsors generate leads, reinforce brand awareness, and manage customer relationships.

Conferences are built upon their own unique ecosystem:



### Organizers

deliver a qualified audience and an exhibiting experience to participating companies that, in return, provide revenue and attract attendees for the benefit of the organizer.



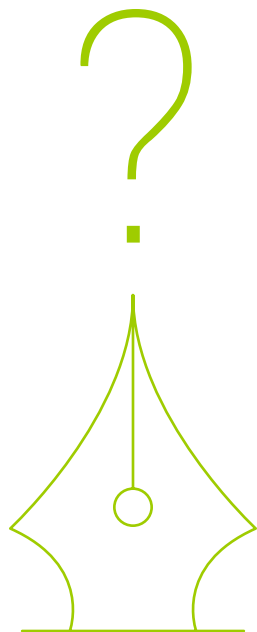
### Exhibitors

and sponsors provide valuable information and one-to-one engagement to attendees, who reward them with their attention and a return on opportunity or investment.



### Attendees

satisfy exhibitors and help organizers meet their specific goals in exchange for a curated experience, a chance to network with peers, exposure to innovations through a mix of exhibitors, and valuable programming from organizers.

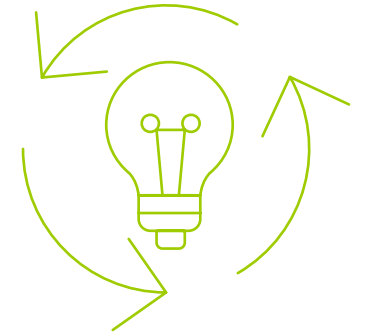


## Questions Every Designer Should Ask

To reach such diverse goals and maintain a balanced ecosystem, organizers look to the show floor — one of the most important representations of the exhibition strategy. To craft an effective floor plan, the design team has to answer some very specific questions:

- 1 What are the goals and objectives of your organization? Do you want to grow membership? Increase education? Expand into new markets? Attract a younger demographic? You will want to fully understand the future vision of your organization before embarking on an experience design project.
- 2 What problems are we solving? Too many attendees potentially depriving exhibitors of opportunities to meet with the right prospects, too few attendees risking the appearance of an empty show, the need to distribute traffic throughout the show to satisfy all exhibitors? The list goes on. By understanding your challenges and opportunities, your experience design will become a strategic tool to help you achieve your goals and objectives.
- 3 What is the customer journey before, during, and after the show? How can the show floor be part of a consistent, end-to-end experience?
- 4 What elements of the floor plan — especially if it's designed a year in advance — can deliver the highest value, while remaining the most flexible?
- 5 What new or relevant digital technologies can be integrated into the show floor design to bolster the participant's experience? Attendees will arrive expecting this, so you should be prepared to deliver.

*Applying experience design principles to a floor plan can help organizers, attendees, and exhibitors reach their objectives.*



Questions like these offer a window into the discipline of experience design. As a practice, it addresses the needs of the organization and its stakeholders, and views the customer experience holistically. Experience design is a framework that scales across multiple events and focuses on measuring results. By using the show floor as a road map for giving every stakeholder what it needs to be successful, experience design can play a critical role in driving business results, executing strategy, and giving creativity a seat at the table.

Applying experience design principles to either a new or existing floor plan can help organizers, attendees, and exhibitors reach their objectives. Organizers are looking to drive value back to attendees, exhibitors, and, ultimately, their association or company. Attendees want to shop and learn,<sup>1</sup> and exhibitors want to generate leads, create or reinforce brand awareness, and manage relationships.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "What Attendees Want from Exhibitions, AC32.13." Center for Exhibition Industry Research. 2013.

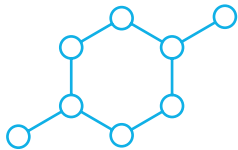
<sup>2</sup> Center for Exhibition Industry Research. "Exhibitor ROI and Performance Metrics Practices." July 2015. PDF.



# *experience design* in practice

*The best way to demonstrate how experience design works is through specific examples.*

Rather than simply plotting booths and other show elements on a grid to optimize space, these organizers (and others like them) have adopted specific styles to their floor plans in order to improve the attendee and exhibitor experience, achieve trade show objectives, and highlight the organization's own unique personality.



### **Providing Purpose: Circulation Paths**

The challenge with designing a 750,600-square-foot show floor is providing attendees with enough flexibility to create their own path, but enough structure so that they have a sense of purpose. The world's leading global foodservice retailer achieved that at its conference with several circulation paths and strategic groups. The primary path enabled organic circulation and easy conversations among primary focal points. A secondary circulation created “beachfront” property for exhibiting suppliers, while an “Areas of the World” section allowed attendees to find each other easily. A strategically placed “Learning Center” drew crowds to the middle of the show floor for robust TED-like sessions, while full-service restaurants in the back of the space ensured traffic throughout the space.



### **Driving Attendees to the Show Floor: The Central Hub**

One way to make it easy for attendees to share and learn is to build a central hub — a space where they can network, be part of a community, and engage in more casual activities. The team at one of the top 3-D design, engineering, and entertainment software companies wanted to attract more attendees to the show floor, deliver an experience that was unmistakably on brand, and encourage visitors to “learn, connect, and explore.” The show floor featured “Central Park,” a social interaction space located in the heart of the show floor that was later transformed into a theater for product demos. The central hub reinforced the theme of discovery along with the company's brand and corporate messaging.



### **Providing Education Despite the Hurdles: Special Spaces**

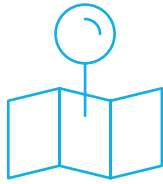
Special spaces such as lounges, seating areas, demonstration stages, and information booths — especially association and membership areas — can help promote networking and learning in flexible ways. For example, one of the top medical societies for cardiovascular care is, of course, bound by strict government regulations for medical shows. Promotional activities (exhibit booths) have to be separated from continuing medical education delivered on the show floor. For the association's annual event, the group used a variety of special spaces, including an innovation stage and two new product theaters, to deliver education on very specific topics while remaining in compliance.



### **Boosting Discoverability: Pavilions**

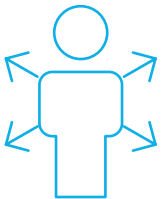
A pavilion design is ideal for helping attendees discover exhibitors and products that might otherwise be lost inside a larger show. At a leading trade show for summer outdoor products, the experience design played right into the type of products on display with pavilions featuring a fun and festive boardwalk concept. Included on the boardwalk was a curated display of standup paddleboards (SUP), which served as a shopping tool and resource guide for the SUP market; the Paddle + SUP Tank, which allowed attendees to demo boards in actual water; and Venture Out, which showcased a curated selection of brands designed to attract new, younger, and more urban-influenced consumers.





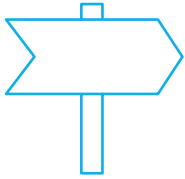
### **Centralizing the Experience: The Campus**

In order to simplify the experience and engage attendees' hearts and minds, the leading platform and productivity software company created a mini campus at its annual global partner conference. The show floor contained all of the exhibits, and demo stations and signage were streamlined into a cohesive space that remained flexible enough to meet the needs of each product group while showcasing how the products can work together. Small parklets dotted the campus, inviting attendees to work alone or meet new friends among unexpected elements like wooden benches and trees. By centralizing the show's activity into one campus, the energy and engagement remained high.



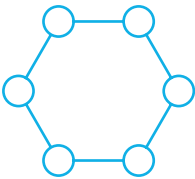
### **Leveling the Playing Field: The Customer Journey**

A well-crafted floor plan can guide traffic flow so that even small exhibitors, departments, and corporate vendors get noticed. The annual convention of the world's largest retailer-owned hardware cooperative grouped exhibiting companies by departments, similar to the way products are organized in a store. The departments included lawn and garden, paint, tools, plumbing, hardware, housewares, cleaning, impulse, auto and sporting, and pet and pool. One wide aisle in the shape of a square guided visitors from the entrance through every single department so that store owners would see every area of the show.



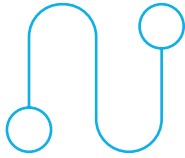
### **Helping Categories Stand Out: Neighborhoods**

Organizers are always looking for ways to energize the show floor and increase the discoverability of new, emergent, or innovative companies and products. At its annual conference, the top association dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke has employed a neighborhood strategy in its floor plan for many years. Exhibitors are grouped according to themes, such as drug trials, office technology, publishing, research, healthy lifestyles, and hands-on learning. The scenario provides exposure to companies in smaller, newer categories. The neighborhoods are well-marked with on-site signage and color-coding in the show directory.



### **Delivering More Qualified Leads: Product Zones**

Unlike neighborhoods, which honor diversity, product zones honor homogeneity. They provide welcome exposure to single-product companies and tend to attract prequalified buyers. The global audiovisual and information communications trade association uses product zones at its annual conference to make it easier for attendees to bring their questions and purchasing intent right to the exhibitors that can best address them. It divides up the show floor by zones, such as audio, digital signage, unified communications and collaboration, lighting and staging, and security. Segmentation by product makes it easier for attendees to find the exact products in which they're interested. Exhibitors are able to spend more time with visitors who have the intention to buy.



### **Improving Traffic Flow: Content**

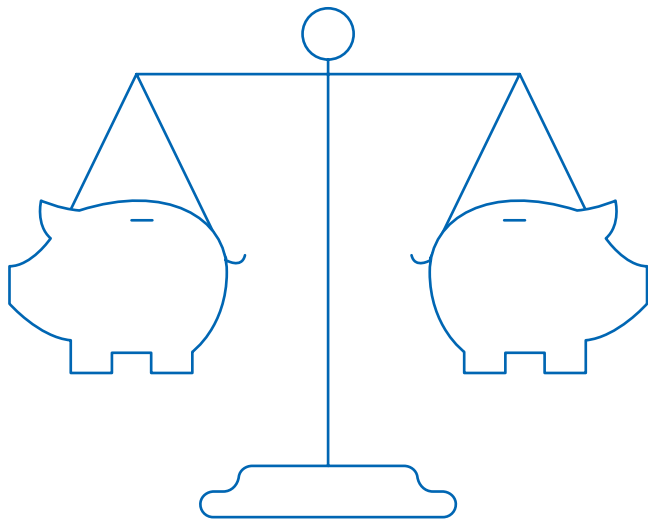
On-floor education is a highly popular and effective design tactic. Theaters, demo stages, and general session areas on the show floor help to increase traffic and dwell time. The leading association for healthcare information and management systems places educational opportunities throughout the show floor. Exhibitors and sponsors are permitted to deliver presentations on specific topics inside theaters dedicated to medication management, RFID, cybersecurity, interoperability, connected patients, mobile health, federal health, and intelligent health. Placing content areas on the layout strategically helps even out traffic across a very large exhibition area.

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*A well-crafted floor plan can guide traffic flow so that even small exhibitors, departments, and corporate vendors get noticed.*

# *the costs of creativity*

*As with all floor plans and layout decisions, organizers have to strike a balance between the needs of attendees, exhibitors, sponsors, and the event budget.*



An ideal configuration both for show floor diversity and optimal attendee experience might impact revenue. Going off the grid may require more discussion around additional labor, carpeting, structures, equipment, and access to electricity. Some designs require more workarounds to achieve the desired effects.

Experiential design can add a fresh patina and an undercurrent of electricity to a new or existing show, helping organizers to innovate at a time when other trade shows, corporate events, and digital marketing channels present stiff competition. Creative, strategic design principles can help organizers overcome challenges, stimulate and activate attendees, increase exhibitor satisfaction, and grow business opportunities.



# *deliver great design*

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