

Aquarama 09

The purpose of this article is to quickly review Aquarama trade show in Singapore and the presence of the Taiwan booth, in correlation to what lessons can be learned for the future. The original content was presented in form of a more wide-ranging Power Point presentation.

The B2B aspect of Aquarama.

Aquarama with its hybrid business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) approach is somewhat special pet industry. There are a number of factors that enable the B2B show, such as a broad base of local producers, convenient air-link, broad customer base abroad and various options to combine a visit to the show with a vacation package.

Of note is the combination of the aquatic products on display along with the pet industry (cats and dogs). This may be out of convenience as many fish retailers also retail other pets, or out of concerns for size and customer interest, where only aquatic products on show would be too small.

The last days of the trade show was accessible to the general public.

Generally speaking both show types, B2B and B2C, have their strengths. B2B makes it easy to spot potential business customers in a more focused environment. Whereas B2C provides first-hand feedback on what products are appreciated by end-customers. Big B2C shows still allow for B2B interaction, but these often happen in closed VIP areas of the individual booth.

Some exhibitors of B2C shows manage to recoup much of their expenses by selling their product at the show. This is often a strong driver for new or financially weak producers that seek to make their first mark at international exhibitions.

Producers that experience high customer interest from B2B or B2C customers get valuable feedback and learn through interaction about customer wishes and needs. If they manage to sell their products, then this can be motivating to develop the market further.



The Taiwan booth at Aquarama

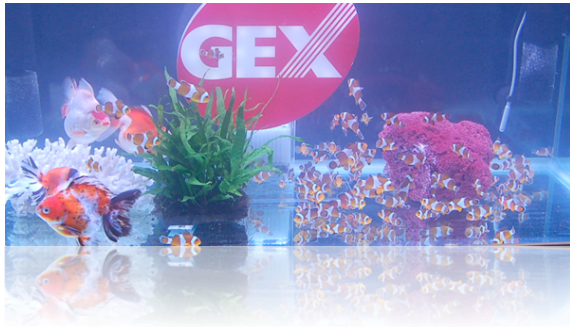
The Taiwan booth was executed on a professional level in terms of all-over design and built. It represented a unified display of Taiwanese companies, which mostly participated in the cluster.

The unified presentation was useful, but somewhat suppressed a stronger product focus in the overall booth layout (e.g. the fish that Taiwan is famous for or busy to promote). The nature of focus rests in its exclusivity. One has to focus on the one or the other; TOFA has to be

credited for making its tactic choice.

Alternative focuses could have been the already mentioned products, the companies themselves or the customers (further down the supply chain).

While often difficult to execute (especially abroad) it would be desirable to have eye-catching specials available at the booth, which enforce “stickiness” and impression-retention. This is somewhat important, as Taiwan is lacking some branding and brand values, in this industry – a topic that is important to create stronger impact, but out of the scope of this article.



Introducing an eye-catching specialty. Being special.

Most companies of the dry goods and food industry have long product circles, with few new products or research findings that distinguish them from the competition. Exhibiting at trade shows can therefore be a challenge.

One way of drawing customer interest at the show is by emphasizing ones brand and potential by displaying product stars or exceptional achievements. For example, the fish food company Hikari had pictures of their champion fish on display. These are fish that were raised with Hikari food and consequently won international trophies. A feeds producer from Taiwan also had a very impressive booth, but failed to enforce the product-result relationship like Hikari did.

A different and often cheap way of being special is to display parts of the producing/breeding process that usually is not visible further down the supply chain. One example at Aquarama was, QianHu displaying Aruwana eggs (see picture with yellow eggs), which drew lots of interest. Similarly, antique machinery is sometimes displayed at food exhibitions producing food ingredients.

Specialties don't have to be market-able or even long-term. GEX created a temporal sensation by presenting seawater and fresh-water fish together in one aquarium sharing the same water (see picture). The feasibility and survival rate were not stated, nor were they important at the exhibition, but would be of greater importance if they wanted to re-produce or market this experiment further down the supply chain (e.g. in pet shops). GEX managed to enforce the image that they know about fish and water and that they are up-to-date in research.

The “specialty” aspects can have many faces, ranging from exotic booth-design (for example eastern designs at western exhibitions) to industry celebrities working at the booths (in England Mr. Peter Waddington was a pioneer of the Koi industry, and still draws fans to any booth that he supports).



Of course it is not enough to just be special. Right from the start, the participating companies have to make up their mind if they will be focusing on the product, the company, the customer or the country, and emphasize the booth planning and layout thereafter.

Understanding and surpassing the international standard

Aquarama was a standard indoor exhibition, executed professionally by UBM Singapore.

Many exhibition participants of agricultural / pet shows follow patterns and standards that have been established over time. Looking at photos and video of past years of a certain exhibition can help to understand this pattern. In order to have higher impact, it is recommended to investigate the pattern and try to surpass its standards.

Attractive booth design that is different from the standard pattern and appreciated by end-customers is among the easiest and quickest ways to stand out. It also provides freedom to incorporate artwork or higher-level craftsmanship, which is represented by a professional photograph produced by artists Tristan & Lidia (see image of fish).

The attractiveness of the booth is also important for marketing material that is produced at (not for) the exhibitions documenting the producer's effort at the show (photos, videos, interviews).

Creating Trust

Apart from making business contacts and selling products, one major aspect of participating in the exhibition is to create brand awareness and trust at the

consumer side. Inferior and fake products are not often encountered at international trade shows, but much more often represented by agents that do not disclose their producers, but compete on the market.

This is of importance in a directly related field. Nowadays, many producers can be found and contacted over the Internet. However, the quality and trustworthiness can often only be established after test-orders or significant investigation.

Internet customers establish trust easier, if the agricultural producer is repeatedly present at established trade shows. If the producer manages to produce attractive and professional documentation of his effort at the trade show, and the customer interest in his products, then trust can be built more quickly. In fact, the resulting marketing material from tradeshow participation is one of the most important assets gained.



Awards and Champions

Trophies awarded at international exhibitions are authentic and relative standardized expressions of quality and appreciations that are understood across borders. If logistically possible, it pays off to be among the winners. However, trophies are awarded within a small time frame. Preparation for powerful media-impact is of the essence. Repeatedly awarded companies can build an international successful track record and gain status with relative low cost involved.

Training opportunity

The lessons learned from participating in a trade show, the follow-up process and ongoing interaction with customers and

competitors should be seen as an continuous learning process; This hold especially true for first-time participants. The knowledge gained at trade shows in the end has to circle back to production, customer care and marketing, in order to be effective and relevant for the future.

Summary

Aquarama was a professionally executed trade show. The Taiwan booth focused on a unified representation of a cluster of Taiwanese companies and succeeded in doing so. In order to streamline and re-enforce marked values and messages, some strategic wider-reaching marketing work is deemed necessary.