

Take Control of Your Booth Budget

Key components of exhibiting costs

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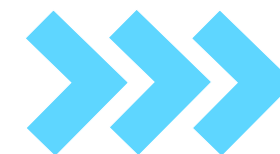


When it comes to exhibit planning, your budget is more than just a number; it's your roadmap.

Most exhibitors know their overall spend for the season, but the challenge is making every dollar work harder.

This guide will show you how to take control of your booth budget by planning intentionally, prioritizing efficiently, and avoiding unnecessary costs.

You'll learn how each booth element affects spend, and how to stretch your budget without sacrificing impact.



Resources for accurately budgeting

Before you start designing your exhibit experience and crunching numbers, get to know the exhibiting requirements set by the venue and the General Services Contractor (GSC) hired to manage the physical setup and tear down of the show.

The GSC provides exhibitors with an Exhibitor Services Manual (ESM) that contains general show information, rules and regulations, target move-in dates, material handling calculation, and other information pertinent to your exhibit.

Pro Tip: Plan early and look for discount deadlines in the ESM to make your exhibit budget go further.

The ESM will also highlight services that are exclusive to the venue or required vendors contracted through the venue. These can include material handling, cleaning, electrical, rigging, food and beverage, hotel, Wi-Fi, etc.



4 steps to take control of your budget and maximize the value of your booth

1 Keep current on industry insights before finalizing your budget.

2 Understand the elements of your booth build and how they impact costs.

3 Be flexible as plans evolve.

4 Stay prepared to avoid surprises.



Take Control of Your Booth Budget

Booth build

Since most booth budgets are set for the season, think of your structure as your baseline. This is often the first cost you'll encounter, and the foundation you'll build from.

From our research, exhibitors shared that booth structure accounts for roughly one-third of their total exhibit budget. (Figure 1)

Rent vs. own

Determine whether [owning or renting](#) your booth best suits your brand goals. It's also important to consider number of trade shows, locations, storage, design, and branding, drayage, etc.

Pro Tip: Talk to your exhibit partner about multi-show discounts and rental options.

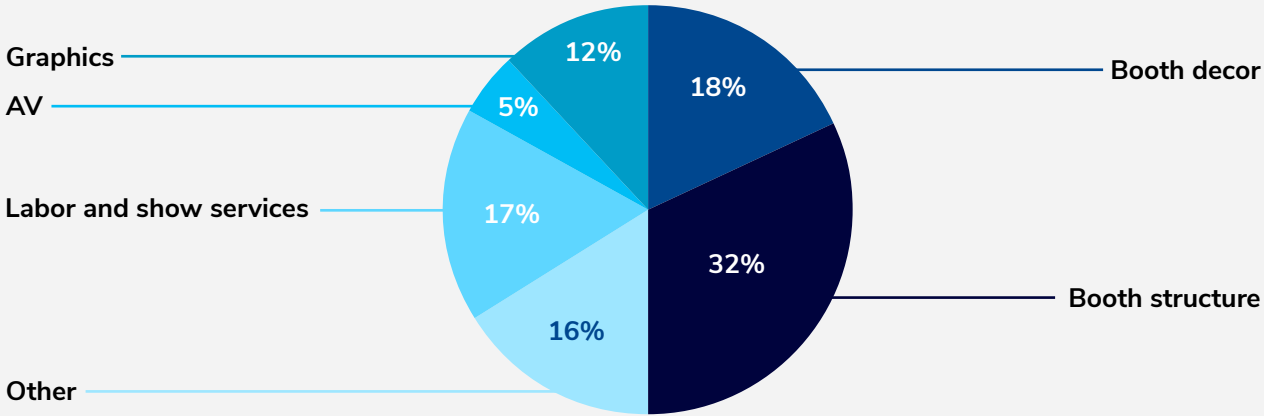
Graphics and branding

To save on costs, consider reusable graphics and digital options for brand messaging and exhibit content, including signage and presentations.

Labor

Labor costs can vary widely; each venue has its own rules and regulations, so it's essential to consult your ESM to understand labor requirements, rate structures, and scheduling considerations before finalizing your budget.

Figure 1
Booth Budget Allocation



Note. Data collected from an external survey of 2,096 event decision makers in February 2024.

Here's a quick guide to common booth elements and the type of labor they typically require:



Booth structure
Structural Labor
Installation and dismantling of the physical exhibit.



Hanging signs, overhead lighting, and displays
Rigging Labor
Overhead installation using cables, chains, or hoists. Check your ESM for height restrictions so you don't run into additional rigging costs.



AV equipment, lighting, and other tech
Electrical Labor
Anything that requires power. (Outlets may also be required.) **Pro Tip:** Keep costs down by placing powered items together around one electrical drop instead of spreading them out.



Heavy materials
Forklift Labor
Moving large items during install and dismantle.



Water features
Plumbing Labor
Running water to and from the booth.

Different cities have varied union rates. Labor rates may increase based on weekends, holidays, shift lengths, etc.





Shipping and material handling

Getting your exhibit materials to and from the show site — and from the loading dock to your booth — can be one of the more complex budget items. Costs vary based on timing, carrier, location, and show site logistics.

Shipping

This service, also called transportation, covers movement of your materials to and from the venue. Partnering with a carrier who understands the trade show industry can make a big difference. Experience often translates into smoother delivery and cost savings.

Pro Tip: Choose a carrier that will not split your shipment in transit, which can lead to multiple material handling charges and lost items.

Material Handling

This refers to moving your materials once they arrive at the venue or to the advanced warehouse — typically from the dock to your booth space. Rates depend on timing, weight, and handling requirements.

To avoid unexpected fees like overtime, surcharges, or re-routing, check your ESM for:

- Target move-in and move-out times
- Material handling rates
- Storage and delivery rules

Pro Tip: Bundle round-trip shipping with material handling through [Freeman Transportation®](#) and save up to 10%.



Additional services

Check pricing and requirements for these additional items that can fluctuate from venue to venue and year to year.

- **F&B (food and beverage)** including coffee, snacks, branded treats, catering, etc.
- **Wi-Fi** for your booth staff and attendees to stay connected
- **[Marketing and promotion](#)** to promote attendance pre-show and stay in contact post-show

Your path to exhibit success

Successful exhibit budgeting isn't just about controlling costs — it's about making intentional choices that align with your business objectives. Every dollar spent should (and can) serve a purpose, whether that's creating memorable attendee experiences, showcasing your brand effectively, or generating meaningful leads.



Ready to streamline your costs and planning?

Let's talk →

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