

New study by Visable questions the relevance of a presence at trade fairs for companies

Hamburg, 6 April 2021 - According to the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, around 70 percent of all trade fairs had to be cancelled nationwide last year due to the Corona pandemic. A heavy blow, after all, trade fairs are generally regarded as an important instrument for initiating business and presenting new innovations, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). But is this really the case? A recent study by Visable, the operator of Europe's leading online B2B platforms EUROPAGES and wlv (formerly "Wer liefert was"), in cooperation with the market and opinion researchers of Civey, questions the relevance of trade fairs for companies: For more than half of all executives surveyed (56.4 per cent), the cancellation of leading trade fairs for their own industry represents only a minor loss or no loss at all. For just under a quarter of all respondents (24.9 per cent) the losses would be significant. According to the study, almost 38 percent of all private-sector decision-makers have never been represented at trade fairs anyway. Only one in five companies (21 percent) would still like to actively exhibit after the pandemic. So do trade fairs really have the significance for companies that has been attributed to them?

Not every industry attaches importance to trade fairs

"What we have been observing for years is confirmed by the study results: The relevance of trade fairs for companies is dwindling in many sectors. For them, the personnel and financial expenditure is often out of proportion to the benefits. The Corona pandemic in particular has shown that digital is also possible. Companies are increasingly recognising the advantages of e-sourcing, digital platforms or virtual presentations of their products and services - they are significantly cheaper, more efficient and also more sustainable," emphasises Peter F. Schmid, CEO of Visable. According to the study, the importance of being present at trade fairs for companies depends strongly on the respective industry. Around one third of the employees surveyed in the machine and plant engineering sector say they will continue to actively exhibit after the pandemic. Only half (48.3 per cent) fear a major loss if leading trade fairs were no longer to take place in the future. Of all the sectors considered, employees in marketing apparently still attach the most importance to trade fairs and networking on site. Here, every third person (32.4 percent) would like to continue to actively exhibit. At the same time, however, it is surprising that almost 60 percent of all respondents in marketing would also do without a leading trade fair.

Only 20.7 percent of the managers in the construction industry and the real estate and housing sector plan to actively exhibit in the future. A different picture emerges in construction and the skilled trades: employees in this sector were comparatively frequently on the road at corresponding events and will continue to be so to a large extent - only about 18 percent do not plan to go at all in the future.

Lack of trade fairs affects business contacts

For many companies, trade fairs are the basis for making contact with industry experts and decision-makers. Accordingly, the absence of trade fairs has an impact on the number of business contacts. More than one third of all respondents (36.6 percent) had fewer business contacts last

year. Ten percent even had at least 80 percent fewer. Employees in plant and mechanical engineering were comparatively hard hit. Almost 20 percent of them had up to 60 percent fewer contacts. But: At the same time, about 20 percent stated that they had not initiated fewer business contacts during this time.

Classic trade fair is in a state of flux: younger generation relies on digital alternatives

The vast majority of all decision-makers surveyed (around 42 per cent) would not miss anything if trade fairs were no longer held. The reasons are varied: on the one hand, classic trade fairs seem to be overestimated in their relevance for decision-makers, on the other hand, trade fairs are shifting to virtual spaces, depending on the industry. However, these cannot replace face-to-face meetings. Around a quarter (24.5 per cent) of all respondents stated that they would miss social aspects, professional networking (23.3 per cent) and getting to know new suppliers (21.9 per cent) if they did not attend trade fairs.

Younger decision-makers in particular, who are currently shaping the future of companies, believe more strongly that they can compensate for their presence at trade fairs with alternative offers. The 18 to 29 year-old bosses see virtual trade fairs as the most sensible alternative (55 percent). But online platforms and marketplaces (43.1 per cent) also represent a way to generate leads for many.

"The results of the study show a trend that we have been observing for a long time: The classic trade fair is changing, and many traditional industry meetings could become obsolete in the foreseeable future," says Peter F. Schmid. "Digital offerings such as B2B platforms or virtual trade fairs represent an ever greater alternative for acquiring new customers. The need for interpersonal exchange and networking will continue to exist, but beyond the digital space it will increasingly be transferred to professional conferences and summits. In the medium term, traditional industries will also need to embrace digital options to remain viable."

About the study

As part of a representative survey with the market and opinion research experts from Civey and Visable, 1,002 private-sector decision-makers in Germany were asked about their attitudes towards trade fairs and the digital alternatives. The focus was on decision-makers from retail, marketing, construction/trade, construction industry; real estate and housing, industry/logistics as well as mechanical and plant engineering.

About Visable

Visable supports industrial SMEs in making products and services internationally accessible to buyers. As a combination of its own B2B platforms and online marketing services, such as Google Ads and Retargeting, tailored specifically to business customers, the company offers a broad digital portfolio for increasing reach on the Internet.

The platforms operated by Visable GmbH include wlw ("Wer liefert was"), today the leading B2B platform in the D-A-CH region with around 620,000 registered companies, and the European B2B platform EUROPAGES, on which around 3 million companies are registered. Together, the platforms reach over 4 million B2B buyers a month who are looking for detailed company and product information.

With its online marketing services, Visable offers companies additional opportunities to increase their reach on the Internet. Visable is currently the only Google Premium Partner with a B2B focus.

Visable was founded in response to the challenges of internationalisation and digitalisation in the B2B sector and today employs over 410 people at its locations in Hamburg, Berlin, Münster and Paris. As a joint umbrella for the wlv and EUROPAGES brands, Visable is continuously expanding its marketplaces and online marketing services.

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