

# nimlok®

## EXHIBIT DESIGN TO SHOW FLOOR

the process of creating a killer trade show exhibit





Many exhibitors partner with expert exhibit dealers to design trade show exhibits that will wow the audience and draw them in to engage and sell. In this guide, we explore the planning, prep and process surrounding the design of a semi-custom or custom exhibit.

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# 1. PREREQUISITES

Before entering the exhibit design process, exhibitors should complete three prerequisites. Having completed these allow for a smoother and more effective exhibit design process.



## 1 TRADE SHOW PARTICIPATION:

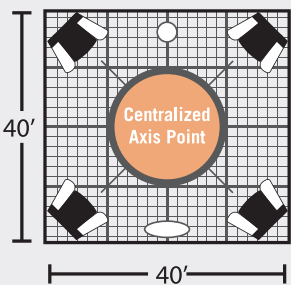
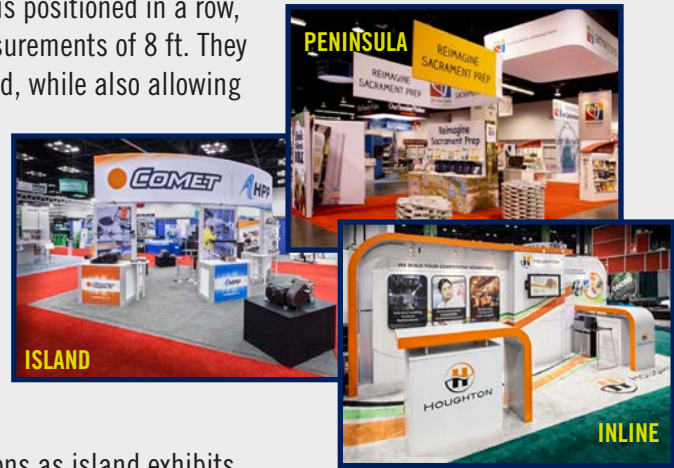
Research and compile a list of key industry events you plan to exhibit in or plan for. Evaluate the events and determine which best align with industry and trade show marketing goals, offer the best return on investment and are within budget.

## 2 EXHIBIT CONFIGURATION:

Inline, island and peninsula exhibit types are options to choose from in most floor plans. An inline trade show exhibit, also known as a “linear” exhibit, is positioned in a row, and sold in 10 ft. increments. These exhibits have height measurements of 8 ft. They offer exhibitors a visually commanding backdrop for their brand, while also allowing for easy attendee and sales staff interaction.

Island exhibits are exposed on all sides to the trade show aisles. Island configurations typically have 20-24 feet height limits and greater square footage than inline exhibits, which means exhibitors can incorporate more booth elements, such as hanging structures, towers, conference rooms, stage areas or product demonstration spaces.

Exhibits with a peninsula configuration are exposed to the aisles on three out of four sides. Like island exhibits, peninsula exhibits can incorporate larger booth elements as well and typically have the same height restrictions as island exhibits.



## 3 CONTRACT BOOTH SPACE:

Use your event marketing budget and overall goals to determine the size space you need to contract for your shows. Contracting booth space should be roughly 30% of your overall budget per event. Booth space can be contracted directly through show management and is typically sold in 10' x 10' increments. There may be additional fees for premium spaces near major walkways, at busy corner spaces or near the exhibit hall entrance, so consider this when choosing your space.

Once these prerequisites are completed, the next steps are to:

- 1) **Partner with an exhibit solutions provider** to decide, based on goals, budget, timeline and other needs, the path and design the exhibit should take: fully custom, semi-custom or an exhibit system based on modular building blocks and off-the-shelf elements. Choose an exhibit partner you trust, ideally one with whom you have an existing relationship. If you do not have an exhibit partner, meet with and interview two to three to determine which one best understands your goals and visions and who is also most capable of delivering the ideal exhibit solution for your needs.
- 2) As you choose the right partner, also begin **researching exhibits** to help guide your new partner in the process.

# 2. RESEARCH & ASSESS YOUR EXHIBIT REQUIREMENTS

Research and become familiar with exhibit look and feel, structural elements and things you like and about exhibits so you can communicate your desired vision with your exhibit partner. Review these popular exhibit elements as a starting point for discussions.

## LOOK & FEEL

Open exhibit designs are accessible from multiple entry points, which allows prospect and visitor traffic to easily flow within your space. The uncluttered nature of open exhibits creates an approachable atmosphere perfect for networking.



Enclosed exhibit designs have perimeter structures made of solid or semi-translucent materials formed to create a fully or partially enclosed space. If you are looking to shield proprietary products from onlookers or offer VIP access to your space, enclosed exhibits are ideal.



# 2. RESEARCH & ASSESS (CONT.)

## HANGING STRUCTURES

Hanging structures and signs are great tools for broadcasting your company logo or other brand-identifying information. They also give you additional on-the-floor real estate, making them ideal for exhibitors looking for an open layout with maximum branding.



## TOWERS

Towers can serve multiple uses: storage, an anchor to which other structural elements are connected and as surface walls for multimedia installations. Towers, especially when backlit, are a great way to create a big brand experience in limited spaces or on limited budgets. Their height and small footprint provide a big look without the costs of overhead rigging.

## BACKWALLS

Fabric-based backwalls are increasing in popularity because they are cost-efficient, adaptable and can provide ample graphic space for messaging and imagery.



# 2. RESEARCH & ASSESS (CONT.)

## PRIVATE & SEMI-PRIVATE MEETING SPACES

Whether reinforcing relationships with existing customers or taking steps to convert a prospect into a client, relationships are all about conversation. You may need some space to support small group conversations to make your customers feel valued, and private or semi-private consultation areas are the perfect in-booth solutions.



## VISITOR RECEPTION & REGISTRATION AREAS

Counters and information kiosks are essential for greeting booth visitors, collecting contact information, dispensing marketing collateral, conducting surveys and handing out premium giveaways. Counters can be incorporated into almost any exhibit in a variety of ways and can be customized to include branding, lighting and integrated technology.

## PRODUCT DEMONSTRATION & PRESENTATION SPACES

Nothing sells a product as effectively as allowing your visitors a space to directly engage with merchandise. Stage areas, product enclosures and shelving are all key design elements if you are looking to have your customers interact with your products.

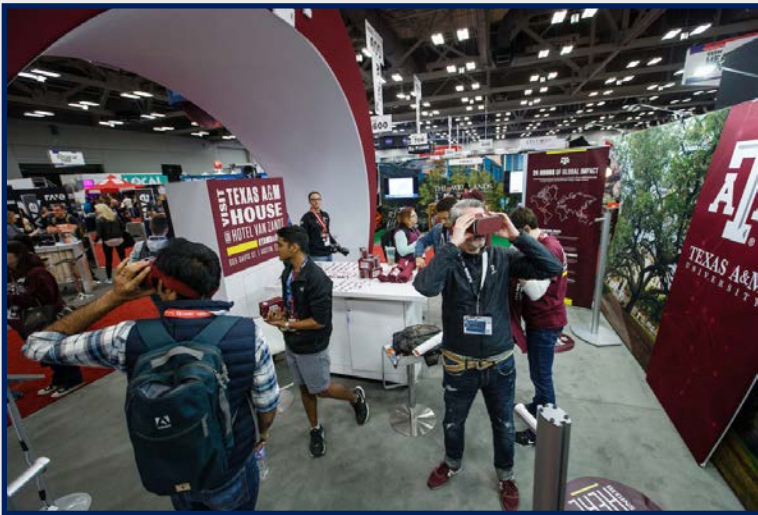




# 2. RESEARCH & ASSESS (CONT.)

## INDEPENDENT & MOVABLE STRUCTURES

Independent structures such as kiosks, counters, work and multimedia stations are ideal for exhibitors seeking a customizable and reconfigurable exhibit solution. Depending on the show and audience in attendance, exhibitors can add, take away or reposition structures to suit exhibiting needs. The flexibility and versatility offered by modular pieces also reduces costs and extends the life of the exhibit.



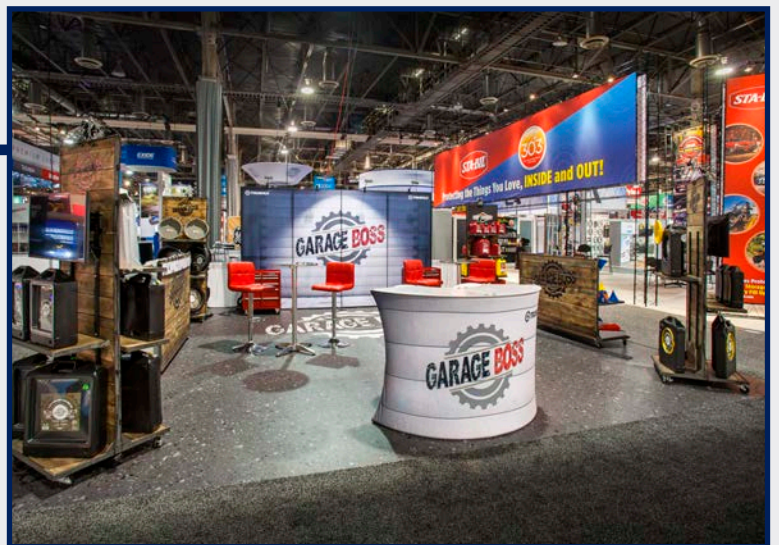
## IN-BOOTH TECHNOLOGY

In-booth technology is changing the exhibiting landscape, especially for companies promoting experiences, production process and innovations.

Consider incorporating your marketing message into large backwalls and kiosks featuring LED video walls, touch screen displays or tablets, or create an entire brand experience with augmented reality (AR). AR requires a static reference point, so structural booth elements such as towers, banner stands or backwalls should be incorporated into the exhibit design while allowing space for AR viewers to move.

## INDUSTRIAL TEXTURES & NATURAL MATERIALS

Many exhibitors incorporate industrial and natural textures that mimic concrete, metal and natural woods to give their exhibit a brand-consistent theme. Consider the textures and visual mood of your brand and communicate this to your exhibit partner during the exhibit design process.



# 2. RESEARCH & ASSESS (CONT.)

## SHAPES

The availability of angular and curved aluminum framing systems have created a world of structural shape possibilities that can be used by exhibit designers. Geometric shapes such as, rectangles, squares and triangles, have clear edges and are ideal for exhibitors looking for a modern or hi-tech look. Organic shapes have a more flowing, natural look and work best for exhibitors conveying a calmer, softer brand message. Determine which shapes best conveys your brand identity.



## CREATIVE LIGHTING

The combination of enhanced LED lighting and graphic printing technology make it possible to create sophisticated illuminated experiences for booth visitors in the form of vibrant backlit structures, unique integrated overhead lighting and more. Consider the areas of your exhibit that may need to be more illuminated—such as conference rooms—as well as areas that should be more muted and soft.

## IN-BOOTH LOUNGES

More and more, exhibitors are dedicating space for on-the-floor lounge areas. Lounges are attractive lures to attendees looking to get off their feet and relax. Lounge spaces increase time spent inside of an exhibit, and give booth staff valuable opportunities to meet, educate and sell. Lounge areas with charging stations are also popular, as they allow visitors to charge phones, tablets and laptops while perusing product offerings.





# 3. EXHIBIT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is now time to apply your research in a formal needs assessment. The needs assessment will be the primary guide for exhibit designers and serves as a platform for a common vision between you and your exhibit partner. Review, consider and answer these questions.

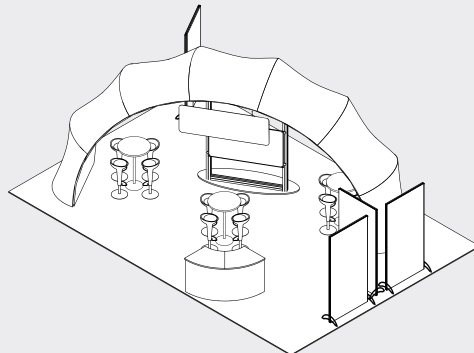
1. What is the name and date of your first show?
2. What exhibit size and configuration do you need?
3. What is your budget range?
4. What are your primary trade show marketing goals and objectives? (i.e. product launch, selling, brand promotion)
5. Describe your company's products and services and how you are perceived in your industry.
6. Do you have an exhibit? If so, what does your current exhibit look like? What features do you like and which do you dislike?
7. What have you seen in other exhibits that you like? What do you dislike?
8. What is the look and feel you desire? (i.e. conservative, high-tech, architectural, elegant, industrial, minimalist)
9. Are there materials or colors to avoid or include, such as wood, metallic or plastics?
10. Will you need a conference room? If so, private or semi-private?
11. What are your corporate branding requirements?
12. What are your product display requirements? (i.e. shelving, display cases, stage)
13. What are your presentation and demonstration needs? (i.e. stage, theater arrangement or media center, work stations/kiosks)
14. What are your registration and reception needs? (i.e. counters, information kiosks)
15. What are your literature and marketing collateral needs?
16. What are your in-booth storage requirements?
17. What are your graphic requirements? (i.e. colors, images, materials)

# 4. FROM REQUIREMENTS TO CONCEPT TO EXHIBIT DESIGN

Once the needs assessment is submitted to the exhibit partner, the design process begins. Depending on show dates, exhibit size and other factors, the planning and design process begins three to four months in advance of the first trade show. Once exhibit goals, needs, concepts and ideas are discovered, the exhibit partner begins channeling your ideas into a concrete vision.



The preliminary draft of the exhibit may come in the form of rough sketches to give you an idea of how your exhibit will potentially look.



From there, the sketches evolve into line drawings, which are skeletal mock-ups of your design.



You may also receive 3D renderings to give the most realistic representation of your exhibit pre-build.



If there is more than one workable design, there may be multiple options for each design concept. Additionally, if budget is a concern, your exhibit partner may provide exhibit options at different price points to ensure they meet the goals and budget. Once you review the exhibit designs, you will have a chance to make changes and revisions. Throughout the revision period, you can discuss every detail of the renderings, from the materials, color palette, floor space and backwall placements, to make sure your exhibit reflects your vision perfectly. Then you select the final design you want to buy. With a detailed blueprint in hand, you can move into production.

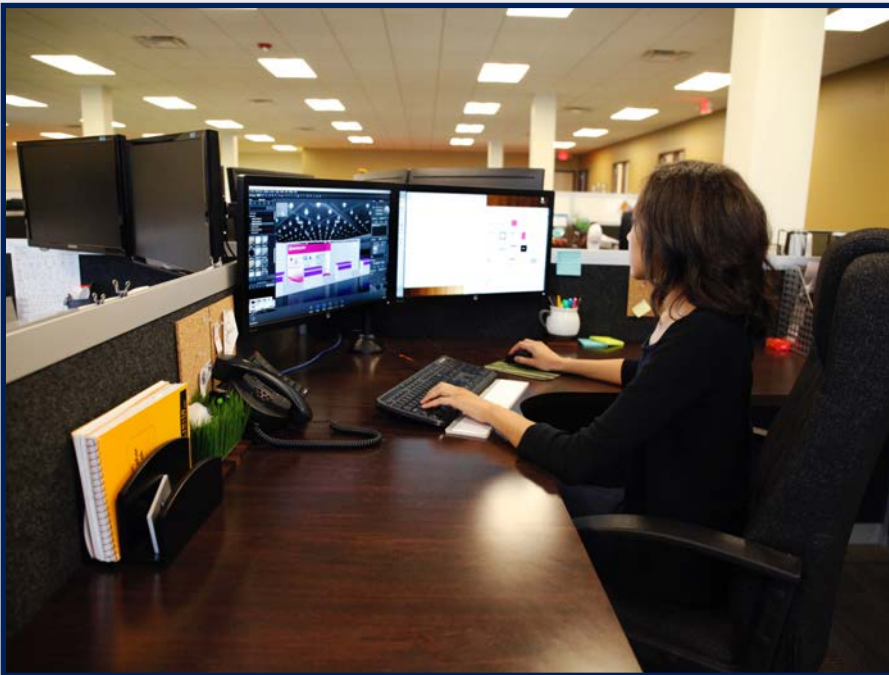


# 5. EXHIBIT DESIGN TO PRODUCTION

The production period of your exhibit could last weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the project. During production, multiple skilled teams work together to build your exhibit.



## A. EXHIBIT DETAILING AND FRAMEWORK



**DETAILING:** First the exhibit details are outlined by detailers using CAD software to determine the exact building blocks, required framework and related elements. Detailers provide complete specification of parts, materials, finishes and construction methods for project managers, exhibit designers and exhibit builders to work from. Then graphic specification are finalized and converted into templates for graphic designers.

**FRAMEWORK:** As artwork design occurs, the framework and building blocks elements are prepared and made to eventually marry with the graphics. The process to create the framework often incorporates welding, metal working and wood working processes. Once final art is turned over, then a critical step of graphics production takes place, where skilled printing, finishing, sewing and fitting professionals work their part of the project.

# 5. EXHIBIT DESIGN TO PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## B EXHIBIT GRAPHIC DESIGN

Exhibitors have an average of three seconds to communicate key brand messages to passersby on the trade show floor. This brief timeframe makes having attention-grabbing trade show graphics critical. Consider the following three elements when designing your trade show graphics.

### MESSAGE & HIERARCHY

Each graphic area in your trade show exhibit should have a unique role in your messaging hierarchy. There are three basic levels in this hierarchy.

#### First Tier Graphics – Brand Identification

Think of first tier graphics as the title of your brand's story. They should be bold and easy-to-read from across the exhibit hall. Your first tier graphics should carry your company name and logo and be viewable from a distance of at least 20 feet.

#### Second Tier Graphics – Instructional

Second tier messages serve as the subheader of your marketing messaging. These graphics are intended to direct visitors to specific areas or product groupings within your space, and should be readable from the aisles to positively impact exhibit traffic flow into your exhibit.

#### Third Tier Graphics – Informational

Your third tier messaging is the body copy and should feature engaging bite-sized messages communicating specific details about your products, services and brand identity as well as reinforcing calls to action. You do not need to write a book to get your message across. A line or two of text or a video should suffice.



### FONT & TYPEFACE

a A b B c C

When selecting fonts for your trade show graphics, identify simple and easy to read lettering.

Your audience's eyes may find it difficult to read multiple typefaces, so stick to a simple collection of one to three fonts for maximum readability.



# 5. EXHIBIT DESIGN TO PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## COLOR

Color plays a critical role in trade show exhibit design, establishing the mood and feel of a space. The color scheme you choose for your exhibit should reflect your brand and personality while complementing your messaging.



To create a visually appealing color scheme, match the colors you use for your graphic elements—such as fonts, images, shapes and borders—with the colors of your exhibit's prominent structures and components.



## IMAGERY



Technological advances in printing have allowed trade show exhibitors to use progressively complex images. The images you choose for your trade show exhibit should support your message and be powerful enough to communicate it, regardless of whether an attendee reads your marketing copy.

Graphic panels are typically printed up to 120" wide. This is important to keep in mind if your exhibit features walls greater than 120" in both height and width, as panels will need to be sewed together, creating a seam.



# 5. EXHIBIT DESIGN TO PRODUCTION (CONT.)

## C THE MARRIAGE OF FRAMEWORK & GRAPHICS

The production of exhibit graphics is a process filled with artwork proofs, printing and finishing. This process includes the following phases:

# 1

### Artwork Test Printing.

The artwork production team will print several samples of artwork to confirm correct coloring and to identify any visuals that are not producing well due to low image resolution. During this process, exhibitors may review these proofs and provide confirmation, or defer this responsibility to the exhibit partner.



# 2

### Graphic Printing.

Once graphics are approved, they are printed directly to substrates on clear, transparent and opaque materials, or can be dye-sublimated onto a variety of fabrics or printed as continuous tone images depending on the requirements of the exhibitor.



# 3

### Graphic Finishing.

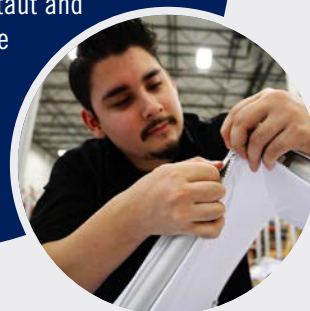
After graphics are printed, sewing, finishing and quality control teams work to finish the graphics. Using state-of-the-art laser printers to make precision cuts to ensure proper sizing and fit, teams also sew in grommets, zippers, silicone edge beading and hemming edges.



# 4

### Graphic Fitting.

For exhibits with large graphic areas (especially if these areas are organically shaped) graphic fitting is critical. Graphic sewing and fitting teams will work together to ensure exhibit graphics are taut and properly fit the framework of the exhibit.



After moving through all phases of the graphic production process, the exhibit framework and graphics can finally be married into a final resulting exhibit.



# 6. PREVIEW, APPROVAL AND THE SHOW

After the exhibit is complete, some exhibitors preview at the production facility prior to the booth shipping to the event. The preview enables you to experience a new exhibit privately before its premiere to the public.



If unable to attend a physical preview, you may be able to view the exhibit via webcam. By previewing your exhibit before it leaves the warehouse, you will be able to make final adjustments before the event.

The exhibit either is approved or tweaked after your preview. Once every detail is to your liking, your exhibit partner will pack up the exhibit and have it shipped to the show.

## ON THE SHOW FLOOR

Once your exhibit is approved and shipped to your event's venue, your exhibit partner will use an in-house team or work with an experienced installation and dismantle (I&D) professional, to assemble your booth. When your exhibit partner is working with I&D teams, they are responsible for the following.

- Confirming the setup and tear-down dates and times. If I&D teams arrive late, exhibitors may face double-time or overtime rates and also could incur additional venue fines.
- Providing copies of booth setup instructions to the I&D team for quick and efficient setup and tear-down of the booth.
- Providing detailed packing instructions to the I&D team. Exhibit partners often take detailed photos of properly packed crates for the teardown crew to reference. This ensures that your exhibit will ship safely to its next destination.





# BRINGING YOUR BRAND TO LIFE

To create the perfect trade show exhibit for your brand, you need to establish a creative dialogue with an exhibit partner who understands and can deliver a solution tailored to your marketing goals and objectives.

**Nimlok®** has over 45 years of being exactly that exhibit partner. From large-scale custom and custom modular designs to smaller portable displays, Nimlok always delivers a goal-oriented exhibit solution sure to make your next event a success.



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