

TRADE FAIRS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY OF ITB BERLIN

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Abstract: Factors affecting career management in modern world, such as globalization, new technologies and changes in the structure and time of work, influence tools and techniques used by employers and employees. This article presents how contemporary trade fairs can be perceived and used by employers and employees for professional development. Based on analysis of the biggest tourism fairs, ITB Berlin, this article presents how activities such as networking and personal branding can be applied in the context of contemporary trade fairs.

Key words: career management, professional development, personal branding, trade fairs, tourism

Introduction

The turn of the XX and XXI centuries has brought many changes in the structure and character of employment in economically developed countries. Globalization, technologies advances, changes in structure and time of work influence the way, in which contemporary workers manage their careers. New tools for employees and employers, such as social media, has come into existence. On the other hand, previously known tools change their character and applications. One of such tools is trade fair, which analyzed from the perspective of career management constitutes a specific opportunity for the development of one's professional career.

Factors influencing job market in the knowledge-based economy

The 1990s have brought significant changes in the perception of knowledge as one of the main factors influencing competitiveness of economies and companies (Kiełtyka, 2010). In the analyses of economical determinants more and more often attention is paid to concepts of knowledge-based economy, information society or learning economy, based on science and new technologies, in which employees should constantly improve their skills and competences (OECD, 1996).

In economically developed countries a noticeable trend has started of better payment for intellectual, qualified employees (and reduction of wages in traditional sectors of economy), who response to the expectations of knowledge-based companies and display such features as: initiative, creativity, ability to solve problems or flexibility (OECD, 1996).

Contemporary frameworks of career management can be divided into three main categories: environmental context (service driven and technology intensive

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businesses, hyper competition at a global level), organizational response (knowledge and information technology driven learning organization, multi-dimensional career movements, small component of core employees and big component of part-time, casual and contract staff) and individual response (focus on employability rather a particular than job, life-long learning, acceptance and near-total responsibility for career management) (Thite, 2001).

Factors influencing career management in knowledge-based society are also reflected in tools and techniques used by employees and employers and taught by educational institutions (Stukalina, 2012). In the professional sphere, information technologies appear alongside relations established in a direct way, by post or telephone. Other traditional tools, such as job interviews or trade meetings evolve in accordance with economic, technological and professional trends. These phenomena can also be captured in the scope of analysis of contemporary trade fairs.

Career, career development and career management

In this paper we use the definition of a career put forward by Arthur et al. who defined career as *“the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time”* (Arthur et al., 1989). Career management can be perceived as the way careers are managed and how this management can attract and retain talented employees to help organizations grow (Yarnall, 2008). It is also possible to point out a difference between career management and a career development. As Yarnall stated (2008): *“Career management assumes a more planned model of change, where the company can grow and develop employees towards a predicted future (...) Career development is about individuals taking responsibility for developing and progressing their career with support from the organization”*. In this paper we focus on the career development opportunities from the perspective of the individuals that may seek new skills, job offers and professional networks, often outside of the organizations.

Trade Fairs

Genesis of contemporary trade fairs

Fairs, known for ages as a form of communication, enable direct contact of producers of diverse consumer goods with the customers. As a result of the evolution that exhibition events have undergone over the centuries, present-day fairs are characterized by many specific features, essential for companies willing to fight effectively for the domination in the complex market surrounding. Fairs, from an appropriate perspective, are, first of all, an attractive form of marketing communication, as well as a tried-and-tested way of stimulating trade exchange. For many entrepreneurs they are also an important place for acquiring information about specific trade or business (Gębarowski, 2010).

The beginnings of fairs known in their contemporary shape can be found in Leipzig in 1894 in the form of the so called samples fairs, which differed from earlier events in presenting only single, standard patterns and samples of mass produced goods, which enabled to considerably reduce the exhibition surface area. Samples fairs, due to fast technical development, specialization of production and development of international division of work, transformed with time into trade fairs. The first event of this type took place in Parma in 1939, whereas the 1950s are considered as the groundbreaking period in trade fairs development (Gębarowski, 2010).

Trade Fairs and Exhibitions

There are many definitions of trade fairs and exhibitions. UFI (Union des Foires Internationales - association of trade show organizers, fairground owners, national and international associations of the exhibition industry created in 1925) highlights the difference between both, stating that: *“Trade fairs are market events of a specific duration, held at intervals, at which a large number of companies present the main product range of one or more industry sectors and mainly sell it on the basis of samples. Trade Fairs predominantly attract trade and business visitors”* (UFI) whereas:

“Exhibitions are market events of a specific duration, held at intervals, at which a large number of companies present a representative product range of one or more industry sectors and sell it or provide information about it for the purposes of sales promotion. Exhibitions predominantly attract the general public” (UFI).

The rank of contemporary trade fair depends on the following features: the number of exhibitors and exhibiting countries, the number of visitors, the exhibition surface area and history. In this article we do not analyze virtual fairs (Gębarowski, 2010). Even that in some areas they are similar to traditional fairs (focus on specific industry, number of exhibitors in one place in limited time), because of their virtual character they cannot be compared with contemporary, physical located trade fairs that allow participants to interact directly and perceive the offers by all the senses.

ITB Berlin fairs from career development perspective

About ITB Berlin

ITB Berlin is the world’s largest tourism fairs. The overall area of the venues is 160,000 square meters and consists of 26 halls. In 2014 the fair was attended by 114,000 visitors and had more than 10,000 exhibitors from 189 countries (ITB *CLOSING REPORT...*).

There are several types of the exhibitors during ITB Berlin. The biggest group consists of tour operators (25.3%), tourist organizations (20.5%) and hotels (20.5%). Besides that participants can explore the offers of tourism associations and institutions (11%), travel agencies (9.1%), travel IT and reservation systems

(7.1%), carrier companies (6.4%), business travel (3.3%), research and educational institutions (3.3%) and leisure and theme parks (3%) (ITB *Analysis Exhibitors...*). In 2013 22.2% of the exhibitors were from Germany and the rest came from European Union (61%) and other European countries (17.3%), Asia (10.6%), Africa (7.7%), America (9.4%) and Oceania (0.2%) (ITB *Analysis Exhibitors...*). Activities and events during ITB Berlin can be divided into two main categories. The first one consists of the activities of the exhibitors who invite people to visit their stands, press conferences, receptions, presentations of the services and products and business meetings. The second category is accompanying events organized under the label of ITE Berlin Convention.

In 2014 the ITB Berlin Convention registered record levels of attendance. A total of 22,000 people took part in around 200 lectures, discussions and workshops (ITB *CLOSING REPORT...*). The topics were divided into 8 categories: Future, Hospitality, Marketing; ITB Destination Days; PhoCusWright@ITB; ITB Business Travel Days; ITB CSR Day; Young Professional, Wellness; Workshops and eTravel World.

Activities directly related to career development

Activities specially devoted to job searching and career planning within ITB Berlin are organized under the label of **ITB Career Center** (ITB *Berlin Career Center...*). They can be divided into specific events (such as ITB Young Professional Day, ITB Job Fair) and areas (such as presentation of educational institutions, consultancy, job, internship and volunteering offers).

Employees interested in a tourism industry career can learn about the latest job vacancies and meet representatives of different exhibitors (hotel chains, cruise companies or tour operators) in Hall 5.1 of the fairs (ITB *Young Professional...*). **ITB Job Fair** is promoted as the central career meeting place for newcomers, ascenders and employees switching from the hotel, catering and tourism industry (ITB *Young Professional...*). Participants can get in touch with the recruiters, apply for a job directly or use counseling services.

Educational institutions (universities, technical colleges, vocational schools and job academies) are located mainly in Hall 11.1. People interested in dedicated study programs, training and courses have an opportunity to talk to the representatives and compare the offers.

ITB Young Professional Day which is a part of ITB Berlin Convention is a platform for presentation and discussion about the trends influencing tourism industry. In 2014 speakers who represent business and academic sectors elaborated on the topics such as "Tourism Studies 2020: Which Graduates Are Required In The Tourism Industry", "Expectations Surrounding Internships" or "Uncommon Jobs In Business Travel" (ITB *Young Professional...*).

ITB Berlin is also a place for business-to-business meetings. In order to simplify interactions between ITB Berlin participants organizers developed a tool called **ITB Networking**. The tool allows users to create their online account and publish

information such as their position, company, type and place of work or date of attendance to the fairs. All of that with the purpose of making the exhibitors easier to find by potential business partners.

ITB Buyers Circle, a dedicated space for decision-makers of medium-sized and large enterprises of the global travel industry, only in 2013 concluded purchase deals worth 1.5 billion euros (ITB *Buyers Circle*...).

Activities indirectly related to career development

Although one of the biggest advantage of trade fairs is opportunity for face-to-face direct interactions, nowadays they are extended also by virtual tools. ITB Networking is one example here. Another tools, such as official ITB discussion group on LinkedIn (the biggest professional networking social media platform) or Twitter hashtags (metadata tags allowing to group messages of the same topic) “#ITB” are used for marketing, networking and personal-branding purposes (see below).

ITB Berlin, as one of the biggest and most prestigious event of such type, within a few days focuses both on the latest trends and theoretical and practical knowledge. It is also a reasonable place to conduct personal or professional research of the areas such as visual communication, quality and types of promotional materials or new tools available for tourism and travel industry. Being up-to-date with the latest knowledge and trends is perceived as an employee’s asset important for its career development.

Exhibition area gives a specific opportunity to conduct a series of direct, informal, face-to-face meetings. For job-seekers direct contacts with representatives of different organizations is a chance to get to know organizational culture, unwritten rules and possible plans of a company’s development. Open space of the fairs enhance people to interact regardless a difference in their occupation and place that they occupy in business hierarchy. Direct talks could be also a valuable source of information about key people and their contact details. Accompanying events, such as ITB Berlin Convention or ITB Berlin Crew Night, give a chance to build or strengthen business relations.

Trade fairs as an opportunity for professional development

In the era of growing uncertainties of employment and recent economic crisis (Brzeziński, 2011) employees pay more attention to professional development. One of the answers to economic turmoil is **personal branding**, which can be defined as a programmatic approach to selling a person on the professional level, which is fashioned as a proactive response to the emerging desires of a target audience or market (Cheney and Christensen, 2001). As Lair et al. stated (2005): “*Within the personal branding movement, people and their careers are marketed as brands complete with promises of performance, specialized designs, and tag lines for success*”.

There are many opportunities to develop the personal brand. As in the traditional marketing also on this level employees use techniques such as social media marketing, targeting or direct selling. Some of them can be transmitted also to the environments of trade fairs (see Figure 1).

Career research	Networking	Professional knowledge	Personal branding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry research • trends research • job titles and occupations • job offers • internships and volunteering offers • educational and training offers • others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct • informal • equal • research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key people • social structures • online tools • others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trends • tools • case studies • best practises • activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lectures • workshops • presentations • receptions • professional publications • others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct meetings • public speaking • visibility in social media • others

Figure 1. Opportunities for professional development during trade fairs

Additionally to personal branding, G. Columbus enumerates eight strategies for long-term career success in tourism and special events industry: target advertising; networking; maintaining relationships; attending / exhibiting / participating in conferences and tradeshow; educating, learning, staying on top of the trends; speaking at conferences or meetings; participating actively in professional organizations; writing for professional publications (Columbus, 2010).

In the knowledge-based societies employees are being enhanced to broaden their theoretical and practical competences (Ślusarczyk and Kot, 2011). Contemporary trade fairs, analyzed from the professional development perspective combine different set of tools, activities and techniques used one way or another by students, employees and employers in order to manage their careers. What is unique in the fairs environment is a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, presentation of the latest and future trends and presence of people representing all roles and fields of industry.

Based on the tools and activities described in the cited literature we have designed a framework of the opportunities for professional development during different trade fairs. It consist of four categories: career research activities (focus on the most direct way of acquiring jobs); networking (highlight of gaining and developing already set business relations); professional knowledge (trends research and skills development) and personal branding (manifesting itself mainly in direct meetings and opportunities for public presentations during accompanying events).

Summary

Factors affecting career management in contemporary world, such as globalization, new technologies, and changes in the structure and time of work influence tools and techniques used by employers and employees. More and more different activities, such as scientific conferences, job fairs, business meetings and trade fairs overlap with each other. Trade fairs, because of their limited duration, opportunity for direct and informal interactions, presentation of the latest trends and theoretical and practical knowledge remain one of the most important events in the industries such as tourism. For both exhibitors and participants trade fairs could be also an opportunity for career development from a short-term (job offers) and long-term (relations, professional knowledge) perspectives.

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TARGI BRANŻOWE JAKO SZANSA NA ROZWÓJ ZAWODOWY. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU NA PODSTAWIE ITB BERLIN

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono w jaki sposób współczesne targi branżowe mogą być wykorzystywane przez pracowników i pracodawców w celu rozwoju zawodowego. W oparciu o analizę największych targów turystycznych na świecie, ITB Berlin, w artykule zaprezentowano, w jaki sposób narzędzia i aktywności, takie jak nawiązywanie relacji biznesowych (*networking*) i budowanie marki własnej pracownika (*personal branding*) mogą być stosowane w kontekście targów branżowych w celu rozwoju zawodowego.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie karierą, rozwój zawodowy, strategia personal branding, targi branżowe, turystyka

贸易展览会作为专业发展的机会。柏林旅交会的个案研究。

摘要： 影响职业生涯管理在现代世界中，全球化、新技术和结构和工作时间、变化等因素影响，雇主及雇员使用工具和技术。本文介绍了如何当代贸易交易会可以感知和用于由雇主和雇员的专业发展。基于分析最大的旅游交易会、柏林旅交会，本文介绍了如何在当代贸易展览会方面应用网络和个人品牌等活动。

关键词： 职业生涯管理、职业发展、个人品牌、贸易展销会、旅游