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Synergy and strategy surpass sanctions

Sergey Selivanov, Deputy Director General, EXPOCENTER, revealed how the Russian exhibition industry is responding to current challenges and described mechanisms that ensure the most effective support.

Business event model as a tool for entering new markets

- Would you agree that modern business events have become the most lucrative tools for Russian companies to enter international markets?

Of course, participation in B2B congresses and trade shows has always been one of the main mechanisms for entering foreign markets, and in recent years its value for export-oriented companies has been significantly propped up. Due to constant changes in the geopolitical environment, many channels of interaction become either hard to access or prohibitively expensive. At the same time, new niches appear in the markets of friendly countries, opening up solid opportunities for the development of the international outreach of Russian producers. This effect is strengthened by the support of the government and regional authorities involved in co-financing participation in trade shows through export support centres.

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- What features of Russian events attract new foreign participants?

Despite significant changes in the geography of foreign exhibitors at trade shows in Russia, their share remains substantial. It contributes to the international status of events. Enterprises from China, Turkiye, Belarus, India, and other friendly countries, thanks to their participation in trade shows, are planning to fill in vacant niches in our market after the departure of European and American companies. Yet, it is an amazing fact, but we observe a weighty number of exhibitors from Italy, France, Switzerland, Spain, and other European countries at the largest events of EXPOCENTRE. They have no desire to leave the Russian market despite the risks of sanctions from their respective countries. Moreover, one of the specifics of both trade shows and their conference programmes are discussions held between Russian and foreign partners on issues linked to interstate production cooperation right from the supply of components to the opening of joint ventures.

- What barriers remain and how to overcome them to enhance the appeal of the Russian business platform on foreign markets?

The Russian market and the MICE industry show sufficient flexibility to promptly respond to requests from international participants in order to attract and retain them among their exhibitors. There are still some difficulties with making payments from abroad. Nevertheless, there are options for overcoming these barriers since financial institutions and partners in Russia provide support to solve such complex issues.

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Innovations and new market players

- What changes are taking place in the composition of the participants in Russian events related to representatives of business, government agencies, and investors?

The structure of participants in the largest conventions and trade shows is generally preserved at the traditional level. Representatives of federal and regional authorities, business, public organisations and industry associations take part in the events. The role of associations and the degree of their immersion in the content of trade shows has recently considerably raised the status of events. Thus, it is critical for event organisers to build close interaction with industry leaders. In recent years, an important feature emerged: special engagement of professional buyers who enhance the effect of participation in trade shows and increase the value of events, and, accordingly, their scale.

- What new formats and technological solutions help attract and retain a target audience?

New technologies are now intensively introduced in all sectors of the economy and in our daily life. The MICE industry has become one of the first to embark on the path of digital renovation. In order to increase the efficiency of interaction with exhibitors, EXPOCENTRE has introduced and is constantly developing electronic services, one of which is the Exhibitor's Personal Account. It quickly allows filling out and adjusting online applications for additional services, receiving payment and reporting documents without wasting time while scanning a full range of services offered.

As for the new approaches to holding events, many organisers no longer support the videoconferencing and hybrid format. Everything is back to personal presence, although interactive communication is also widely introduced, involving the entire audience in holding conferences, expanding agenda, answering questions that come up in real time to chat with a moderator. Different game scenarios are implemented as well. Much attention is paid to the development of an appointment system called MatchMaking. This service, like many others in our field, is introducing AI tools that increase the efficiency of finding potential business partners.

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Challenges and prospects of the MICE industry

- What are the main challenges facing the MICE industry in Russia today?

Trade shows are a mirror of the economy, both of the industry and of the country in general. This is a postulate, and the challenges facing our industry correspond to it. Maintaining positions in the market, attracting major customers and searching for new ones, including foreign partners, being flexible, exercising individual approach in respect to prominent customers, interacting with authorities and industry associations – all of these sum up to the effect of preserving trade shows in the lead, as well as asserting their values for participants.

Strategic partnership and synergy

- What is the uniqueness of the partnership between EXPOCENTRE and WTC? What are the benefits of such a model?

The interaction between EXPOCENTRE and WTC is not just the coexistence of two subsidiaries of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russia. It is a synergy of businesses between the two leaders of the Russian congress and trade show markets. The business model of our partnership implies mutual reinforcement and build-up in the areas of activity pursued by our companies. Despite the forced relocation of trade shows of EXPOCENTRE from Krasnaya Presnya to other venues in the Moscow region, our exhibitors and visitors still remain loyal to comfortable WTC hotels, use its congress and restaurant infrastructure, and we do promote these services. Our customers can count on special terms and also on additional bonuses, which compels them to return next year.

- What mechanisms of interaction are implemented to optimise the flow of participants and stimulate their business activity?

Within the working group on interaction between EXPOCENTRE and WTC, we develop or adapt existing tools for maintaining permanent and attracting new participants, boosting their business undertakings. These measures are both systemic in terms of developing a common approach to accommodate the preferences of our participants, and also a targeted approach when discussing specific activities. The result of such an interaction algorithm amounts to professionally-handled events and satisfied participants while organisers achieve their goals.

- What are the plans of EXPOCENTRE for the development of exhibition activities in the coming years? What new projects and initiatives are planned?

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According to statistics, today, EXPOCENTRE is the leader of the exhibition market in Russia. The main tactical task for our team is to preserve this position and develop each of our 25 own trade shows. Thus, by organising the largest B2B trade shows in our country, we promote the expansion of production and sales markets of Russian companies and contribute to the development of different industries and the Russian economy as a whole. Our strategic task is to build a new state-of-the-art exhibition and congress venue, which all our partners, participants and visitors are waiting for. The management of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russia and EXPOCENTRE are actively involved in this issue. We hope this project will come to life soon.

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