

A trade show booth for Chicago, featuring a blue and white color scheme. A large banner at the top reads "CHICAGO CHOOSE CHICAGO" with a cityscape image. The booth includes a curved wall with a cityscape graphic, a table with white chairs, and a large circular sign on the left. The background shows a modern building with large windows.

PLAN YOUR NEXT EXHIBIT LIKE A PRO

Whether you're a first-time exhibitor or a seasoned pro, this workbook will help you clarify your goals, streamline the design process, and get the most out of your next trade show.

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WHAT'S INSIDE

-  Goal-setting prompts
-  Design planning checklist
-  Budget break-down
-  Timeline and milestones

WELCOME

Trade shows are high stakes—and high effort. Success doesn't just come from showing up. It takes a clear purpose, a smart plan, and the right team by your side.

That's where this workbook comes in.

We created it to help you:

- Get focused on what matters most
- Streamline your design and planning process
- Avoid common (and costly) surprises
- Show up confident—and ready

This guide walks you through the foundational questions every exhibitor should ask. Whether you're working with a builder or just getting started, it's a great way to clarify your vision.

We hope it helps—and if you need support, we'd love to be part of your process.

—The B-FOR Creative Team

B-FOR
Creative

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Send us what you've completed—we'll review and follow up with ideas.

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

STRATEGY STARTS WITH SPECIFICS

You can have more than one goal, and you probably should. But clarity is key—are you primarily there to generate leads, build visibility, meet with media, or support existing clients?

Understanding who will be walking the floor is just as important. Look for demographic insights on the show's website or ask the organizers for a visitor breakdown. Are they mostly buyers, press, consumers, industry insiders?

The more you know, the better you can tailor both your booth and your outreach strategy.

EXHIBIT GOALS & STRATEGY

What are your goals for this show?

- Generate qualified leads
- Build brand awareness
- Launch a new product
- Meet with partners or media
- Other:

Who are you trying to reach?

Briefly describe their industry, role, and goals

What should happen when they visit your booth?

E.g., scan a badge, demo a product, schedule a meeting



WHY THIS MATTERS

Your goals shape everything—from layout to messaging. A booth designed for lead capture won't look the same as one built to wow media or host private meetings.

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

KEEP YOUR KEY INFO HANDY

Having your basic show details organized and easy to access is a must when planning your booth. Show name, dates, location, booth size, and setup timeline all inform the design and logistics.

If you're newer to exhibiting, look for the exhibitor manual or service kit from the show's General Contractor—companies like Freeman, GES, or Hargrove.

These kits often include booth specs, deadlines, and key contacts to help you get started.

SHOW DETAILS

Show Name:

Link To Exhibitor Manual or Show Services Website:

Use this to help answer the questions below

Show Dates:

Start and end dates

Location:

City, state, country

Booth Size:

Include feet or meters

Booth Number:

If known, or leave blank

Set-Up/Teardown Timeline:

if you're not sure, check the exhibitor manual

Booth Details:

What's Included? carpet, electrical, furnishings, etc.

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

DESIGN AROUND REAL USE

Before we talk visuals, we need to understand how your booth will function. Think through the logistics:

- **Staffing:** How many people will be in the space? Will they greet, mingle, or host meetings?
- **Meetings:** Do you need room for one-on-one chats—or multiple simultaneous conversations?
- **Activation:** Are you planning a demo, giveaway, or photo op? If not, leave flexible space for interaction.
- **AV:** Movement draws attention. Good video elevates your brand—bad video does more harm than good.

BOOTH ELEMENTS CHECKLIST



WHY THIS MATTERS

Each area of your booth should serve a purpose. Choose only what supports your goals and audience—too many zones can dilute your message or overwhelm a small footprint.

Choose What You'll Include:

Check all that apply.

CORE BOOTH FUNCTIONS

- Product display or demo area
- Reception or greeting area
- AV/screens
- Literature or swag
- Storage (lockable or open)

ACTIVATION ZONES

- Sampling/tasting area
- Photo or selfie spot
- Hospitality (drinks, snacks)
- Other activation area

MEETING & COLLABORATION

- Private meeting space
- Partner area(s)

Other (describe below):

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

START WITH THE VIBE AND BUILD FROM THERE

In the early stages of planning, focus on how your booth should feel and what it needs to do. Should it be polished and premium? Fun and energetic? Calm and welcoming? That overall vibe, paired with your functional needs, will guide layout, materials, and flow.

Visual assets like logos can come later. What matters now is the experience you want to create and how the space will support it.

For example, a premium coffee brand might aim to feel like an upscale café with soft lighting, wood finishes, and seating for tastings or casual meetings. Clarity on atmosphere and function gives your design team a strong foundation.

DESIGN INSPIRATION & BRAND INPUTS

1 Desired Vibe

List 3–5 adjectives or descriptive phrases that capture your desired vibe. (Examples: sleek and modern, earthy and organic, bright and energetic, professional but approachable)

2 Layout & Style Cues

Are there layouts, materials, or styles that reflect your brand's vibe? Think about open vs. enclosed spaces, neutral vs. bold colors, lounge-style vs. high-energy setups.

3 Material Preferences

Are there any materials or elements you'd like to include or avoid? (e.g., wood tones, bright colors, tech displays, sustainability cues)

DESIGN INSPIRATION & BRAND INPUTS

4 Helpful Brand Assets

You don't need these yet, but if you have anything that could help guide direction, feel free to include it. Think logos, product photos, style guides, moodboards, or marketing materials. A shared link (Dropbox, Google Drive, etc.) works best.

5 Reference Booths

Do you have previous booths you'd like considered for reference? If yes, describe what worked—or didn't—and share files or links if available.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Design starts with feeling and function. Before choosing colors or logos, focus on how you want visitors to feel and what your booth needs to do.

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY BUILDS BETTER BOOTHS

Many teams hesitate to share a budget, worried it will lead to inflated pricing instead of the best deal. In reality, a clear budget helps the design team create a concept that meets your needs without overdesigning or cutting corners.

Without a range, you risk two common issues: getting a booth that looks basic when you were expecting premium, or being shown a concept that looks great but costs far more than you're willing to spend. Sharing a realistic budget is the best way to get a design that works—visually, functionally, and financially.

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

What Should Your Budget Include?

Your booth budget usually covers more than just design and build. Use this checklist to outline what you've accounted for—or identify areas where you need support estimating:

- Booth design and fabrication
- AV / technology
- Furnishings and décor
- Shipping / freight
- Show services (e.g., labor, rigging, carpet, electrical, etc.)
- Installation and dismantle (I&D)
- Contingency buffer

Your Ideal Budget Range \$_____



IMPORTANT NOTES

Planning to Reuse Your Booth?

Let your builder know early. Reusable designs may require different materials, added planning, and storage—so budget accordingly.

Show Services Add Up

Rigging, electrical, and cleaning are often billed separately and vary by venue. Ask your builder or show organizer for estimates.

Unclear on Budget?

If you're unsure what to budget, reach out early. A booth builder (like B-FOR) can give ballpark ranges based on your goals and booth size.

 **EXPERT INSIGHT**

TIME IS ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE ASSETS IN EXHIBIT PLANNING

The earlier you lock in your design and builder, the more flexibility you'll have—and potentially, the more money you'll save. A good rule of thumb is to confirm your builder and design at least 12 weeks before the show.

During peak seasons, some builders even offer discounts for early approvals because it allows them to structure their workflow and deliver stronger outcomes. Don't be afraid to ask about lead times when reaching out to potential partners. Rushing often means compromises—on design, finish quality, or cost.

TIMELINE & DECISION-MAKING

Target Date to Finalize Booth Design:

Show Install Date:

Internal Review/Feedback Deadline:

Stakeholders

Who needs to weigh in on decisions? Include names, roles, or departments.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Clear timelines and decision-makers help avoid delays and last-minute surprises. Agreeing on key dates early keeps everyone aligned.

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RECOMMENDED MILESTONE TIMELINE

16+

BEGIN OUTREACH TO BOOTH BUILDERS

14-16

SHARE GOALS, INSPIRATION, AND BUDGET

12

CONFIRM BUILDER + APPROVE DESIGN CONCEPT

10

FINALIZE GRAPHICS DIRECTION (IF AVAILABLE)

8

CONFIRM ALL FUNCTIONAL NEEDS AND SERVICES

6

LOCK ALL STRUCTURAL DESIGN ELEMENTS

5

SUBMIT FINAL GRAPHICS

4

FINALIZE SHIPPING AND ORDER SHOW SERVICES

3

SUBMIT FINAL AV CONTENT

2

CONFIRM SHIPPING AND SHOW SERVICE ORDERS

SHOW WEEK

INSTALLATION AND ONSITE EXECUTION

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LET'S BRING YOUR VISION TO LIFE

At B-FOR Creative, we design and build custom trade show exhibits that are as strategic as they are striking.

From first sketch to show floor, our team works closely with you to create a booth that reflects your brand, meets your goals, and makes a lasting impression.

WANT INPUT FROM OUR TEAM?

You don't need to have every detail filled in—just send over what you've got. We'll review your workbook and follow up with ideas tailored to your needs.



UPLOAD

UPLOAD YOUR WORKBOOK

Click the button above or visit bforcreative.com/upload

PREFER TO CONNECT DIRECTLY?



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