

The Ultimate Trade Show Planning Timeline

A successful trade show display requires careful coordination, strategic graphic design, and logistics planning. Use this step-by-step master checklist to track your milestones, manage structural design lead times, and avoid last-minute venue surcharges.

Lead Time	Milestone & Objective	Key Steps & Action Items
9 to 12 Months Out	Strategic Foundations & Space Booking	• Define show-specific KPIs, measurable sales targets, and overall budget allocations. • Reserve your booth space; select your footprint preference (Inline, Island, Peninsula) early. • Obtain the official Show Manual (Exhibitor Kit) and note strict structural limits and height caps.
6 to 9 Months Out	Exhibit Concept & Hardware Evaluation	• Establish your booth layout objectives with your display build partner. • Assess display system requirements: deciding between Modular Hardware, Custom Hardwalls, or portable systems. • Audit existing hardware inventory for structural integrity, broken latches, or missing framework.
4 to 6 Months Out	Artwork Asset Creation & Pre-Production	• Initiate graphic design mockups tailored to your exhibit's specific structural

		sizing constraints. • Gather vector graphic assets, ensuring brand typography aligns with required specs (e.g., DM Sans Bold, Jakarta Sans). • Map out your promotional campaign, pre-show email outreach strategy, and staff scheduling.
2 to 3 Months Out	Production Finalization & Logistics Setup	• Finalize artwork assets and hand them off for technical wide-format printing or fabric tension (SEG) printing. • Arrange logistical accommodations: book flights, hotel room blocks, and register staff passes. • Submit primary onsite service requests: dedicated electrical drops, high-speed Wi-Fi, and booth flooring/carpeting options.
1 Month Out	Final Compliance & Venue Deadlines	• Complete advance material shipments to the specialized warehousing center to secure lower handling fees. • Confirm structural layout approvals and rigging safety declarations with venue architectural engineers. • Prepare lead retrieval devices, presentation slide decks, and digital product collateral files.

1 to 2 Weeks Out	Pre-Show Verification & Kit Gathering	• Double-check tracking numbers for all advanced shipments and verify dock receiving receipts. • Assemble an urgent onsite emergency pack containing extra tape, spare hardware pieces, utility knives, and printed copies of all order forms. • Brief your booth crew on lead capturing procedures, scheduling rotations, and primary messaging points.
Show Week	Installation, Onsite Management & Dismantle	• Monitor targeted installation progress during your designated freight dock unloading window. • Conduct comprehensive product hardware tests, screen calibrations, and lighting layout updates before the floor opens. • Complete post-show dismantling packing, execute Bill of Lading paperwork, and clear out empty crates from storage.

Critical Shipping Tip for Exhibitors

Shipping deadlines are non-negotiable in the trade show industry. Opting for 'Advance Warehouse Shipping' rather than direct-to-venue delivery typically gives you up to a 30-day cushion, protects your

assets from getting caught in marshalling yard bottlenecks, and ensures your exhibit display is waiting directly in your booth space before the standard installation period opens.

Need assistance setting up your production timeline? Call Westkey Xibita: 1-800-663-9952