

GSC, or no GSC... that is the question.

–By Liz Shepherd, Owner and Manager of ExhibitPRO International

GSC is the acronym for General Show Contractor. We in the trade show business love acronyms more than words themselves. The GSC is the company who is hired/ contracted by the show organizer, the association, or show management (the ones that sold you the booth space). The GSC is responsible for decorating the show which includes the registration area, entrance ways into the show, directional signs, aisle carpet and aisle signs. That is one half of their job. The other is to provide booth decoration and services to the exhibitors coming to the show. In fact, the GSC puts together the show manual or exhibitor kit, which is filled with forms to order services and rental items from, guess who... the GSC.

So the question is, when should an exhibitor use the GSC?

The short answer is... **ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE TO**. In truth, none of your decoration items must come from the GSC. You have a choice!

The only services that you **MUST** hire from the GSC involve machinery, like forklifts, scissor lifts, cranes, etc. And this is only because of insurance liability issues. So translated to the forms in the exhibitor kit, these services will include:

- Material handling/ drayage
- Hanging signs
- Forklift/ crane labor

That's it... for all other decorations and services, shop and choose wisely. You can save a lot of money and find a lot higher quality in product and service.

Carpet: To achieve a professional presentation, your carpet should be **AT LEAST 28 oz.** weight. And if budget allows, padding is recommended. It should cost no more than \$3.50/ sf., including carpet, padding, plastic cover, delivery, installation and removal. The GSC will typically be higher than any independent contractor.

Furniture: Rent custom! Your visitors will notice and appreciate the nicer looking and more comfortable furniture. Custom furniture through the GSC, offered through the exhibitor kit, is typically marked up by 15-20% to take care of the "kick back" the furniture company (not the GSC) has to pay to show management to be included in the official show kit.

* Note that Freeman Decorating (GSC) has a nice line of upgrade furniture that is reasonably priced.

Rental Exhibits: use the GSC, only if you want to look generic... An exhibit is integral to your unique presentation- you need to stand out, don't settle for anything less! Renting a standard exhibit from the GSC is like renting a suit from the same store as your competitor to visit a new prospect for the first time. Yikes! There are many, many rental options available throughout the country, and the world. Again, you should shop and choose wisely. And don't forget to spend some time and money on creating awesome graphics that set you apart from your competition!

I&D Labor: Another acronym. We do love them... I&D stands for "Installation and Dismantling" labor of exhibits and carpet. Here is where good relationships are the most important. The best way to save money with I&D is to have the same supervisor at every show. This can be one of your reps, or someone from your "exhibit house". The GSC has a large crew of people available for hire during show set up and tear down, but in most cases, you will be better off hiring independent contractors to handle the labor.

* Hire from the GSC if your exhibit/ carpet I&D takes less than 4 hours for install or dismantle. GSC does NOT charge minimums, whereas independent contractors typically will charge a 4 hour minimum.

If you use an independent contractor, you need to get the proper paper work in at least 30 days before the first day of installation. So this takes a little planning.

Shipping: DO NOT use the GSC for shipping! The GSC is sub-contracting these services to trucking companies and marking it WAY UP. There are many, many shipping companies out there that can handle your shipping anywhere at anytime. Even better, let your "exhibit house" take care of the shipping. There are so many minute details involved with shipping and so many problems that can happen, you will be better off letting the professionals take care of your shipping. For shipping out literature and product at the close of the show, you should either take these packages back to your hotel and ship from there (if Fed Ex, UPS, or DHL), or leave it with the exhibit freight and let it go back with the exhibit/ carpet to your storage facility or "exhibit house." They can ship it back to you from there and save you money.

* Don't forget to turn in your bill of lading (BOL) to the GSC at the close of the show. The BOL tells everyone where the freight ships to and which shipping company is expected to pick up at show site. If you don't specify the carrier, the GSC will move your freight and charge you dearly.

Vacuuming/ Booth Cleaning: Either bring your own vacuum, or buy one in the city where you are exhibiting! Too bad for the GSC, they charge way too much for cleaning.

Plants & Flowers: Buy these too, at the closest "home center" to the show facility (Home Depot, Lowes, Ace Hardware, grocery stores). Beautiful selections are available all-year around.

* While you, or your I&D supervisor, are out buying a vacuum cleaner, flowers and plants, hit an office supply store (OfficeMax, Office Depot, Staples) for great looking trash cans & liners. Don't give your money to the GSC! Save this little errand for last, and pick up all those forgotten & necessary items, like literature holders, tape, pens, staplers, scissors, etc.

Save money and be in control... this is the message to learn from these shared words. Call us if you need help. We practice these tips at every show, for every project.