

Low Down on Layouts

Everything you need to know about the six most common exhibit
floorplans.

-- Linda Armstrong --

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By Linda Armstrong

Did you know that a classic diamond style booth layout is great for a multi-division company, but notoriously difficult to staff? Did you know that several oversized products clutter a random display type of booth, but they're perfectly at home in a plaza-style layout? Were you aware that closed, or club-style exhibits are an awesome canvas for graphics, but some visitors view them as traps?

If you're like most exhibitors, you probably don't have a clue. In fact, "there's a lot of default design and purchasing," says Tom Bowman, principal of the Bowman Design Group of Signal Hill, CA. "If the exhibit house doesn't show exhibitors the pros and cons of each basic layout, exhibitors often think, 'Hmm... This looks nice, and it seems to fit my needs. And since I'm not sure what could be wrong or what might work better, then, why not? I'll buy it.'"

Sure, some exhibit houses go the extra mile to explain your options. But frankly, educating clients isn't their job. You simply must walk in their doors with a basic understanding of your options and a general sense of what will work best for you.

To provide the basics, then, three industry experts have identified six core booth layouts and provided some general guidelines for each. The trio includes Bowman, who provided the original diagrams, along with Jeremy Regenbogen, principal of San Francisco's Dual Office (and a 2003 Exhibit







Design Awards judge), and David Albarian, project manager for Expomobilia, a Swiss firm (with offices in San Diego) specializing in European design. Although our team agrees on the six basic layouts, they caution that variables exist within each. You can, and should, change each layout's components (theaters, kiosks, monitors, exhibitry), size (both for the booth and components), and positioning (objects rotated at an angle, moved off center, etc.). But these core concepts are blueprints for almost all exhibit designs, including inlines and peninsulas.

Our trio also cautions that there's no one specific layout that's right for every exhibitor every time. You must mix and match layouts and elements to suit each situation. And, what might be a positive for one exhibitor can be a negative for another. For example, the exclusivity of a closed exhibit can make those inside feel special and those outside feel rejected. The layout's impact on your program depends on the location and personality of your target audience.

Under all the variables, however, are these six core layouts. Our experts have made several generalizations about each to provide a sort of "least you should know" guide. Understanding these basics will help you make a confident, informed buying decision the next time around. ■

*By Linda Armstrong. Questions or comments?
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	Main focal point(s)	Access	Message visibility	Traffic flow
 <p>CLASSIC DIAMOND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers strong visual presence • Requires one large message and several equal smaller ones • Works well for display of multiple small products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplicity and lack of walls draw people in • Lack of boundaries means visitors might leave too soon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central structure blocks view across booth • Offers only one spot for a single, high-impact statement • Generally limited space for graphics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires careful staffing to encourage visitors to explore whole booth • Especially large central structure can push visitors out of booth
 <p>CENTERPIECE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works best when one product or message needs spotlighting • Requires central element worthy of highlighting • Offers little flexibility over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows easy access to focal point • Single focus can't hold attendees' interest long 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers great impact for main message • All graphics must support main message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows easy access to main focus • Central focus can attract so much traffic to cause clogging
 <p>THEATER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout drives all attention toward presentation • Singular focus prevents highlighting of multiple products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness encourages visitors who don't like to 'commit' to more enclosed presentations • Offers no capture effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows strong medium for message delivery • Partitions can display smaller messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back of theater pushes away potential visitors • Undecided visitors can tie up aisle traffic • Quick exits after presentation difficult to prevent
 <p>CLUB</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendees can't see main focus until they step inside • Interior offers quiet off-floor environment • Exterior walls can attract attention and deliver messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows complete control over entry and exit of visitors • Limited entrances discourage walk-up traffic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit walls offer huge canvas for graphics • Confusion can result if too many messages plastered on walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main entrance clogs easily if booth is popular • Staff can route traffic through key areas before allowing exit
 <p>RANDOM DISPLAY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows use of multiple products and presentation media • Prevents highlight of one central focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different elements act as draw from different sides • Disorder can keep some visitors from entering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits many levels of messaging • Chaos can work against proper message delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing layout can be difficult to navigate • Traffic can clog at focal point
 <p>PLAZA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers open and inviting interior space • Allows all elements to be seen at once • Doesn't offer one striking element visible from afar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness encourages visitors to wander and explore • Visitors are free to leave as easily as they enter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows placement of large display graphics • All product offerings viewable and accessible at once 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central elements can draw too much traffic, causing clogging • Staff guides can enable smooth traffic flow

Classic Diamond

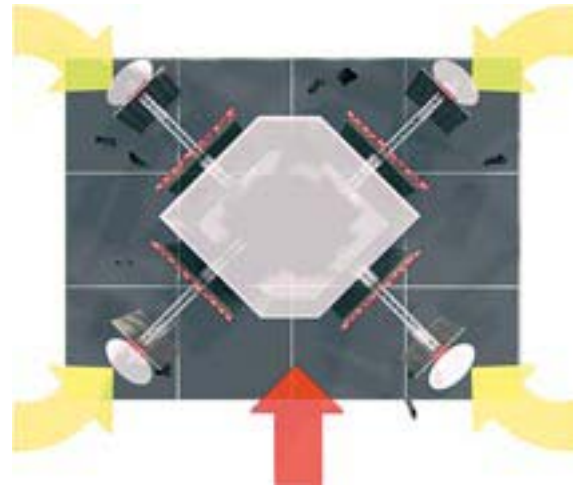
The classic diamond is a large, central structure with a series of independent elements surrounding it. Often, the central structure is an exhibit tower, perhaps a two-story monolith, maybe including a storage room, upper-level hospitality area, meeting room, etc. The surrounding elements might include kiosks, demo stations, graphics, product displays, etc. The exhibit doesn't have to be symmetrical or diamond shaped to fit this model — it just has to have the same basic positioning.

Advantage

Provides a strong visual presence, which draws people in from a distance. It's a canvas for one powerful message.

Disadvantage

The central structure blocks the view from one end of the booth to another. Attendees might not grasp the connection between different company messages.



Disadvantage

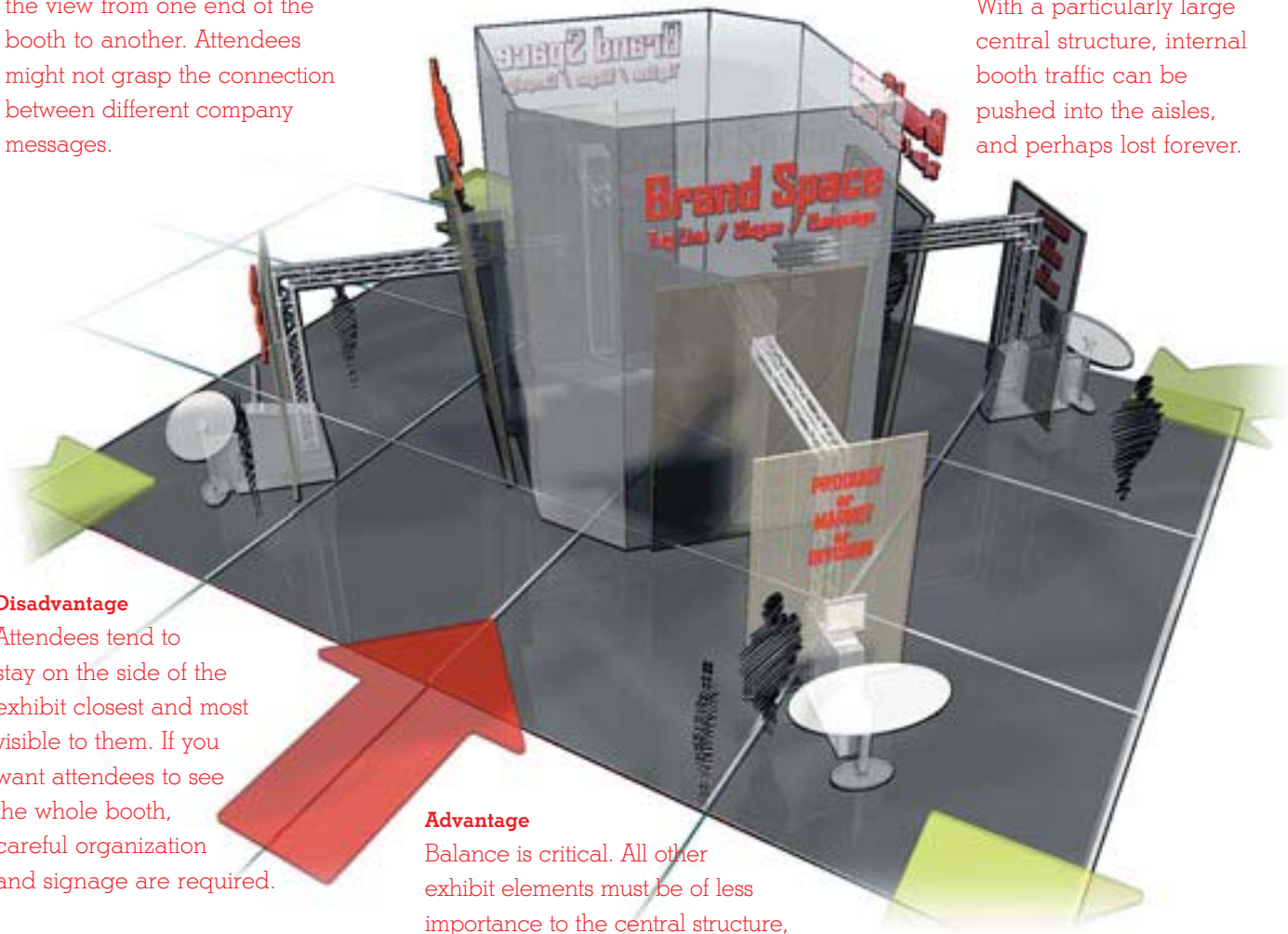
With a particularly large central structure, internal booth traffic can be pushed into the aisles, and perhaps lost forever.

Disadvantage

Attendees tend to stay on the side of the exhibit closest and most visible to them. If you want attendees to see the whole booth, careful organization and signage are required.

Advantage

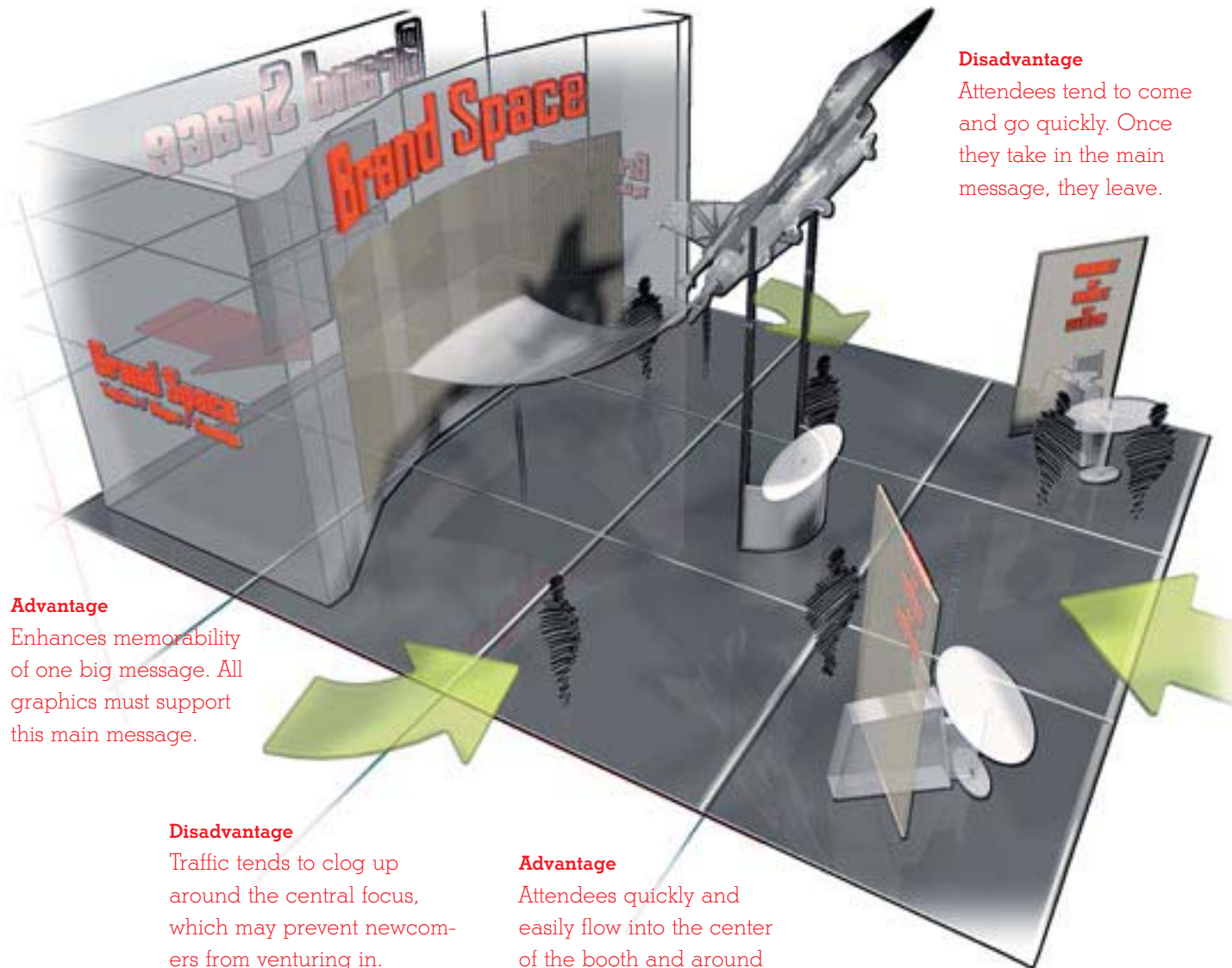
Balance is critical. All other exhibit elements must be of less importance to the central structure, but of equal importance to each other.



Key Considerations: The central diamond works well for displaying multiple small products under one company umbrella. But a system to position and track staff is

required so staff can assist attendees effectively. Also, there's little long-term flexibility. You're locked into one central message and equally important surrounding elements.

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Advantage

Enhances memorability of one big message. All graphics must support this main message.

Disadvantage

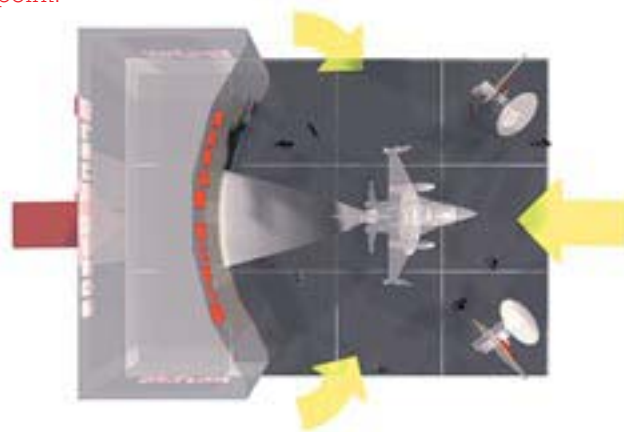
Traffic tends to clog up around the central focus, which may prevent newcomers from venturing in.

Advantage

Attendees quickly and easily flow into the center of the booth and around the main focal point.

The Centerpiece

One message or product is featured — and everything else is diminished or excluded. The manner in which it is featured varies considerably from large pedestal displays to huge graphic murals. However, everything in the booth is directed towards one focal point. Smaller elements might be graphics or kiosks, or a range of functional components such as a presentation area, storage room, conference area, etc.



Key Considerations: This works best when exhibitors have one dominant reason for going to a show. It's all about the powerful statement. Because of this characteristic, the central focus

must be worthy of spotlight. You can't feign importance. And next year, if you've got two messages or products to showcase, you'll probably need a new booth.