

The digital level of China's exhibition market



Insights from EAC investigation of Chinese organizers

China's local trade show organizers have adapted to using digital tools to survive in the "new normal". Get insights from EAC's investigation on how local Chinese organizers use digital tools to boost their offline trade shows



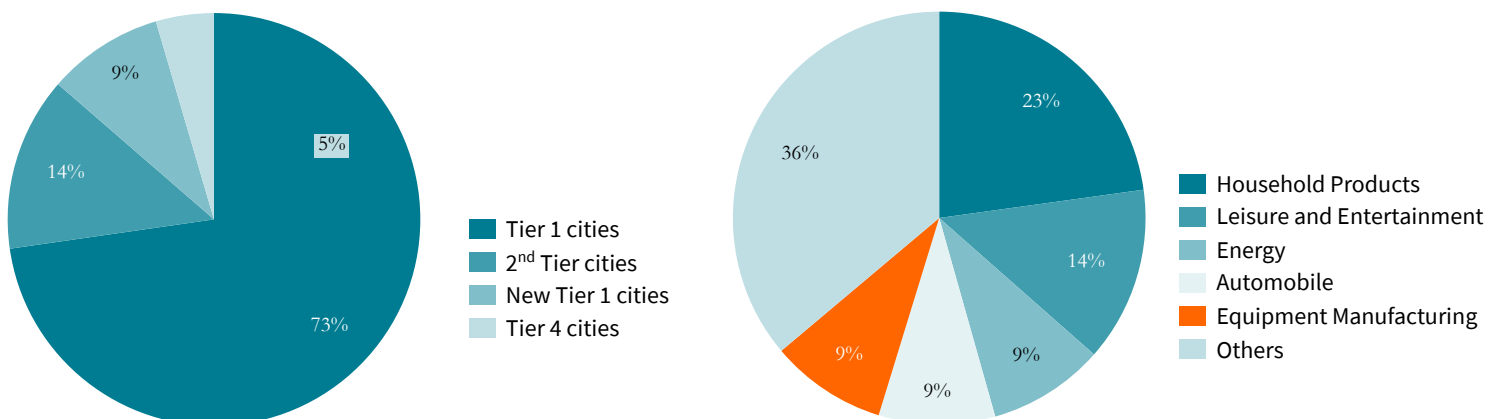
How the pandemic has forced the digitalization process of China's local exhibition industry

Contradictory to the global exhibition industry which almost stagnated in 2020, China's local trade show organizers have adapted to using digital tools to survive in the "new normal".

- ✓ **Change of customer perception:** both exhibitors and visitors have recognized the added value of meetings and full-screen conversations from the "cloud" – connecting people anywhere in the world without wearing a mask
- ✓ **Improving the level of digitalization:** traditional digital services i.e., visitor pre-registration and online ticketing are gaining more importance under the epidemic prevention and control policies; online exhibition has become more mature and more functional with the upgrading of IT technologies and the involvement of IT giants such as Alibaba, Tencent, JD.com
- ✓ **Increasing implementation of digital tools:** although official websites and APPs are still the most commonly used tools, social media platforms are diversifying their digital services

Digitalization of China's local trade shows covers a wide range of cities and topics

EAC conducted a study of **22 selected local shows in China** which outline and discuss the key learnings of digitalization in the industry. Digitalization of exhibitions permeates into lower Tier cities and is broadly used among all kinds of topics in both B2B and B2C shows



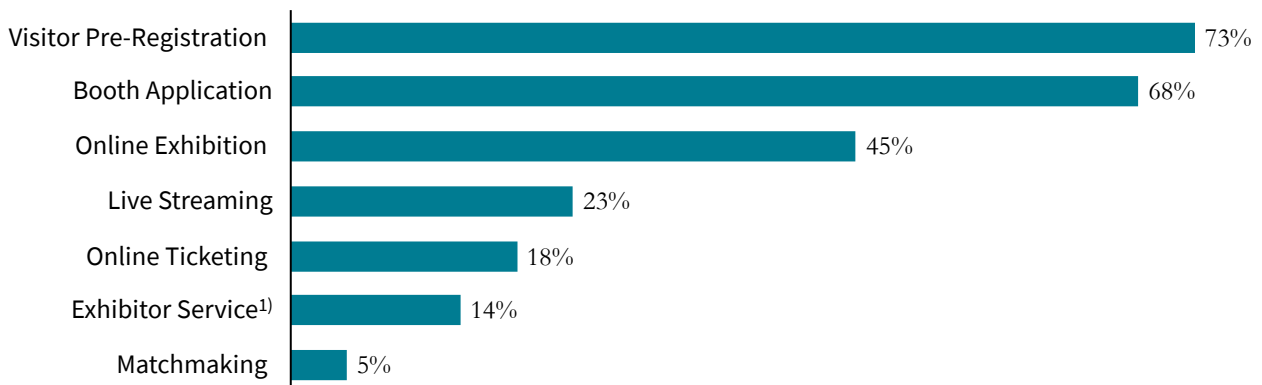
City coverage and topic distribution of selected trade shows at ≥ 100 tsqm organized by local Chinese private companies (22 shows in the year 2020)



Improving data accuracy and data quality due to the implementation of diversified digital services

Traditional digital services such as visitor pre-registration, booth application and online ticketing services already existed before the Covid era and have greatly improved. Under the “new normal”, a higher degree of detailed personal information is required to participate in an offline exhibition - health code, travel code, effective cell phone number, and even an ID number is now a must. Digital services are a strong support for exhibition management to contain the epidemic. This has also greatly improved the quality of the exhibition organizer's database.

Distribution of Digital Services (EAC analysis of 22 selected local trade shows at ≥ 100 tsqm)

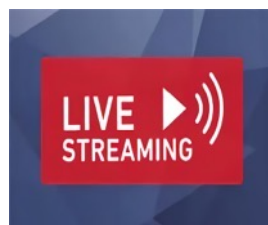
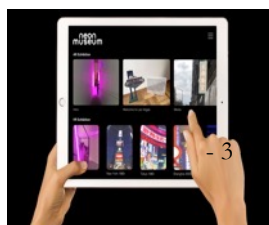
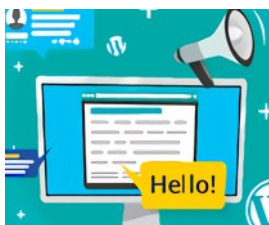


1) Badge application, logistics, hotel and other services

Source: EAC analysis

Increasing attempts of new digital services serve for the market change

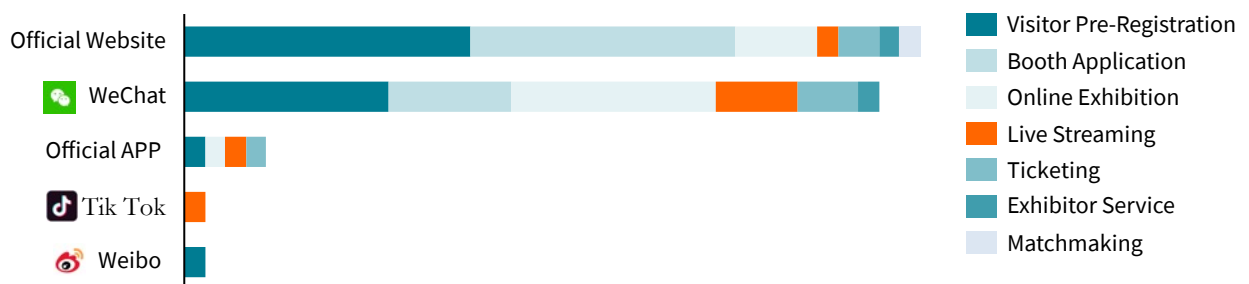
Local Chinese exhibition organizers are trying to find **new digital services** to improve the involvement of participants. Online exhibitions with access to **video replay and product display**, as well as a **live streaming service** during the exhibition are both designed to attract the attention of exhibitors and visitors who are not able to attend the offline exhibition. The latter also makes **online product trading** possible.



Diversified platforms, but a high degree of concentration on a few powerful tools

Official websites, which have the highest utilization rate among all digital platforms due to the easy implementation of all kinds of digital services, are the most fundamental platform for exhibition information display and dissemination.

The range of services covered by different digital platforms
(EAC analysis of 22 selected local trade shows at ≥ 100 tsqm)



Source: EAC analysis

WeChat ranks second place due to its extensive user base and perfect function settings

In the 2nd quarter of 2021, WeChat MAU (Monthly Active Users) exceeded 1.25 billion, and its penetration rate among smartphone users exceeded 95%. Therefore, getting data and information from WeChat is the most efficient way.

In addition, **WeChat as one of the most used social networking APPs in China** is compatible with diversified functions and has extensive application scenarios. **WeChat Official Account** and **Mini Program** are the two main ways. Official Accounts usually have two or three function models with links to different services. Mini Program has some of the functions with similarity to the official exhibition APP, but it is lighter and more user-friendly.

However, in actual application, the mix using of different platforms may lead to function and data overlapping, which could confuse management and data processing. Integrating different services on different kinds of platforms is crucial to data management.

Social media as supplementary platforms for exhibition promotion

Popular social media platforms, such as **Tik Tok**, **Kuaishou** (short video and live streaming platform), **Weibo** and **Xiaohongshu** (social media and e-commerce platform) are also used for **exhibition promotion**, with no linkage to customer service.



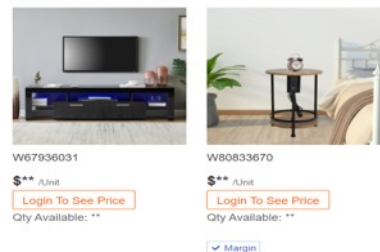
Case studies in China – analysis of 22 selected local trade shows

Online exhibition collaborates with overseas B2B trade platform

- Gigacloud Technology is a foreign trade e-commerce platform and business partner of a home furnishing exhibition in China.
- The cooperation with Gigacloud builds an efficient and smooth foreign trade connection for Chinese exhibitors under the pandemic with its global warehouses and its own logistics facilities in the United States, Japan, United Kingdom and Germany.



New Arrivals



Attractive online exhibition and sales platform implemented on WeChat mini program



- WeChat mini program is perfectly applied by a local Chinese F&B trade show organizer to serve for both exhibitors and visitors – effective matchmaking.
- On the exhibitor display page, it contains a lot of detailed information such as exhibitor contact information, their product comments, and links to ask for free sample. Meanwhile, through data analysis and services reporting, exhibitors can use it as a sales platform to monitor their sales performance.

The official multi-functional APP in combination with popular Chinese e-commerce platform can generate added value for exhibitors

- Paid industry seminars and high-quality live streaming forums are available on the show APP with a replay function for a charge. This creates the possibility of new revenue models for show organizers.
- As the official APP links products to e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, this reduces the technical cost of the APP and provides exhibitors with a wider range of business support



International organizers can gain insights on Chinese market strategy

In conclusion, local Chinese organizers are very flexible and diverse on exhibition digitalization. And EAC can help you to form a localized exhibition digitalization strategy in China:

Market & Customer Understanding	Profound assessment of China's exhibition market and customer demand on digitalization services
Digital Readiness Assessment	Internal screening of organization or exhibition digitalization readiness and assessment of entering models
Decision Support Own- vs. 3rd-Party Platform	Synthesis of research insights from preceding modules to make fact-based decisions on most suitable approach
Platform Benchmarking & Selection	In the case of a 3rd-party platform (vs. own website), assessment of individual platform fit, based on company-specific criteria
Platform Development & Listing Support	Support in platform development driven by market feedback and/ or support of account and online exhibition setup on 3rd-party platform



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