

inspiring  
people

Make the  
most of  
events to  
promote  
your brand

RAI INSIGHTS INSPIRATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

**rai**  
AMSTERDAM

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**RAI INSIGHTS** INSPIRATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT



Increase  
impact

## Make the most of events to promote your brand

Offering experiences has become a vital part of the marketing mix. One-on-one meetings with potential customers and relations are becoming increasingly important for organisations looking to really connect with their target group. Events represent a crucial platform for this.

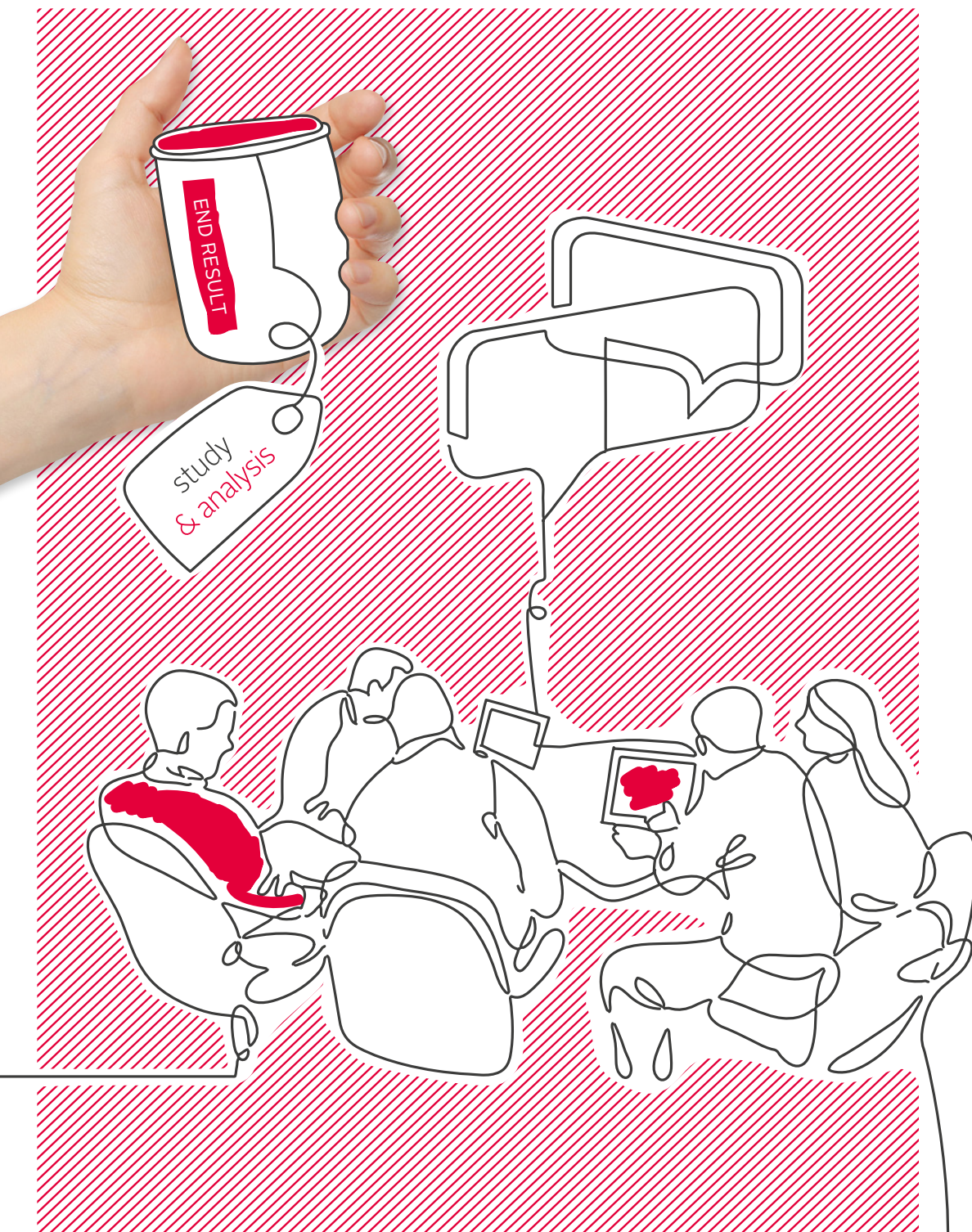
At the same time, taking part in an event can be daunting. How do you ensure that potential customers come into genuine contact with your brand, and how do you measure the success of your participation? Translating market strategies and goals into face-to-face encounters and experiences is a challenge. How do you make your participation or activation effective?

Having an insight into the exhibitor's overall experience of an event can play a key role here. From the first idea to make use of an event as a medium to the last contact with customers at the event, what are the most important benchmarks?

RAI Amsterdam has mapped out a typical customer journey for exhibitors, one which we hope will provide inspiration for all types of events. Feel free to share the most important insights with your partners and relations.

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Customer Marketing Manager

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Market Researcher



## Study approach customer journey-analysis

RAI Amsterdam partnered with Unplugged, part of Makerstreet, to map the journey of exhibitors of (trade) events. Our goal was to discover and utilise the most decisive moments on this 'customer journey'.

Supported by a team of RAI specialists, including marketers and event managers, we started by mapping the various contact moments and experiences of exhibitors at RAI Amsterdam, from their initial orientation to the evaluation.

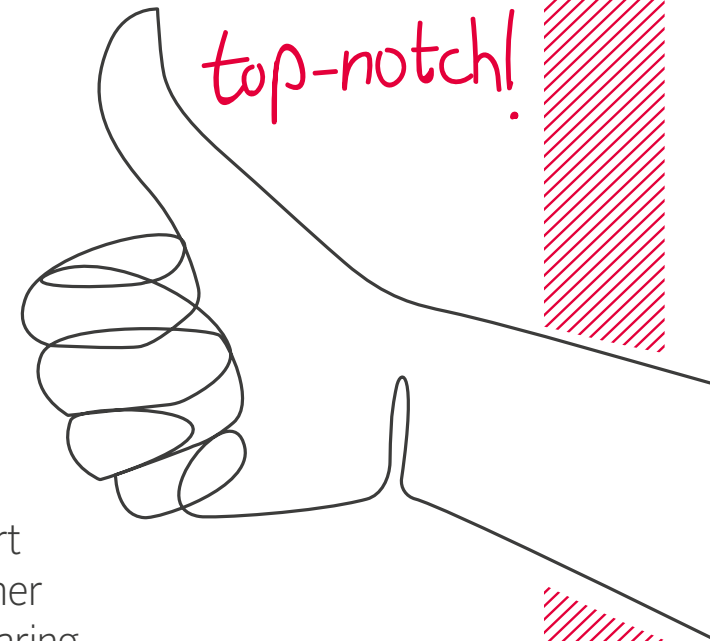
We then took the resulting knowledge to the next stage. Via interview techniques based on design thinking, we took a close look at exhibitors. We then validated and refined the concept journey and gained insight into what exhibitors expect.

Finally, we tested the results based on a survey of a broad group of exhibitors.

# Ensuring a successful event together

An exhibitor's customer journey depends on many factors. Is the company at an exhibition for the first time or is it at the same stand in the same aisle with the same team every year? Are there major cultural differences between the exhibitor's country and that in which the event takes place? How do the different expectations of the organisers, exhibitors and visitors fit together? There are a wide range of variables that together make up a unique value for every exhibitor.

Even so, there are a number of issues that are equally important for every exhibitor throughout their entire customer journey. They concern return on investment (ROI), as well as convenience, support and commitment on the part of the organiser, who needs to be a listening ear and an active discussion partner for exhibitors at all times. There is also innovation, learning from others and sharing knowledge. This involves real conversations and meetings, and the development of a solid client base. After all, the exhibition visitors want to focus on the tasks at hand, such as maintaining relationships, networking, doing business, finding inspiration, discovering the latest innovations and developing themselves. An exhibition must ultimately meet everyone's expectations.



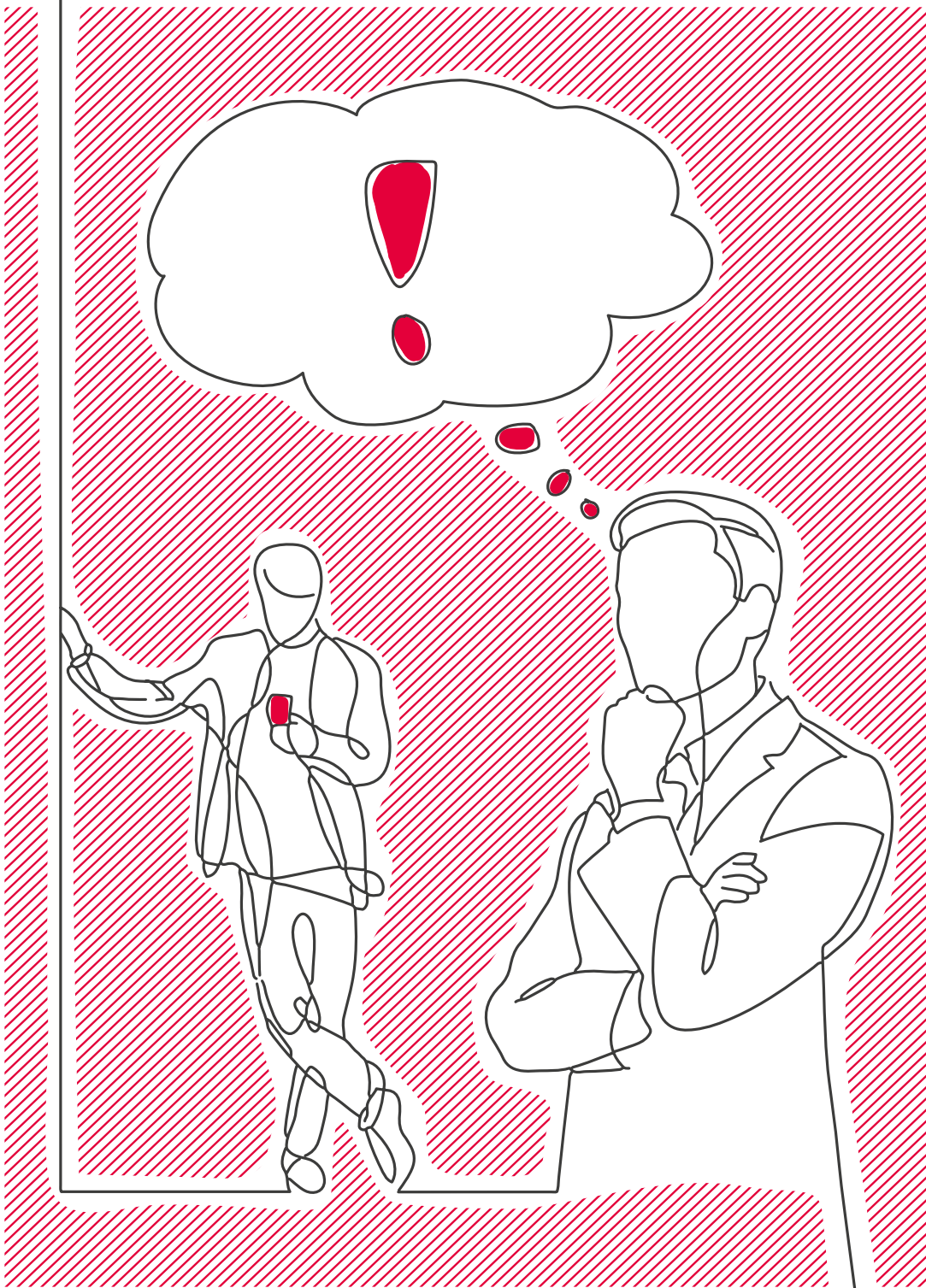


# The customer journey

A customer journey consists mainly of stages and micro-moments.

The stages we think are relevant for an exhibitor are described briefly in the following pages.

- 01** Orientation
- 02** Preparation
- 03** Leading up to the exhibition
- 04** During the exhibition
- 05** After the exhibition



## 01 Orientation

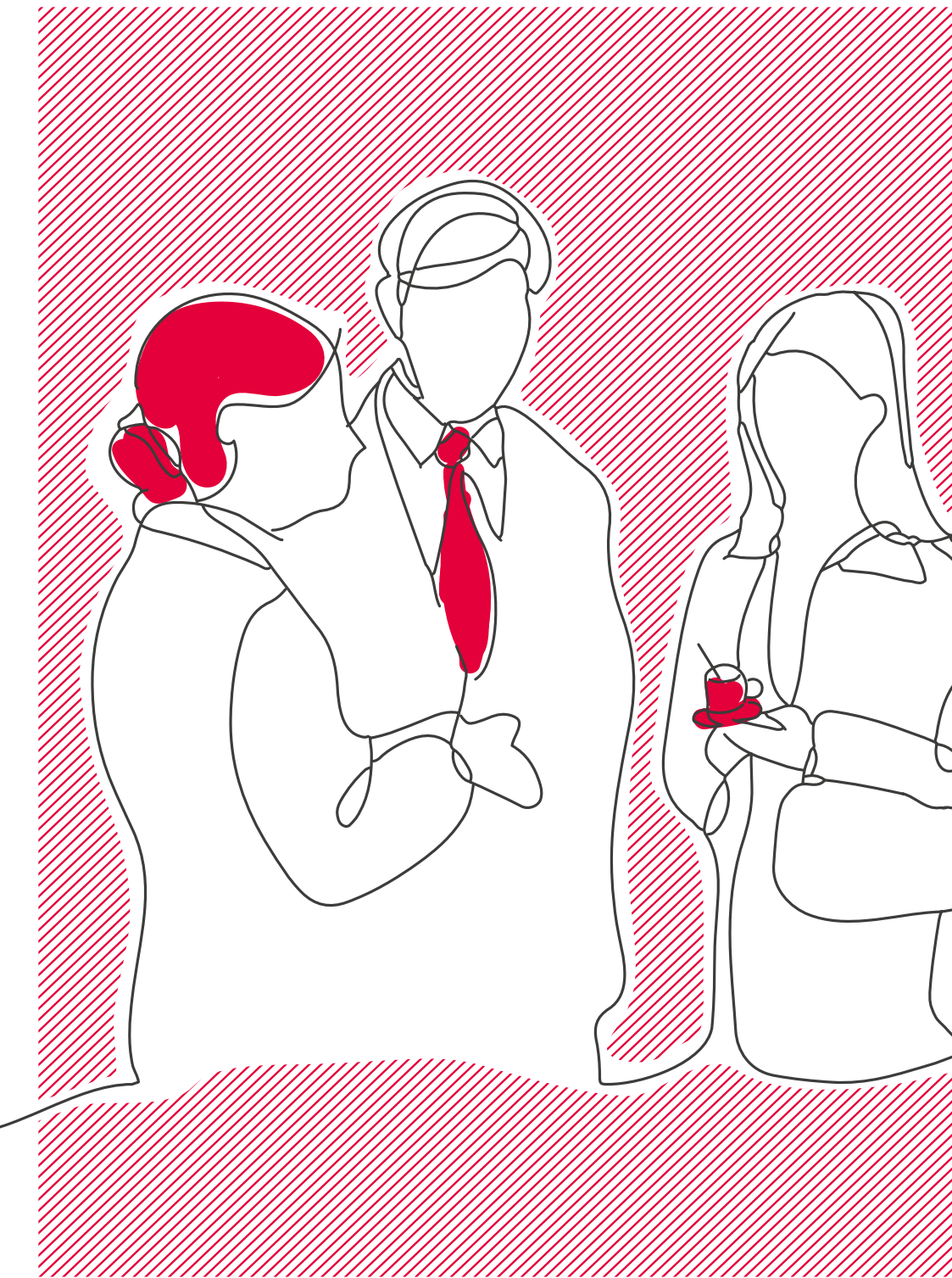
The orientation phase comes before the decision to participate in an exhibition or other event. The choice to take part in an exhibition depends on the company and its marketing objectives. The marketing mix is the starting point to look at the different exhibitions, their reach, visitors and exhibitors.

## 02 Preparation

This is a combination of strategic and practical matters – choosing resources and preparing for the exhibition itself. It includes registration, development of the activation concept and the stand, approval of the stand design and arrangements for operations and personnel, as well as content planning, participation announcement, inviting relations, planning of networking opportunities, and, not least, integration within the overall marketing plan.

## 03 Leading up to the exhibition

The physical journey from A to B includes transporting goods, arranging materials and bringing stand staff and stakeholders to the exhibition. Then there are issues like registering on site, checking material, setting up the stand and taking care of any last-minute orders.



## 04 During the exhibition

The exhibition can roughly be divided into the things that happen at the stand, the rest of the event and digital matters. We are increasingly seeing a fusion of these elements with an emphasis on valuable meetings. There is more co-creation between organisers, exhibitors and visitors. The latter are welcomed, conversations held and products or services shown at the stand – but things happen elsewhere too: exhibitors visit competitors, network, check out sessions and speakers, and generally gauge the atmosphere. And, if everything goes well, a deal or two may be closed right on the show floor.

## 05 After the exhibition

The actions that follow the event can be divided into practical and strategic ones. Stands need to be disassembled and logistics & finances handled. But it's also important to keep making the most of the exhibition by following up on new contacts, continuing to generate leads and carrying out an internal evaluation and analysis of the marketing objectives and results of the exhibition. Measuring is the key to knowledge. One of the things depending on the evaluation is the decision whether to participate in the next edition of the exhibition.



# The orientation phase – What's the story?

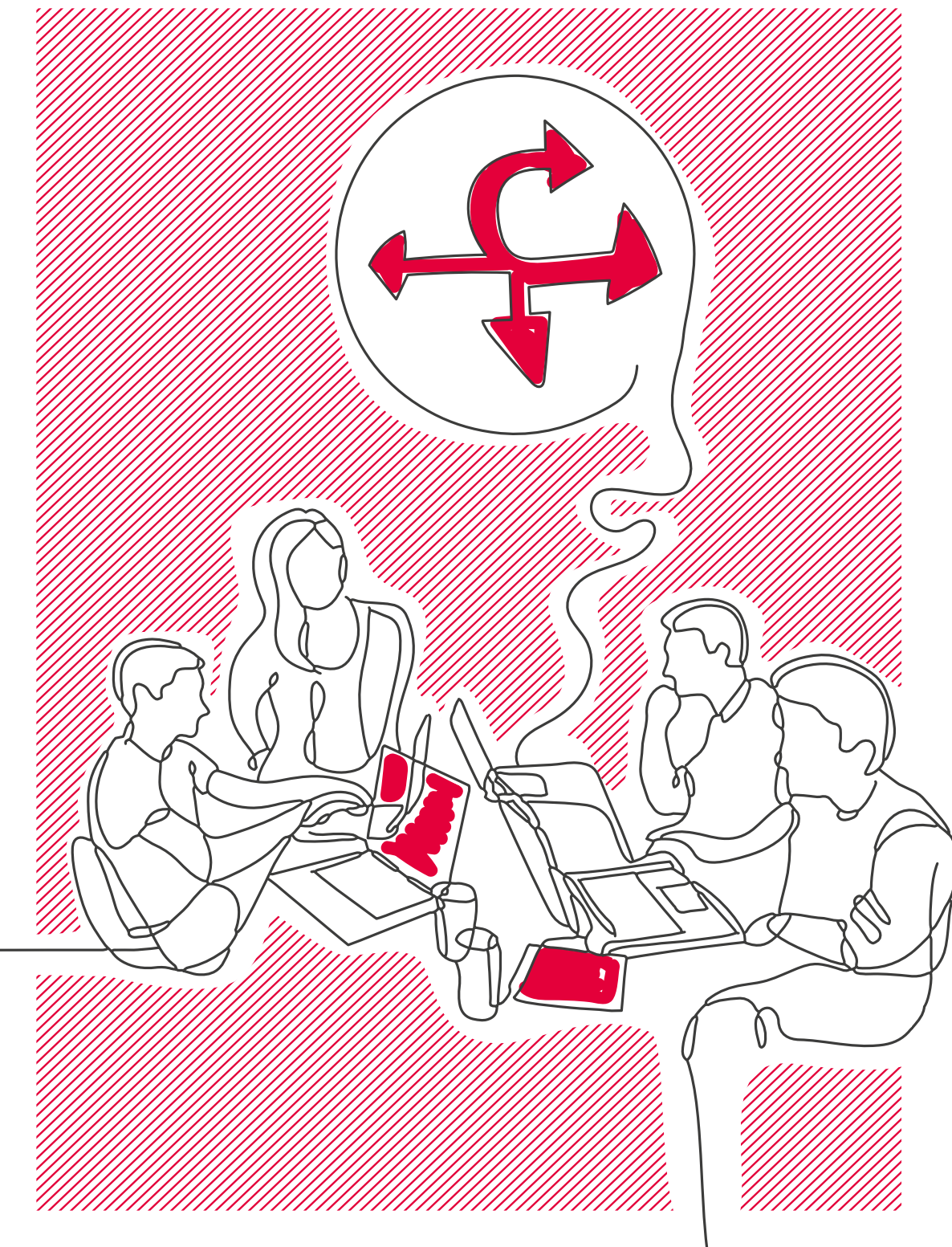
## Take time for research

It may sound obvious, but it's absolutely crucial to check whether taking part in an event contributes to your marketing objectives: What will the exhibition yield? In addition to a financial analysis of any potential participation, thorough desk research can help prevent potential disappointment. Because let's face it: there are plenty of exhibitions held on any subject you care to imagine. So be critical and compare the objectives of the organisers, sponsors and other exhibitors with your own. Take a good look at the visitor profiles and make sure they are a good match for yours.

## Check the exhibition both on the floor and online

Which social media channels does the exhibition use? What is its tone of voice? Are the online followers and discussion partners relevant? Do your relations talk about it online? Do they go there as visitors or perhaps exhibitors? How is the atmosphere at the event? Are there enough potential prospects or customers who are actually talking to the exhibitors at the various stands and network lounges?

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, after all. A good idea might be to visit the event with one of your customers.



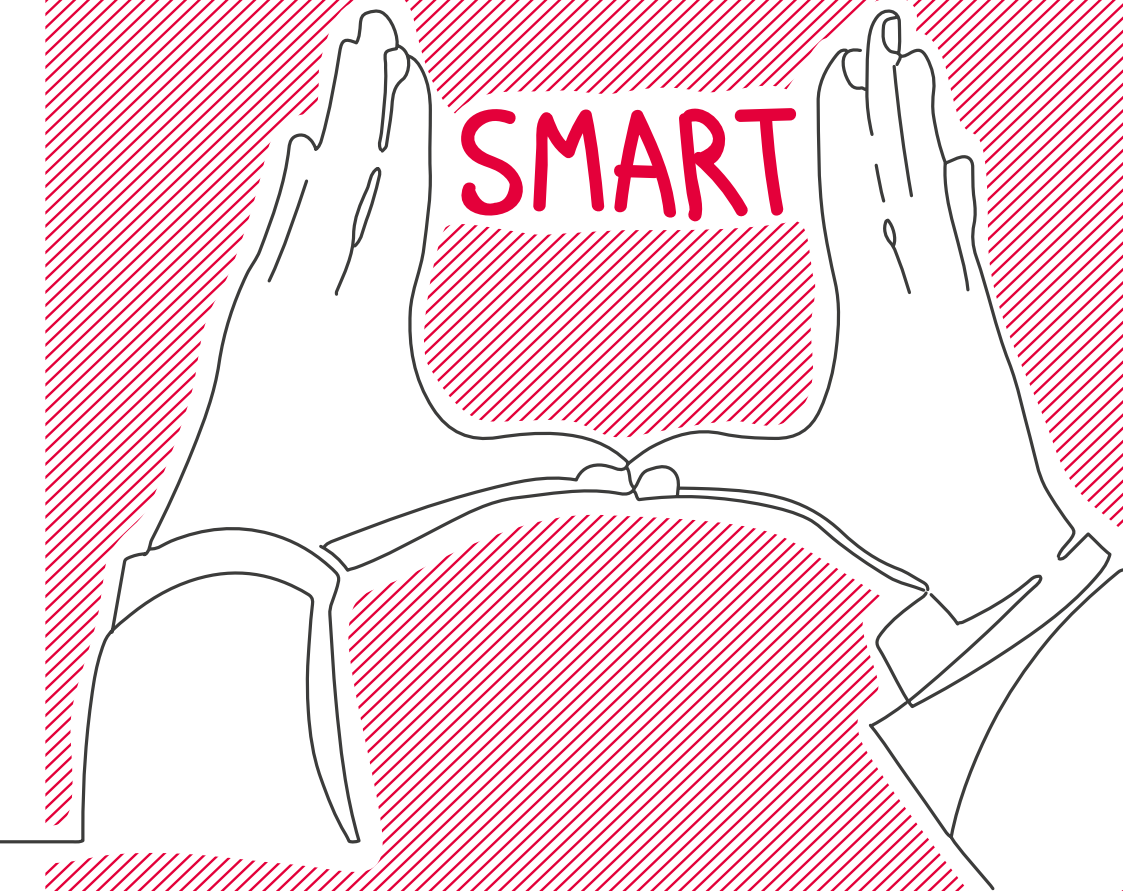
# The orientation phase – What's the story?

## Are my objectives *smart* and how do I quantify them?

Carefully considering the objectives and KPIs of taking part in the exhibition, and putting them down on paper in advance, will help you quantify them better during the event itself. In addition to measuring the KPIs, it is also important that you ensure that your relationship management system can handle the leads from the event.

If your company doesn't have one, make sure that a process has been set up for this. Setting up the back office so early on may sound premature, but can yield a lot in terms of the ROI of your participation. Better yet: it will give you an overview of the participation and other marketing initiatives at a glance.

Taking part in an exhibition is an integral part of your company's story and a strategic part of the marketing mix.



# The preparation phase – Spread the word!

## Stand or no stand? There are many ways to take part

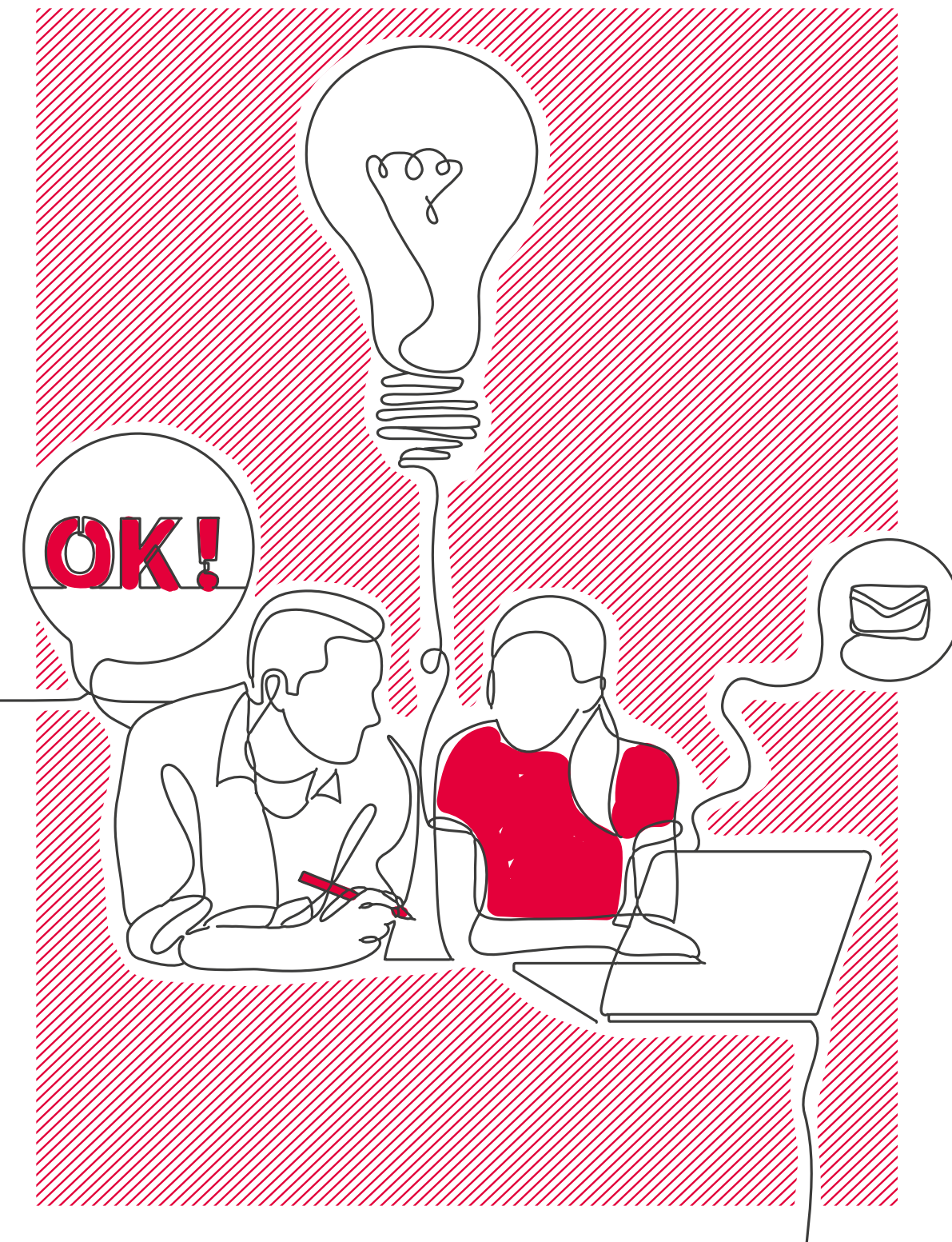
There are many options to participate in an event. Let the organiser advise you. Possibilities include network events with clients, presenting innovations, sponsoring lounges or sub-events like a speed dating breakfast. More exhibitions feature innovation or research hubs, start-up spots and Dragon's Dens. Many events also offer online connections with the target group, like social activations or whitepapers. Be true to your goals and your identity – maintain a recognisable face for relationships. And both first-time and repeat exhibitors need to remember to regularly stop and take stock of the possibilities.

## Use your own and the exhibition's channels to promote your presence

The sooner existing customers and prospects find out where and when they can meet your company, the earlier they can make their plans for a visit to the exhibition. Keep in mind the budgets and planning of all stakeholders and make sure your participation is featured in all marketing channels. And keep track of the possibilities provided by the organisers to maintain an online presence during the rest of the year as well.

## Make the most of the power of the physical encounter

Competitions, speakers at the stand, industry heroes, virtual gadgets, campaigns, and playful performances: there are many ways to bring and keep visitors at your stand. Remember to keep an eye on the event concept and the knowledge programme. Consult the organisers: you don't want to end up being one of three stands with loud music right next to each other.



# The pre-exhibition phase – The route to success

## Make an online start to your physical experience

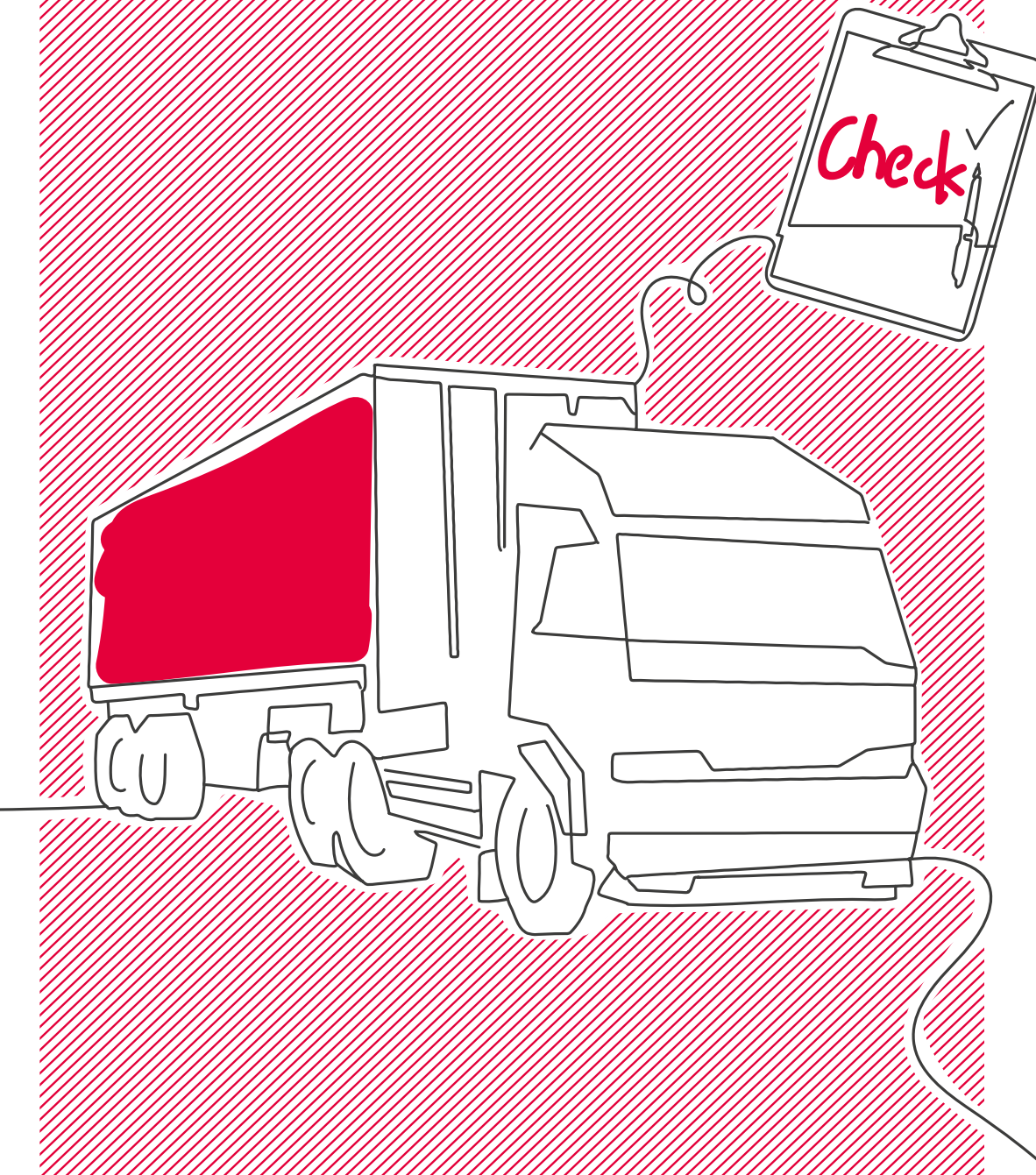
Take advantage of all the opportunities offered by exhibitor portals. Remember to check, check and double check both the big picture and all the details. Take the time to make an inventory of the possibilities offered both by the venue and by the organisers. Local knowledge of issues such as suppliers and products, or broad expertise in the sector, can make all the difference. Ask questions and remember to clarify your own goals: make the event happen together with the other participants and organisers.

## Set-up and stand crew travel are part of the story

Go all out on your communication. Make use of things like employees' vlogs, share your progress through a special hashtag such as #roadto... or #onourwayto... or show a time-lapse of the set-up. Remember to use images as well as sound and form.

## Provide rested staff who know what they're doing

This may mean that your people arrive at the destination a day earlier and start by visiting the stand, getting a feel for the show layout, testing the systems, taking part in a kick-off and working toward a clear common goal. Your time budget should include me-time and napping zones. Make sure your people are alert and motivated, and that they work together on the customers' behalf. Some venues or organisers offer advance exhibitor training sessions or a lead generation system. Evaluate your performance every day and celebrate successes, such as being the sales lead of the day.



## During the show – Own the floor

### Is the era of leaflets and brochures over?

Not entirely! Yes, virtual resources are indispensable: visitors want digital information fast, so if an exhibitor scans a badge, they might as well send the content right away. On the other hand, the tangible memory is also important to business visitors. So think about physical and online content: how will they share it with colleagues? What will a person want to keep and use when they are back in the office? And how does this fit within your CSR ambitions?

### Success depends on meeting the right people and making relevant contacts

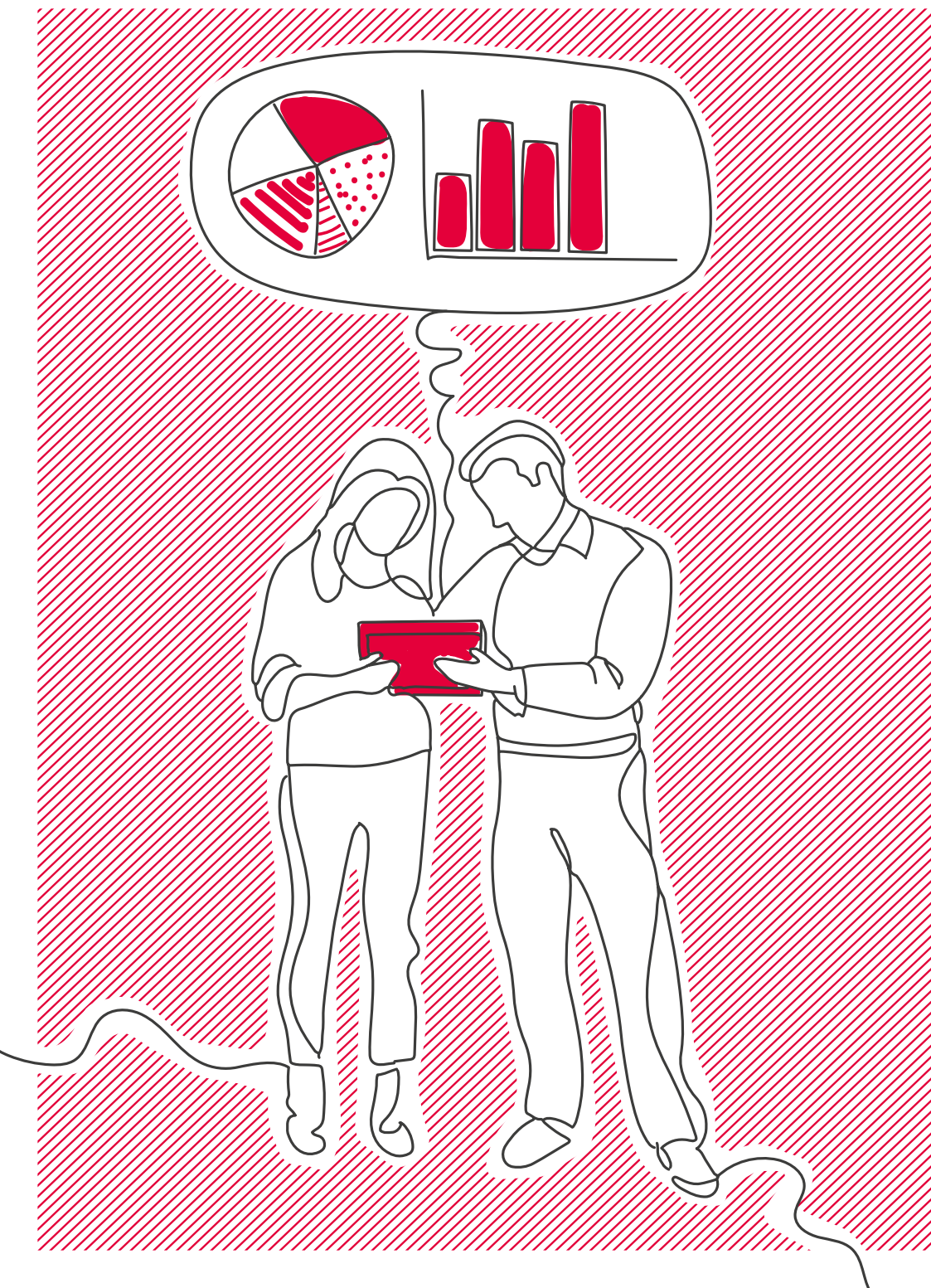
That doesn't only happen at your own stand. Walk around the show and talk to the visitors, organisers and other exhibitors. Is there a seminar programme? Does the event have a network club? Join in or take part. And remember that there are also virtual participants who follow the event on social media and online. What content do you share? Remember to add value for physical as well as virtual participants: they each want something different.

### Main reason to exhibit: your goals

Make sure there is no doubt about that when people walk past the stand. Preferably keep the company name close to the products; after the exhibition, visitors will remember first the product, then the brand. Make that work for you. That's not an excuse to make a plain presentation, but an invitation to think about design, play, conversation and connection.



Wat wilt u  
bereiken?



## After the show – Keep in touch

### Made to measure – principle 1

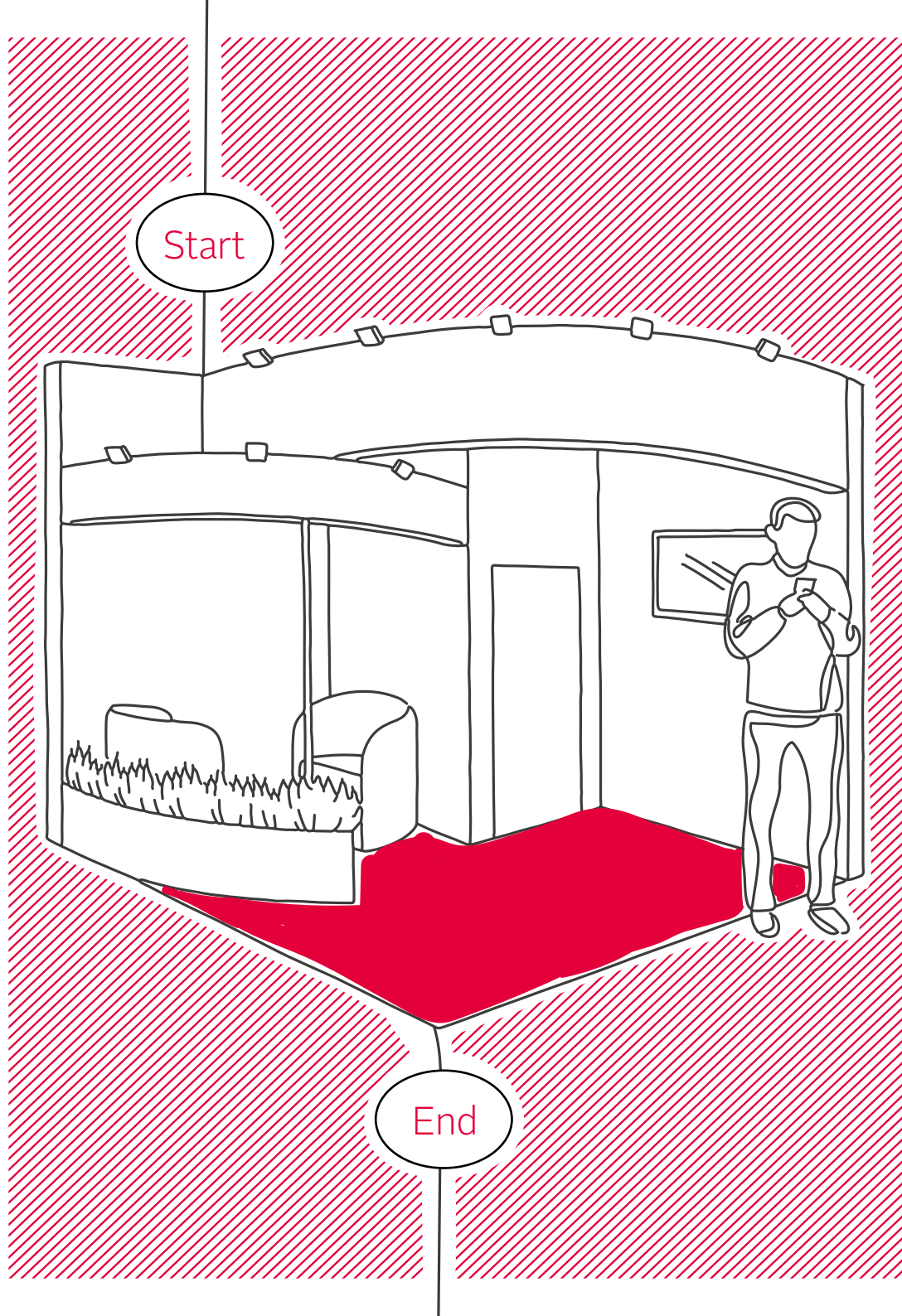
Remember that ROI is hard to measure, since it depends on each exhibitor's individual objective. One thing is the same for everyone, however: ROI is not usually clear immediately after an event. Sometimes the last day of an exhibition is the first day of a new customer relationship. A purchase or assignment sometimes materialises years after a meeting. So be careful to have a consistent follow-up and make use of your relationship management system or the process to measure the value of participation over a long period of time. This will extend your participation in practice until the next edition.

### Made to measure – principle 2

Be aware that more and more factors are being measured at exhibitions. There are heatmaps, visitor flows, numbers of badges or business cards scanned, matches made, data exchanged. Check in advance which information organisers collect and how they figure in things like evaluations. This will let you compare your data from the stand to that of the venue.

### Made to measure – principle 3

Not all data can be captured in systems – make sure that there is a quick debrief with the stand personnel right after the exhibition ends. That's when experiences are still fresh in their memory and when it's best to talk about things like feeling, atmosphere or sentiment. Which impressions did the show leave? Repeat the process at your workplace. Also use the survey that the organisers send after the event as an invitation to talk. Indicate the things that matter to you and work with them to make the next show better.



## The beginning or the end of the customer journey?

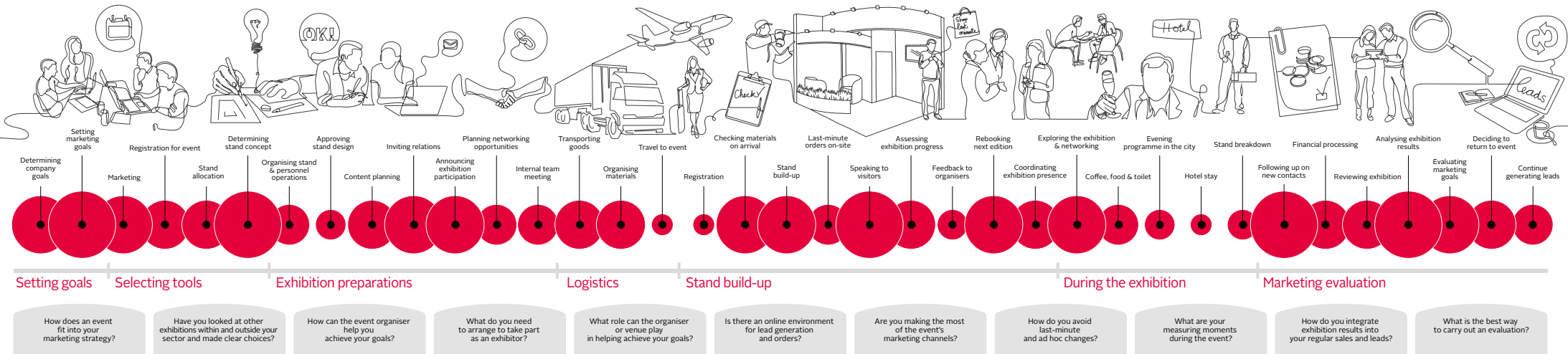
Although the customer journey has a logical and practical timeline for every exhibitor, each moment where you think about marketing for your own company is a possible starting point for the journey.

This could be the moment when a company is encouraged by customers to visit new events. Or when an article appears online about a new meeting with an interesting website. Or perhaps when a conference that you've been visiting for years for content and knowledge inspires you to go looking for an international exhibition on a new continent. Be aware of new networking moments in your own sector and keep an eye on the events. After all, a good conversation with a new contact can be the beginning of a lot of things – that's the unique power of real-life meetings.

# The customer journey mapped

The red circles show the importance of every micro-moment to a exhibitor and their relevance for an event.

The larger the circle, the greater the importance for the exhibitor and the relevance for an event.





# The customer journey mapped



Setting marketing goals

Registration for event

Determining stand concept

Approving stand design

Inviting relations

Planning networking opportunities

Determining company goals

Marketing

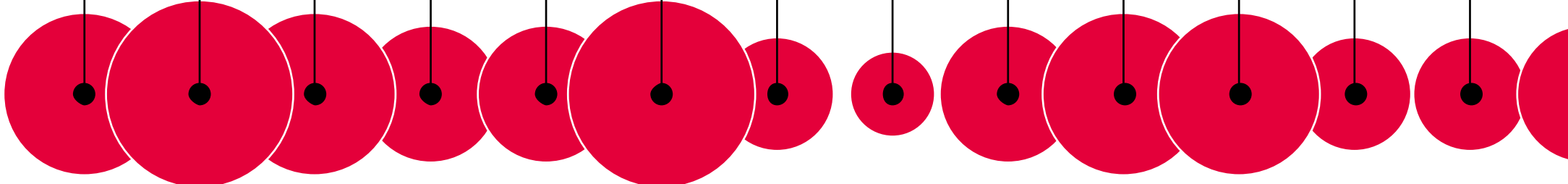
Stand allocation

Organising stand & personnel operations

Content planning

Announcing exhibition participation

Internal team meeting



Setting goals

Selecting tools

Exhibition preparations

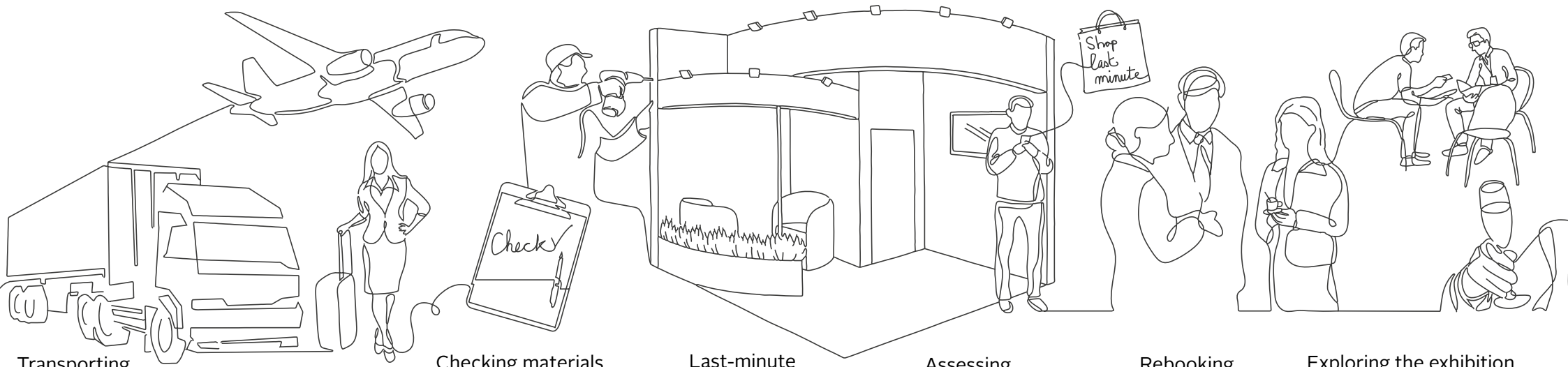
How does an event fit into your marketing strategy?

Have you looked at other exhibitions within and outside your sector and made clear choices?

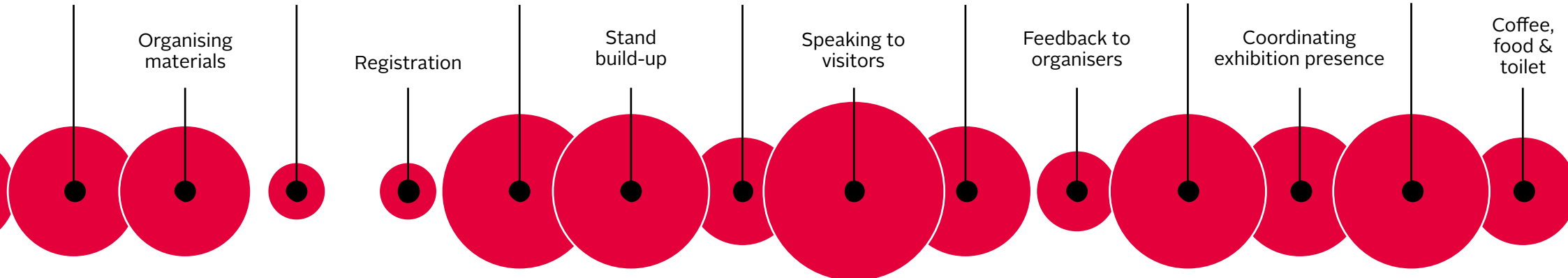
How can the event organiser help you achieve your goals?

What do you need to arrange to take part as an exhibitor?

# The customer journey mapped



Transporting goods      Travel to event      Checking materials on arrival      Last-minute orders on-site      Assessing exhibition progress      Rebooking next edition      Exploring the exhibition & networking



Logistics

Stand build-up

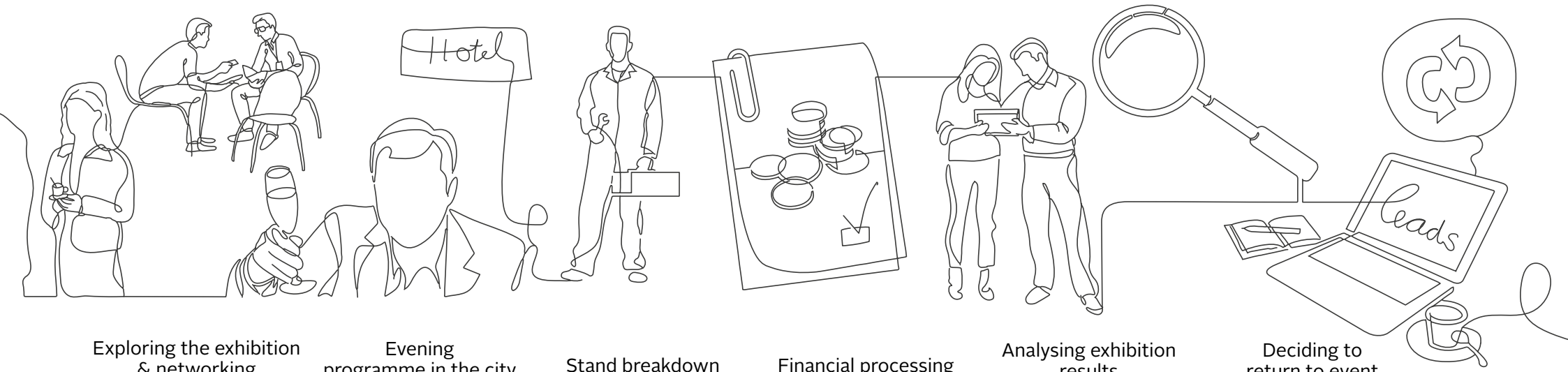
What role can the organiser or venue play in helping achieve your goals?

Is there an online environment for lead generation and orders?

Are you making the most of the event's marketing channels?

How do you avoid last-minute and ad hoc changes?

# The customer journey mapped



Exploring the exhibition & networking

Evening programme in the city

Stand breakdown

Financial processing

Analysing exhibition results

Deciding to return to event

Coordinating exhibition presence

Coffee, food & toilet

Hotel stay

Following up on new contacts

Reviewing exhibition

Evaluating marketing goals

Continue generating leads

During the exhibition

Marketing evaluation

How do you avoid last-minute and ad hoc changes?

What are your measuring moments during the event?

How do you integrate exhibition results into your regular sales and leads?

What is the best way to carry out an evaluation?



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