

LIGHTWEIGHT, EXHIBIT-FRIENDLY MATERIALS

The following are seven lightweight materials that can be used to decrease the heft of your exhibit. Surely, not every one is a perfect match for your brand or booth objectives. But by trading traditional heavyweights for these featherweight options, you can lighten your load and plump up your budget. Note: some of these ideas are “out there,” especially for first time exhibitors. However, these examples are meant to get you thinking about alternatives, before you blow your budget on more traditional, expensive, and heavy booth systems.

1. **Tensioned Fabric.** Given the popularity of fabric exhibit structures, they border on "traditional" exhibitry these days. But the versatility and capabilities of fabric make it an ideal solution. In addition to being lightweight and easy to pack, ship, and install, tensioned-fabric structures (such as those from Moss Inc., Fabric Images Inc., Transformit Inc., TenFab Design LLC, and many others) provide the perfect canvas for bold graphics and lighting. The flexibility in design options also means you can create sculptural, attention-getting exhibits that stand out on the show floor at a reasonable cost. If a more traditional look is desired, you can use a frame and fabric system that gives the appearance of a hard wall. The resulting designs often have the look and feel of traditional exhibit systems but weigh far less and have the added benefit of being adaptable to many configurations.



2. **Interlocking Cardboard.** Mention the term "cardboard architecture," and many people conjure images of Skid Row. But architects and designers have been developing cardboard- and paper-based architectural structures for years. In fact, Charles and Ray Eames created a paper-based construction system with their interlocking cards. The exhibit industry has its own Eames-esque systems comprising interlocking cardboard or substrate structures that can be customized with your graphics and organized into everything from back walls to inventive artwork. The Nomad Screen System from Mio Co. LLC is a prime example. Comprising recycled, double-wall cardboard, this modular system can form freestanding partitions, or even table bases and other structural components. Shipped flat, the customizable sheets require no tools for assembly. Along these same lines, design firm Kuhlmann Leavitt Inc. offers a product called Stax Modular (<http://www.staxmodular.com/>). Using the same interlocking, card-stacking concept, the lightweight system features panels made of a variety of sustainable substrates, so you can pick and choose what works best for your application.



3. **Traditional Cardboard.** You can implement "raw" cardboard into your exhibit without purchasing one of the aforementioned interlocking systems. Granted, you'll need to get creative, but building an entire booth or even a few components out of cardboard is definitely doable (see image). In fact, if you just Google "corrugated cardboard structure images," you'll find everything from chairs and partitions to reception desks and conference tables made entirely out of cardboard. Again, your designers will need a bit of engineering knowledge to turn a piece of cardboard into an exhibit element. But cardboard can often be covered with plastic laminates, printed vinyl, or even painted.



4. **Honeycomb and Corrugated Core.** One step up from traditional cardboard are honeycomb panels and products employing a corrugated core. Honeycomb panels (picture a piece of cardboard with honeycomb-shaped cutouts that's sandwiched between two pieces of cardboard) are widespread in the packing industry. But since these panels are easy to cut to form on a computer numerical control (CNC) machine, and they're light compared to wood or aluminum-frame structures, they're a viable substitute for traditional exhibit materials. They, too, can be covered with various materials to give them a more finished feel. Myriad honeycomb products are available, but two options to get your wheels turning are Sing



Core from Sing Square Log Homes and Tripanel from Tricel Corp. PlyCorr, which is sold through PlyVeneer Products, uses the same sandwiching technique as honeycomb products, but it has a corrugated core that can be drilled or cut with conventional woodworking tools.

5. **High-Density Foam.** Various suppliers offer foam-based materials that can be used to create exhibit components, but one example is PlyVeneer Products, which sells PlyFoam (<http://www.plyveneer.com/plyfoam.html>).

This strong, lightweight panel comprises expanded Polystyrene foam sandwiched between two paper or cardboard sheets. However, at least one exhibit-industry company is testing foam's capabilities as well: Freeman. It's using high-density 2-pound foam as the core for wall panels, which are sandwiched between plastic laminate or other surfacing materials.



6. **Inflatable Structures.** Inflatables are another lightweight option for structures and furniture. And with the designs available today, your exhibit doesn't have to look like a bounce house gone bad. Cort Event Furnishings offers the Blofield Air Design line of inflatable chairs and couches. Meanwhile, Ibebi Design offers a wide range of inflatables, ranging from conference-room structures and reception desks to dramatic freestanding arches.



Keep in mind each of the aforementioned materials needs to meet city, state, and venue standards for fire safety, which means you may need to add fire-retardant or flame-proof treatments to make them trade show ready. Nevertheless, each option can help you decrease your overall exhibit weight, and thus your exhibiting costs. What's more, these atypical materials can often set your exhibit apart from the competition, turning a cost-cutting ploy into an attention-getting lure. <http://www.exhibitoronline.com/topics/article.asp?ID=1268&catID=71#.UdMrW9hinAQ>