



# 2022 Material Handling & Labor Rate Survey

Material Handling and Event Labor  
Cost Analysis Across 16 U.S. Cities

*Prepared By*



*In Partnership With*



*With Support From*



**Version 1/30/2023**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Annual Survey of U.S. and Canadian Labor Rates was first published by *Tradeshow Week* magazine beginning in 1980. After *Tradeshow Week* ceased publication in 2010, various groups produced the survey intermittently. The most recent version was prepared in 2017 by EDPA, the Experiential Designers and Producers Association.

EDPA has officially turned over the production of this annual analysis to The Exhibitor Advocate, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing industry stakeholders with expert advice, research, and tools to amplify the voice of exhibitors and ensure the enduring success of exhibitions and events.

The **2022 Material Handling & Labor Rate Survey** is only one of the many tools which The Exhibitor Advocate will deliver to the industry to preserve exhibitions as a valuable and irreplaceable marketing channel.

”

*The Exhibitor Advocate is the perfect independent organization to take over this project and bring this important research to the exhibition industry consistently every year.*

Dasher Lowe  
Executive Director, EDPA

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## INDUSTRY ASSESSMENT

Much has changed since 2017 when EDPA published the last edition of this survey:

- The pandemic caused many shows to skip one, two, or even three show cycles.
- In the process of building back, the exhibition industry has faced rising inflation, staffing shortages, added health and safety costs, and supply chain issues.
- Experimentation with virtual events has led to the creation of new digital tools and marketing channels, and while virtual events will not replace the experience or the benefits of face-to-face interaction, they are far better at providing exhibitors with valuable buyer data and demographics.
- The competition to secure exhibitor marketing dollars and the demand for proving exhibitor ROI have never been greater.

However, what remains the same is the fact that there are two sides to the exhibitor ROI equation - value and cost. It is critical to work both angles to maximize outcomes and ensure sustainable results.

Quality opportunities for deeper engagement, more leads, and better data will create more value, but the industry must also seek innovative ways to reduce the cost of exhibiting.



**There are two sides to the exhibitor ROI equation - value and cost. It is critical to work both angles to maximize outcomes and ensure sustainable results.**





## KEY DATA FINDINGS

The data from the 2022 Material Handling & Labor Rate Survey clearly demonstrates that exhibitor costs continue to rise. Increases to installation & dismantle labor, electrical labor and material handling rates are outpacing inflation, some by more than 30%.

Overall, there's been a 29% increase in display, labor, and material handling rates since 2017 which far outpaces increases in prices compared with most other business services.

The average installation & dismantle labor rate is \$140/hr for straight time and an average of \$205/hr for straight time, overtime, and double time combined. Straight time rates range from a low of \$100/hr to a high of \$235/hr. The highest rates are in the Northeast, Chicago, and California.

Electrical labor has the greatest increase at 32% compared with installation & dismantle labor (26%) and material handling (28%).

The average electrical labor rate is \$132/hr for straight time and an average of \$188/hr for straight time, overtime, and double time combined. Straight time rates range from a low of \$77/hr to a high of \$187/hr.

The average material handling rate is \$1.88 per pound before event deadlines. An average increase of 10% is recognized when materials are received after event deadlines, increasing to \$2.08 per pound.

## EXHIBITOR COST EQUATION

The cost of booth space is only one factor that exhibitors must consider when reserving space in an exhibit hall.

Correlating show services also have a significant impact on the bottom line – the larger the space, the greater the expense. While a smaller booth space may not be the most productive way to engage the audience or present products and services, reducing space is a guaranteed way to lower costs.

In addition, exhibitors must invite their audience to attend and plan engaging experiences inside their booths to achieve a positive business return. Measurable marketing objectives often include:

- Leads generated
- Booth visitors
- Product demos
- Education sessions attended

- New customers
- Brand awareness
- Customer engagement
- And more

The exhibit hall is like the “playground” for the event. It’s where attendees can test and experiment with new equipment, solve business challenges, and discover new products, research, and technologies. Thriving exhibit halls are full of memorable experiences – ones that require investment from exhibitors to execute and maintain.

The activations that exhibitors deliver in their booths impact the attendee experience and are connected to a successful and sustainable event. It’s more critical than ever to proactively lower costs and incent exhibitors to invest in their show experience.

## INDUSTRY IMPACT

After multiple years of pandemic disruption, exhibitors have acquired alternative ways of reaching their customers and prospects. Escalating exhibit costs and labor rates that are significantly outpacing the current high rate of inflation are forcing exhibitors to choose more carefully how they spend their marketing dollars.

» It is more critical than ever to proactively lower costs and incent exhibitors to invest in their show experience.

» Deeper engagement, more leads, and better data will create more value, but the industry must also seek innovative ways to reduce the cost of exhibiting.

» Show managers, city hosts, facilities, and industry suppliers who make it a priority to find innovative ways to deliver greater value to exhibitors and sponsors will rise to the top.

» Reducing exhibit space is a guaranteed way to lower costs. But nobody wins when exhibitors purchase less space. Typically, smaller booths have less impact on the attendee experience. Plus, they translate to decreased revenue for show management and all show service providers.

» The new Per LB material handling pricing model is simpler and easier to budget, but not necessarily less expensive. Show managers wishing to negotiate the lowest rates for their exhibitors need to understand the unique composition of their exhibitor freight and the exact methodology used to calculate the per pound rates.



## METHODOLOGY

The data included in this study is based on secondary research sourced from 160 publicly available convention and exhibition exhibitor manuals and rate forms.

The data represents events held during January through November 2022, at 16 major U.S. convention centers and facilities in Anaheim, Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Las Vegas, Nashville, New Orleans, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.

These events, manuals, and forms have been selected by market, based on availability of data (rates and services) across a representative sample of events and major industry sectors and sizes (net square footage and number of attendees).

It is important to note that the rates published are those charged to exhibitors, not the wages paid to workers. Many shows offer discount rates for advance orders and premium rates for at-show orders. This survey references the discount rates.

The Exhibitor Advocate engaged industry experts at **Tradeshow Logic**, an independent show management and event solutions company, to verify and analyze the collected data, identify trends, and prepare the report.

**EVOLIO Marketing**, an independent third-party research agency, has reviewed and certified that the data included in this study is true and accurate based on the information and rates included in the events' exhibitor manuals included in the research.

A sample size of 160 events provides statistically directional data with a margin of error of +/- 10% and it

does not account for variables such as each event's net square footage, industry, or attendance.

### Conversion Methodology

The per pound pricing model incorporates up to 48 surcharges which were previously billed individually in the per hundredweight (CWT) model. The methodology for converting from "CWT Pricing" to "Per LB Pricing" must be done on a show-by-show basis and should consider historical exhibitor order data, future expectations for show size, and the complexity and timing of the move-in and move-out schedule.

Because the rates and shows evaluated in this survey represent different facilities, schedules, show sizes, and complexities, a weighted average was utilized to convert CWT rates to Per LB rates.

The weighted average was calculated separately for each show depending upon the number of different rates utilized. However, in general, following are the assumptions which were utilized to determine the weighted average as determined by Jack Kreger, Chief Financial Officer at Tradeshow Logic with 35+ years of general contracting experience:

#### Freight Classification Weighting

Crated: 60%  
 Uncrated/Special Handling: 30%  
 Carpet: 10%

#### Rate Classification Weighting

ST/ST: 60%  
 ST/OT: 25%  
 OT/OT: 15%

## INTENDED USES

The 2022 Material Handling & Labor Rate Survey is an important resource for show managers, exhibitors, facilities, and industry suppliers to review high-level exhibitor costs by city.

It should be noted that the rates are averages and should serve only as a benchmark. Every show is unique. Many variables beyond just the cost of labor factor into the determination of labor and material handling rates including:

- Size and complexity of the show
- Depth of attendee services and show management requirements
- Show schedule
- Required equipment
- Distance to deliver equipment
- Dock accessibility
- Ease of moving into and out of a facility

The chart below illustrates how different industry stakeholders can utilize the survey data to help ensure exhibitor costs are fair and competitive.



The 2022 Material Handling & Labor Rate Survey is an important resource for show managers, exhibitors, facilities, and industry suppliers to review high-level exhibitor costs by city.

## RELEVANT APPLICATIONS

### How can this information help you?

Industry Stakeholders	Use Case
<b>Show Managers</b>	Evaluate and compare current exhibitor rates to city averages
	Factor exhibitor costs into the selection criteria when choosing the exhibition destination
	Use rate differentials from city-to-city and year-to-year to estimate costs
	Set target exhibitor rates before negotiating contracts with general contractors and electrical contractors
	Include exhibitor costs when negotiating the contract with the host facility
<b>Exhibitors</b>	Factor in show service costs before selecting shows and determining booth size and space selection
	Use rate differentials from city-to-city and year-to-year to estimate show service costs
<b>Facilities Suppliers General Contractors Exhibitor Appointed Contractors Convention &amp; Visitors Bureaus</b>	Understand and benchmark exhibitor costs across popular cities
	Utilize competitive exhibitor costs to attract shows to a certain destination
	Factor exhibitor costs into the negotiations when determining packages and contracting with show managers



## INSTALLATION & DISMANTLE LABOR

The 2022 average installation and dismantle labor rates across 16 major U.S. exhibition cities were:

- \$139.75 Straight Time
- \$212.89 Overtime
- \$263.08 Double Time

The lowest average straight time installation and dismantle rate was in Atlanta (\$99.66), and the highest rate was in New York City (\$235.05).

In 2017, the last time this survey was conducted across these same 16 major U.S. exhibition cities, the average installation and dismantle labor rates were:

- \$109.46 Straight Time
- \$170.02 Overtime
- \$210.48 Double Time



Installation & Dismantle  
rates outpaced the  
rate of inflation by  
**3 - 6%**  
from 2017 to 2022

Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, these 2017 average rates were adjusted for inflation and compared to the 2022 average installation and dismantle labor rates.

Based on this analysis, the average exhibitor kit installation and dismantle rates outpaced the rate of inflation by 3-6% over the period from 2017 to 2022.

Exhibitor Kit Published Installation & Dismantle Labor Rates	2017 Average Rates Adjusted for Inflation*	2022 Actual Rates	Difference
Straight Time	\$132.25	\$139.75	6%
Overtime	\$205.41	\$212.89	4%
Double Time	\$254.30	\$263.08	3%

\*Rates were adjusted for inflation over the period from October 2017 - October 2022.

## ELECTRICAL LABOR

The 2022 average electrical labor rates across 16 major U.S. exhibition cities were:

- \$132.10 Straight Time
- \$208.45 Overtime
- \$226.00 Double Time

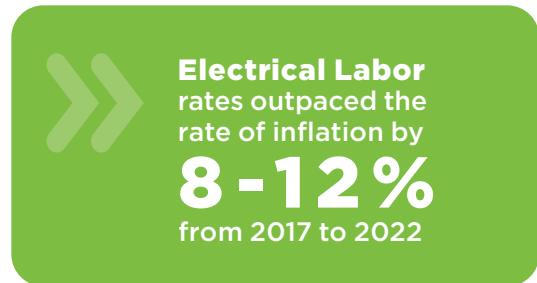
The lowest average straight time electrical rates were in Nashville and New Orleans ( \$77.00), and the highest rate was in Philadelphia (\$187.60).

In 2017, the last time this survey was conducted across these same 16 major U.S. exhibition cities, the average electrical labor rates were:

- \$97.28 Straight Time
- \$161.74 Overtime
- \$173.29 Double Time

Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, these 2017 average rates were adjusted for inflation and compared to the 2022 average electrical rates.

Based upon this analysis, the average exhibitor kit electrical labor rates outpaced the rate of inflation by 8-12% over the period from 2017 to 2022.



**Electrical Labor**  
rates outpaced the  
rate of inflation by  
**8-12%**  
from 2017 to 2022



Exhibitor Kit Published Electrical Labor Rates	2017 Average Rates Adjusted for Inflation*	2022 Actual Rates	Difference
Straight Time	\$117.53	\$132.10	12%
Overtime	\$195.41	\$208.45	7%
Double Time	\$209.63	\$226.00	8%

\*Rates were adjusted for inflation over the period from October 2017 - October 2022.

## MATERIAL HANDLING

Post-pandemic, general contractors have widely shifted to a new per pound pricing model. Of the more than 160 shows surveyed, 49% shifted to the “Per LB Pricing Model.”

To compare rates across shows and cities, the legacy hundred weight (CWT) pricing was converted to Per LB pricing. Please refer to page 11 entitled, “Material Handling Pricing Model Shift” to better understand the change in material handling pricing models and the methodology used to compare rates.

The 2022 average Per LB material handling rates across 16 major U.S. exhibition cities were:

- \$1.88 Per LB Before Discount Deadline
- \$2.08 Per LB After Discount Deadline

The lowest average Per LB material handling rate (before deadline) was in Atlanta (\$1.02 Per LB), and the highest rate was in Philadelphia (\$2.86 Per LB).

In 2017, the last time this survey was conducted across these same 16 major U.S. exhibition cities, the average Per CWT material handling rates were:

- \$106.21/CWT Advance to Warehouse
- \$99.00/CWT Direct Crated to Exhibit Hall
- \$126.07/CWT Direct Crated to Exhibit Hall Special Handling
- \$142.54/CWT Direct Uncrated & Loose to Exhibit Hall

Material Handling rates outpaced the rate of inflation by **18-31%** from 2017 to 2022



(The average 2017 material handling rate converted to a Per LB rate was \$1.59 per pound. Refer to the conversion methodology on page 6 of this report.)

Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, these 2017 average rates were adjusted for inflation and compared to the 2022 average material handling rates.

Based upon this analysis, the exhibitor kit material handling rates outpaced the rate of inflation by 18-31% over the period from 2017 to 2022.

Exhibitor Kit Published Material Handling Rates	2017 Average Rates Adjusted for Inflation*	2022 Actual Rates	Difference
Before Deadline	\$1.59	\$1.88	18%
After Deadline	\$1.59	\$2.08	31%

\*Rates were adjusted for inflation over the period from October 2017 – October 2022.

## MATERIAL HANDLING PRICING MODEL SHIFT

Post-pandemic, the widely accepted practice of billing material handling on a “Per Hundredweight (CWT)” basis shifted to a “Per Pound (LB)” pricing model.

In 2009, T3 Expo launched their company and moved entirely to “Per LB” pricing model, but the industry did not follow until Fern announced their new “1Rate” material handling pricing changes in 2021.

Below are the key differences between the two rate structures:

Per CWT Model	Per LB Model
Billed in increments of 100 lbs.	Billed per pound
Billed based upon a 200 lb. minimum	Billed based upon actual weight (no minimum)
Up to 48 rates/surcharges	Overtime, Special Handling, and Uncrated Surcharges were eliminated or blended into the per pound rate.  Some surcharges may still apply: Late to Warehouse, Off-target, and Carpet Material Handling or Non-Standard



### What are the benefits of the Per LB model?

The Per LB pricing model is simple. It’s easy to calculate and easy to budget.

### Is the Per LB model less expensive?

Maybe. The answer depends largely on how the Per LB price is calculated and how many surcharges were previously applicable.



Organizers wishing to ensure that their exhibitors are receiving the best rates need to understand the composition of the exhibitor freight for their particular show and the exact methodology used to calculate the per pound rates.

### How is the Per LB price calculated?

There are as many ways to convert from a “Per CWT” price to a “Per LB” price as there are shows. Most general contractors consider the conversion method used to be propriety, however, it should be noted that some general contractors actually remove the surcharges from the new rates which results in lower rates to exhibitors. Other general contractors blend the surcharges into the new rates. As with any blended rate, some exhibitors will pay more; others will pay less.

Organizers wishing to ensure that their exhibitors are receiving the best rates need to understand the composition of the exhibitor freight for their particular show and the exact methodology used to calculate the per pound rates.

# 2022

## MATERIAL HANDLING & LABOR RATES

### ACROSS 16 U.S. EXHIBITION CITIES

Category of Service		US AVERAGE	Anaheim	Atlanta	Boston	Chicago
		2022	2022	2022	2022	2022
DISPLAY LABOR	Straight Time	\$139.75	\$153.18	\$99.66	\$176.70	\$172.33
	Overtime	\$212.89	\$257.21	\$150.19	\$250.54	\$254.48
	Double Time	\$263.08	\$293.82	\$182.09	\$325.74	\$342.30
ELECTRICAL LABOR	Straight Time	\$132.10	\$155.08	\$114.49	\$168.54	\$135.98
	Overtime	\$208.45	\$270.92	\$155.74	\$248.72	\$202.29
	Double Time	\$226.00	\$278.83	\$155.74	\$323.01	\$265.31
MATERIAL HANDLING	Before Deadline	\$1.88	\$2.18	\$1.02	\$2.66	\$2.06
	After Deadline	\$2.08	\$2.44	\$1.17	\$2.96	\$2.59

Category of Service		US AVERAGE	Dallas	Houston	Las Vegas	Nashville
		2022	2022	2022	2022	2022
DISPLAY LABOR	Straight Time	\$139.75	\$109.88	\$115.43	\$119.45	\$117.30
	Overtime	\$212.89	\$165.10	\$173.13	\$194.94	\$179.95
	Double Time	\$263.08	\$219.37	\$225.03	\$203.22	\$231.73
ELECTRICAL LABOR	Straight Time	\$132.10	\$114.81	\$99.71	\$140.02	\$77.00
	Overtime	\$208.45	\$188.50	\$124.57	\$256.33	\$116.35
	Double Time	\$226.00	\$215.25	\$124.57	\$256.33	\$157.88
MATERIAL HANDLING	Before Deadline	\$1.88	\$1.44	\$1.24	\$1.42	\$1.56
	After Deadline	\$2.08	\$1.49	\$1.37	\$1.46	\$1.78

# 2022

## MATERIAL HANDLING & LABOR RATES ACROSS 16 U.S. EXHIBITION CITIES

Category of Service		US AVERAGE	New Orleans	New York	Orlando	Philadelphia
		2022	2022	2022	2022	2022
DISPLAY LABOR	Straight Time	\$139.75	\$117.30	\$235.05	\$111.91	\$153.56
	Overtime	\$212.89	\$179.95	\$310.16	\$172.42	\$223.43
	Double Time	\$263.08	\$231.73	\$387.07	\$202.41	\$298.36
ELECTRICAL LABOR	Straight Time	\$132.10	\$77.00	\$150.00	\$124.47	\$187.60
	Overtime	\$208.45	\$116.35	\$150.00	\$183.39	\$254.60
	Double Time	\$226.00	\$157.88	\$150.00	\$195.89	\$268.00
MATERIAL HANDLING	Before Deadline	\$1.88	\$1.40	\$2.73	\$1.30	\$2.86
	After Deadline	\$2.08	\$1.57	\$3.08	\$1.41	\$3.22

Category of Service		US AVERAGE	San Antonio	San Diego	San Francisco	Washington D.C.
		2022	2022	2022	2022	2022
DISPLAY LABOR	Straight Time	\$139.75	\$111.13	\$158.48	\$163.15	\$121.52
	Overtime	\$212.89	\$164.22	\$264.12	\$285.75	\$180.64
	Double Time	\$263.08	\$229.59	\$316.37	\$285.75	\$234.74
ELECTRICAL LABOR	Straight Time	\$132.10	\$111.79	\$162.61	\$187.06	\$107.44
	Overtime	\$208.45	\$223.58	\$278.28	\$360.64	\$204.89
	Double Time	\$226.00	\$223.58	\$278.28	\$360.64	\$204.89
MATERIAL HANDLING	Before Deadline	\$1.88	\$1.46	\$2.03	\$2.26	\$2.40
	After Deadline	\$2.08	\$1.50	\$2.23	\$2.52	\$2.44

<b>Total # of Shows</b>	<b>160</b>	
Total Shows - Per LB Material Handling Pricing	66	41%
Total Shows - CWT Material Handling Pricing	94	59%

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Prepared By



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The Exhibitor Advocate is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing industry stakeholders with expert advice, research, and tools to amplify the voice of exhibitors and ensure the enduring success of exhibitions and events.

In Partnership With



**tradeshowlogic.com**

Tradeshow Logic is a full-service show management and event solutions firm. As dedicated exhibitor advocates, Tradeshow Logic helps associations and for-profit event producers make bold decisions and drive transformative and sustainable change to increase engagement, reduce costs, and elevate the event experience.



**evoliomarketing.com**

EVOLIO Marketing helps marketers deliver the best results for their event marketing experiences and activities. EVOLIO Marketing develops effective strategies, conducts measurement with actionable results, and helps marketers measure the effectiveness of their trade show exhibit marketing strategy.

With Generous Support From



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The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC) is one of North America's largest building trades unions, with over a half-million members. The UBC leads the way in training, educating, and representing the next generation of skilled construction professionals. We equip our professional craftsmen with skills that are demanded in today's construction industry.



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AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF EXHIBITORS

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