

## **Want to get more bang for your buck at trade shows?**

**Here is a basic outline to achieving success at any trade show. Not following this could lead to bottom line failure or mediocrity at best.**

You and your staff have just spent four exhausting days at a trade show and you tell yourself this show was a success. But was it? Did you spend too much and get too little business?

**The bottom line: Are you getting the best return on your show investment?**

This simple outline acts as a "How To" to ensure trade show success.

**Is this the right show?**

Most of the time an exhibitor will turn over the necessary preparation and details to a third party. But first they have to understand is this the right show? Does the goal of the show coincide to what you want to achieve? Does it reach your target audience? Can you determine your booth location? You cannot delegate this important decision. You must decide.

Choosing to work with a third party to supply the show specifics is most important and oftentimes worth the expense. A professional service can coordinate setup and booth prep including electricity, flooring, carpeting, audio visual, telephone, computer, waste bins, furniture, decorations, plants, etc.

**Plan for the objectives:**

Time till show: 9 - 12 months

Amazingly most exhibitors enter a trade show without a plan. Decide what you are trying to achieve and defining a plan with measurable objectives are the biggest keys to ensuring a successful return on your investment. Are you trying to grow existing business or launch a new line? Are you looking to gain quality leads? (What's a quality lead anyway?)

This is the essence of the whole trade show and knowing what you want to accomplish will drive every aspect - your theme, booth layout, display, graphics, product displays, staff, literature, etc.

Don't forget to define a budget and determine who is going to do what, how, and when.

**Plan the Promotion:**

Time till show: 6 - 8 months

How do you plan to reach your target audience?

Prepare your promotion to align with your objectives. The communication portion of your plan should consist of:

- Personalized invitations to clients or targets.
- Advertising in trade magazines, show bulletins, etc.
- Direct marketing to promote your appearance or show objective to your target audience.
- Telemarketing to solicit interest and promotion.
- Website activity tied to the show and complimenting the other parts of your promotional strategy.
- Any sponsorship arrangements that tie in to your products or services.
- Press kits that provide details on your activities and releases.
- Give away promotions to secure interest.
- Booth demonstrations to solicit the target crowds.

Your use of direct marketing is important and should consist of pieces at regular intervals prior to the show, and wherever possible, use first-class mail. The promotional media should give your target audiences a reason to come and visit and should tie to customer benefits with anything that helps saves them time or money.

Another area that attracts the audience is to submit and present a paper at the show. This not only gets your name and company stand out but also opens up the potential that people will come to your booth to talk to the author or find out more details. You should plan on sending out a personal invitation to attend the paper as another approach in your direct marketing efforts. The paper reprint is also a great marketing tool after the show and readers oftentimes look at your company as a knowledgeable leader as a result of the paper .

Don't forget to track the outgoing information so you can later determine which areas provided the most response after the show. These go into determining your investment return.

### **Plan to staff the booth:**

Time till show: 2 - 4 months

Your people are your ambassadors to your business. Choose wisely. Most successful show results come from a booth staff chosen because they are the best and brightest and know how to make small talk and sell to a customer. Also determine how many personnel are needed to support the show ...in peak and down times and create a show schedule.

Your booth staff should be trained beforehand - why you are exhibiting, what you are exhibiting, and what you expect from them. Exhibit staff training is essential if you are to achieve your objectives.

Even with the best staff requires refreshers on the products your displaying, open-

ended qualifying questions, literature requests, what to do with a hot lead, etc. This is all done during the training sessions.

Finally, are you looking to establish a dress code and theme? This needs to be determined up front.

### **Plan the lead capture and follow up:**

Time till show: 1 - 2 months

To simplify your lead follow up, plan for an easy way to capture prospects information using electronic readers or even hard copy information sheets. If you can tabulate this daily and get it out to your sales staff on a timely basis, you are maximizing your success potential.

A lot of exhibitors do everything right at the show. However, when they get back to the daily grind those qualified leads are never followed up in a timely fashion. Isn't generating leads and following up on them the reasons for doing the show?

Statistics indicate that most leads are signed within the first 30 days after a show. The longer it takes, the staler the lead. Prior to the show, establish how leads will be handled, set timelines for follow-up, and make sales representatives accountable for leads given to them. Don't forget to track and record the leads and the follow up as well as the revenue, product, or service potential.

### **Show time**

Don't let all your hard work in the planning stage go down in flames due to overcrowding at the booth. Schedule your personnel with peak periods and slack periods in mind and make them sensitive to how your booth appearance affects the quality of leads.

Many exhibitors use a "fish bowl" at a prominent location to capture business cards. Using a free gift for an exchange of information or a business card is also a very creative approach.

If you are going to use something that will attract attention put some "show biz" attitude behind your attraction and make it memorable. Prospects are drawn to glitter and excitement and turned off by the ordinary.

Often times your booth staff feels compelled to give a prospect as much information as possible. They fail to ask about real needs and interests and miss important qualifying information. Train your staff prior to the show and have a daily debrief to gauge how you're doing relative to the stated show objectives. Look at your hot prospects and get someone moving on them immediately.

Handing out literature and promotional items oftentimes acts as a barrier to conversation. Chances are much of your literature will be discarded at the first

opportunity. A better approach is using a literature fulfillment plan that includes your rep calling on the prospect soon after the show with the literature in hand.

Don't forget to have a point person defined for press contacts.

### **Post Show**

Send out your thank you letters and make sure you and your sales reps are following up on any committed literature, information and appointments.

Don't forget to evaluate your show performance. What did you do right and where can you improve for next time?

Did you achieve your show objectives? How many leads and sales were generated? And how does that look relative to your investment? This information may not be available for weeks or months after the show. Spending the time to get this information, establishes the real bottom line of your show performance.

Lastly, achieving the best possible results from a show is hard work. You should plan on giving recognition or rewards to acknowledge your staff's efforts at the show.

By following this simple outline you are setting yourself up for the best return on your trade show investment.

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