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# Simple Guide to Effective Tradeshow Exhibiting

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At this time of shrinking economy, when experts recommend to continue our marketing efforts, investing our money wisely and making every advertising dollar come back with sales, becomes vital.

Exhibiting at Trade Shows, Business Expos, Fairs and similar events can provide outstanding results and revenues or, just the extreme opposite, be a complete waste of time and money.

The key to success is simple: proper planning. This guide is intended to provide information on the basics to come out ahead. This material is based on many years of experience applying the best practices in the exhibiting industry, both as an exhibitor and also developing many event programs that proved successful for my clients. It is intended to cover the fundamentals for planning all phases (before the show, during and after), to serve as a complete and practical how-to guide, to eliminate improvisation and help you get the highest possible returns from your exhibiting investment.

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## **7 STEPS TO A PROFITABLE TRADESHOW**

Just the mere fact of participating in a trade show requires a great deal of effort. Following these simple steps will help you focus on the important issues leaving the guess work out and making the process much easier.

### **1 - Establish Your Goal**

Your goal needs to be based on whom it is you're targeting and what do you want to get across to them. Be clear on what you want to accomplish: are you looking for visibility, brand awareness, lead generation, new product launching, product sales? You can have a single goal or several of them and you want to be able to measure your return on objectives afterwards. Being clear and planning all aspects of your exhibit in terms of your objectives, not only will save you time and money but also increase your desired results.

### **2 - Select The Right Event.**

You want to make sure the people who attend fit your client's profile so your effort is worthwhile. Before making a decision, find out what the particular trade show's objectives are, the show's audience profile, hours and all the activities planned by the show organizers. You also want to know how it's being promoted and the expected attendance based on previous shows. Another important issue is whom you'll be competing with for the same visitor's attention so you can determine how creative you need to be to attract them to your exhibit.

### **3- Select Your Exhibit Space**

When selecting your space on the show floor, important considerations are size (bigger is not necessarily better), where it

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is located on the floor, what kind of other exhibits will be around it, whether it's a high traffic or low traffic area, your special requirements such as electrical installation and the physical conditions such as lighting, temperature and height. If there are activities planned, such as live music, food stands, etc., make sure you are not located next to them if it might interfere with your desired traffic or the strategy you plan to use.

#### **4. Make It Easy For Your Visitors To Identify Your Products and Services.**

Your prospect will give your space about 10 seconds before deciding whether to stop or to go on. How do you make them stop? Having the largest booth and a very expensive display system does not guarantee your success if the graphics and message are not directed to your target audience. Your product or service is obvious to you but not necessarily so for the rest of the world, making it very rapidly identifiable will get your qualified prospect's attention and will keep the unqualified moving along. Make relevant information about your products and services highly visible, so visitors can easily find it. Product samples, your frequently asked questions addressed in your signs, video presentations with product demonstrations on a lap top, will help interested people stick around your exhibit while you might be talking to another visitor.

#### **5. Have Qualified Staffers**

Your staffers should be able to engage your visitors. Have specific instructions for your staff, including the time they should arrive and leave, break times, information they need to get from prospects and where to keep it, where are they to remain, what to watch for, etc. You may need to have staffers taking turns if the show hours are long or lasts several days, so they can get proper rest. Your staff should be dressed professionally, identified with uniforms or same color clothing and they should wear a tag with their name and company logo.

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You need at least 2 people at all times but you may need additional people at peak hours to properly handle traffic. There should be at least one experienced person at all times, although the more knowledgeable your staff is the better results you'll get at qualifying the leads and converting them to sales later.

### **6. Select The Right Promotional Materials**

The purpose of the promotional items is to keep your name in front of your prospect after the show; therefore it must connect the dots between your goal, your product or service, and your target audience. The idea is to give out an item that is useful, the recipient is unlikely to buy for him or herself and it's not going to break or fall apart. It is a good idea not to keep these too visible and also have a stock of inexpensive giveaways, such as good old candy, which you can get with your logo in the wrapper if you want, for those people who come to your booth just for the gift. Also, have a better gift item for prospects with a higher profile which you can give in exchange for their contact information. Have inexpensive flyers with information about your products and a special offer or coupon for the show to give out to your visitors.

### **7- Have A Follow Up Strategy In Place**

This is where most businesses fail. Not having a follow up strategy in place before the show will more than likely lead to leaving some of the leads out of follow up. Preparing for this is just as important as preparing for the event. You're likely to have a number of qualified leads in your hands who requested specific information which will require some time to prepare, but when you go back to your office the day after the show you're also likely to have some accumulated urgent to-dos, also likely to take 100% of your attention. Having a pre-established, simple method to make contact with all the leads in a timely manner will certainly result in higher sales.

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## **AFTER THE SHOW**

When the show is over and done with it's time for evaluating what you got out of it. This is where you review results and compare to the goals you set ahead of time. It is important to measure, not only your return on investment, but also return on objective and return on relationship building. It is also important to evaluate all aspects of the event to note what worked well and what could you do different next time.

The post show evaluation should be broken down in stages, depending on your particular business, you're likely to have immediate results in the form of leads but the sales cycle might take anywhere from weeks to several months, so you'll need to establish a longer time frame to measure actual closed sales. For example, you might review results 2 weeks after the show, 1 month and 3 months, measuring each of the pre-established goals at every stage. You might also have some activities arising from the event that might have an effect on your overall ROI that need to be taken into consideration, such as PR opportunities, speaking engagements, invitation to network in events were your high qualified prospects gather, etc.

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## **10 COSTLY MISTAKES TO AVOID**

Addressed previously as the first step to a successful exhibit experience, I believe it is also the major mistake a business can make when participating in a tradeshow: not establishing clear goals. Besides that, here are 10 other important mistakes I see businesses fall into quite often, that will adversely affect the desired results.

- 1.** Measuring the success of the event by the amount of people that came to get giveaways.
- 2.** Using your logo or company name as the most visible graphic element in your display: unless you are a widely known brand that needs no introduction, having your logo and/or company name as the largest element in your banner will not make anyone stop.
- 3.** Distributing expensive literature, promotional items that are too cheap looking or too expensive.
- 4.** Not enough staffers, causing interested visitors to leave your space without leaving their information.
- 5.** Staffers without knowledge of your product so your company loses credibility when not able to give information.
- 6.** Staffers not trained on your prospect's profile, causing to waste time with unqualified visitors.

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7. Setting up your display after the show starts or taking it down before the show ends. Even worse: leaving your display unattended.
  8. Staff sitting down. If your strategy requires sitting down with a prospect, you should arrange to use an area apart from your stand.
  9. Staff behind a physical barrier, such as a table. If your space consists of just a table, your staff should remain in front of it to properly interact with your visitors.
  10. Staff eating at the stand or doing anything that does not place 100% of their attention on the visitor.

## **TIPS ON GETTING THE MOST OF YOUR PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS INVESTMENT**

There is a multitude of items, in all shapes and sizes, to select from. Base your selection on your objectives. An effective choice should accomplish being the one company your prospect remembers when in need of your product or service, even long after the show.

- Give them to encourage people to participate in a contest or drawing in exchange for information you can use to qualify them.
- Use them as a gift offer in a pre-show mailing to entice your hot prospects or preferred clients to come visit you.

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- Use an item that needs to be put together so you have extra time to ask questions while you do it.
  - Have a higher price item to give away in exchange for an immediate commitment or an appointment from a qualified prospect.
  - Have different kinds of giveaways for different kind of recipients, like prospects, clients and giveaway seekers.
  - Use only quality items, which doesn't mean necessarily expensive, remember, they will represent your company identity long after the event is over. Often you can find quality items on special or closeouts.
  - Have a gift with purchase offer for the show, that can be extended for a specified period of time after.
  - Look for items that complement your marketing message.
  - Plan your order as far ahead as possible to make sure you take the time to make the best choice and avoid rush fees and overnight shipping.
  - If you're planning on participating in several events, order larger quantities can lower your cost.
  - Select items with an imprinting area large enough to accommodate your company logo, phone, website and message.
  - Avoid laying large amounts of giveaways on your table, besides making it look cluttered, this will tend to attract attention on the gifts rather than of your own products or services.

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## **LASTLY....**

Take Action: print this guide and keep it handy, make sure you refer to it before your next event and if you apply these concepts your results will show. If you're not quite sure how to go about it to make it work for your particular purposes, or don't have the time it requires, you're better off consulting with an expert. Going to the show unprepared leaving it up to improvisation, will be like gambling, you might get lucky, but chances are, you'll lose a lot of money,

If you wish to discuss your next project with an experienced consultant, we offer a 1 hour consultation at no cost to you, you have nothing to lose and a lot of actionable, creative ideas to gain. Just send an email to [glafont@action-promo.com](mailto:glafont@action-promo.com) and I'll get back to you to set a time convenient for both. There is no obligation of any kind.

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