

GETTING THE MOST FROM A TRADESHOW

Preparing for Trade Shows

- Several months advance preparation may be required for printed materials and booth supplies. Advance preparation will avoid errors, omissions and high, last minute costs.
- For larger shows, get your exhibitor's kit early. Be aware of show rules, restrictions, services and facilities. Make sure your plans are consistent with these.
- Talk to people who have attended this or other shows and attend a show yourself. Get ideas and feedback and find out what your competitors are doing.
- Select a booth location for maximum visibility to your target audience. Use strategy and consider what suppliers, competitors or compatible companies you should be near.
- Set specific show goals such as number of sales, number of leads, etc. Be sure your show team buys into your objectives and that your expected gains justify your investments.
- Issue a news release prior to the show. Mention that interested parties could get more information on the topic of the release by visiting your booth.
- Mail VIP invitations to existing and potential clients including a publicity article, a brochure, show passes or show maps marking your location. VIP discounts, product demonstrations or time block might also be offered.
- Advertise your attendance at the show and any special show offers.
- Select a strong marketing message and be sure that everything you do and display at the show is consistent with that. The message should clearly and concisely communicate the benefits associated with your products or service.
- Display material must announce your message, not just your company name. Use few, but easily read words. Focus on visual impact.
- Refine your booth design as you gain experience. In the beginning, even your own carpet, lamps, plants or furniture can make a booth more effective.
- Booths are promotional tools. They should always be professional and inviting, not overwhelming. Use creativity to interest and involve your target audience. Keep in mind that quality, in terms of the audience you attract, is more important than quantity.
- Do a dry run of your booth set-up and ask for objective feedback. Take photographs of the final layout for reference at show set-up.
- Pack and carefully label your show materials. Include a basic toolbox and supply kit for things like extension cords, staple gun, scissors, tape, flashlight and cleaning supplies.

Getting the Most from Trade Shows

- Set up well in advance. Also, always be at your booth early, organized and eager.
- Display actual products if possible and if not, a professional portfolio can be effective. Feature your most profitable items. Use varying heights and angles to make your display more interesting; and bold, brief labels to highlight important information.
- Reserve expensive brochures for qualified leads. Have attractive single-page handouts and business cards for general use. Bring any order forms, invoices, price lists, etc, that you will need. As well as clipboards for writing on and a portable filing system. If you're selling on-site, have the change or credit card materials required to handle sales efficiently. Keep track of inventory so you'll know what's moving and can bring more in.
- Have a helper and don't desert your booth. Also, consider having a 'roamer' to hand out flyers and invite people to your booth. Three to four-hour booth shifts are optimal, with short, frequent breaks. You will probably be standing a lot, so wear comfortable shoes.
- All workers should have easy to read name tags, worn on the right.
- Be direct and friendly with visitors, not pushy. Smile and make eye contact. Don't approach from behind and don't hover.
- Chatter, eating, drinking, clutter and untidiness can discourage visitors to your booth.
- Try to move around in the booth and make yourself approachable. Acknowledge visitors quickly. If you're busy with someone else, excuse yourself for a moment and politely ask the new arrival to wait or, if necessary, come back at a better time.
- Collect the business cards of prospects or provide cards for the general public to fill out. A draw will encourage more of this but you may get quantity over quality.
- Allocate most of your time to existing and potential customers. Determine intention and ability to buy. Always be friendly and courteous but be brief with unlikely buyers.
- Actively probe and listen to potential customers. If you can determine how to match your offering to their needs, you can create a desire to buy. Know your benefits inside out. Answer objections, but don't take them personally. Ask for orders.
- Use a calendar so you can give reliable production or delivery dates on future orders. Don't overextend yourself. It's better to ask a customer to wait than to fail to provide products or services as promised. Keep good track of order and delivery information.
- Make notes as you go, of ideas for presentation, product or service improvement. Ask for feedback. Evaluate your competitors.

Following Through on Trade Shows

- Re-pack your booth materials carefully, placing them in their original boxes. Check contents against the labels you prepared. Make note of depletions and place any damaged items in a separate box. Repair and replace those items without delay.
- Update, organize, expand and act on the show notes you made while your experience and memory are fresh.
- Process orders immediately.
- Within 10 days, send thank-you's to all those who assisted you with the show.

- Within 10 days, make up a mailing list of qualified leads and send them promotional packages. Follow up later with telephone calls.
- Do a complete expense accounting for the show. Evaluate how you did relative to your goals. Ask for feedback from those who worked with you. Determine your success.

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