

Getting the Most from Trade Shows



When used effectively, trade shows can boost to your company's name recognition and help you close deals.

Today, the trade show "business" consumes more than \$15 billion a year from companies just like yours. Every day there are a variety of shows going on in major cities around the globe. For most organizations, these shows represent a tremendous expense. This article discusses how to make certain you are getting maximum return on your investment and minimize wasted time and money at trade shows.

Show Expert

Walk down the aisle of a typical show (or think back to your last show) and look at the booth people. You'll always find several people who stand at the side of their exhibit with arms folded while customers and prospects pass by. Their body language presents a territorial

boundary to prospective visitors, and only the most aggressive or most needy will approach the booth.

When prospects do enter the exhibit, often untrained salespeople will allow the customer to control the situation rather than taking control themselves. You have to encourage your sales staff to be active, not reactive. But, your first task is getting people to and into your booth. You can do this with

- **Direct mail.** A targeted, high-visibility direct mail effort aimed at specific prospective sub-markets;
- **Pre-show PR.** This entails developing special publicity efforts outlining what will be shown in the booth during the show and identifying the booth

number to call attention to your exhibit in the show; and

- **Advertising tags.** This is a simple approach that requires at least three months planning. Here you want to run a strip-in on your ads, something like "See us at the ZYX Show, Date, Booth #1234."

Booth Traffic

A hook is any thing or action that tends to "massage" the prospect's ego. Use their first name (everyone has a badge), ask a meaningful question, or simply smile, reach out and shake hands like you expected to meet the prospect. These may sound like simple selling techniques, but you'd be surprised how often these selling courtesies are overlooked. Common sense sales techniques work here just as well as they do in the customer's office.

When it comes to show magnets, rather than using the old attraction of the beautiful or attractive girl in the booth, consider displaying your product or service in an innovative and original manner. Use color, light, sound, or visuals and make them tie in well with your product.

Sales promotion items and giveaways are also popular show magnets. Such items should have little real value but considerable intrinsic value so they will be retained as a further reminder of the company and its products.

Holding Prospects

Getting people into the booth is only half the battle. You must also hold their attention either by setting up an expectation or getting individuals involved. To gain expectation, build suspense. Make them wonder about the answer to a question and then promise the answer only if they listen. But make certain the answer you provide was worth their time.

One thing you can't afford to do is allow people to leave the booth until you have

determined whether or not they are viable prospects. Don't let people come in and stand around without being helped, even if you are tied up with someone else.

Interrupt your discussion, acknowledge the individuals, and tell them someone will be with them in a few moments. In the meantime, give them something to do. Have them study a specific section of a brochure or view the A-V presentation, but keep an eye on them. As soon as you see their interest waning (assuming you haven't gotten to them immediately), get back to them.

Getting Rid of Casual Visitors

Obviously, at a show you don't generally have the luxury of spending as much time with each individual as you might like. You will make time for the really "hot" prospects, but the others will be in and out of the booth. The key is to determine their level of interest. If it is low, quietly move on to more fertile ground.

Most people will leave after a demonstration, so summarize in a friendly manner to let them know that you are finished. If you can't close and can't seem to "shake" the individual, use some type of sign language to attract assistance from someone else in the booth. This provides you with an easy and courteous method of excusing yourself without leaving a sour taste in the visitor's mouth or a poor impression of the company.

Exhibit Costs

Some people have attempted to put together formulas on evaluating the cost-per-person per show. Others try to trace actual sales to contacts made at a show, while still others use a mixture plus a strong dose of gut-feel. The latter is probably most typical.

Rather than looking at your trade show efforts as an expense, view them in terms of advertising and promotional investments just as you do media advertising, sales literature, direct mail and publicity. Many people address the

concept of a trade show with "what's the smallest amount of space we can use this time?" instead of "what is the most effective method of presenting our message?"

Almost anyone (except heavy equipment or mainframe manufacturers) would be able to get by with a 10x10 (sometimes 8x10) booth. But would it be a good platform for your products, your company and your message?

Once you have determined the amount of floor space required, you'll have to decide how you are going to use the space to its fullest. The variations are considerable, and they all ultimately affect the cost.

To determine your exhibit budget, ask yourself the following questions

- What kind of selling will you be doing in the booth?
- Will you be handing out only literature?
- Will you be carrying on demonstrations?
- Will you be conducting semi-private meetings in the booth?
- Will you be spending considerable time with a few groups throughout the show?
- What kind of graphics, signage or AV presentation do you have planned?
- What mood do you want to establish?

Once you have your floor plan, selling message, product requirements and graphic needs spelled out, you can begin to compile your budget.

As a rule of thumb, you will probably be able to get two years of show life out of your booth. This is assuming you participate in four to six shows a year,

have the exhibit well-crated and shipped the best way possible in plenty of time, and provide adequate instructions for setup and dismantling.

For a booth of moderate quality (not outstanding, but tastefully done) you can expect to spend \$2,000–4,000 a linear foot by the time it is completed (booth, graphics, special effects, etc.). On top of this, you will have to figure that good crating will cost 25–30 percent of your booth cost. Since booths and crates take a terrific beating in transit and during setup, skimping in this area can be false savings.


To avoid overtime charges and yet get the product you want, expect to spend three-plus months from the initiation of the project to completion.

Controlling Trade Show Costs

Across the country the cost of trade show services, including shipping damage, setup, tear-down and show support have risen dramatically. It's a major concern to every manager. But you can keep costs in line and even reduce service costs by applying a little planning and attention to

- Pre-show preparation of the exhibit,
- Shipping procedures,
- Information follow-through,
- Rerouting evaluation, and
- Rerouting procedures.

For detailed information on each of these points visit www.wqpmag.com/lm.cfm/wq080402.

Finally, in order to cut down on your trade show costs, you must carefully evaluate each show and establish clear goals. A detailed checklist of questions to help you evaluate trade shows is also available on www.wqpmag.com/lm.cfm/wq080402. 



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