

# Tradeshow Planning Guide: *Maximizing Your Investment*

Oftentimes, companies invest in expos, tradeshows, conferences and other events with the expectation that they generate business. Unfortunately there are common missteps and missed opportunities that usually prevent us from receiving the maximum benefit from our investment.

This document is intended to give you practical steps and recommendations to get the most from your experience. **In general, the sooner you begin planning, the better...but it's never too late!**

## Evaluate

When evaluating a particular tradeshow, expo, conference, etc...consider the following:

- **The Audience:** who will be attending and how closely do they match your ideal prospects or clients and specifically whether the individuals attending are capable of buying your products or services.
- **The Environment:** Are your competitors there? Depending on your competitive position, you may or may not want to be in the same environment.
- **The Exposure:** Understand what kind of marketing promotion is planned and how your organization will benefit.

The tradeshow company should be able to provide you with:

- Audience statistics & demographics
- Promotion schedule
- List of exhibitors
- Reference exhibitors

Once you secure the size and location of your exhibit space, begin planning for success ASAP.

## Plan

### 1. Specific Goals

In addition to tangible goals, there are many intangibles from which you can benefit, be sure to list them so that they become part of the overall judge of success.

#### Tangible Goals

- Quantity of leads
- Number of booth visitors
- Number of sales
- Number of "touches" or contacts

#### Intangible Goals

- Increase awareness
- Launch new product/service
- Increase interaction with sales staff
- Shorten sales cycle
- Convey competitive advantage

**For Service Businesses:**  
Consider using the lifetime value of a client to determine your ROI or break-even.

$$\frac{\text{Fixed Cost}}{\text{Avg Profit Per Sale}} = \text{Sales Needed}$$

## 2. Theme

What is the overall message and how do you want to convey through all your efforts surrounding the tradeshow? Everything should support this.

- What products and/or services should be highlighted
- Themes make your message more effective by making them engaging
- Themes can be fun or serious, but should be reflective of the organization
- Successful themes tend to play off of some common ways people connect to information (from Lois Kelly's book, "Beyond Buzz") including:
  - Aspiration and belief – think hope
  - David vs. Goliath – everyone likes the little guy
  - Avalanche about to roll – knowing something before others
  - Contrarian/counterintuitive – makes someone go "hmmm"
  - Anxieties – grab attention through fear
  - Personalities – inspirational personal stories
  - How-to – no fluff, just the facts
  - Glitz and glam – people like a wow factor
  - Seasonal – instantly relatable

## 3. Offer

How will you create interaction that ultimately turns people into qualified prospects? This could be a single offer or a series of offers that provide something valuable in exchange for information or interaction with your sales staff.

### Examples

- Give-away
- Contests
- Drawings
- Information Requests
- Whitepapers
- Promotional Products
- Product Trials

**Successful offers...reflect the goal you're after.**

**Qualified Leads:** Make sure you offer something that is only going to be valuable a prospect (if you're a consultant, offer \$2,000 of free consulting).

**Suspects:** If you're after people to put on your email list to qualify down the road, then perhaps a trinket or drawing will work.

## 4. Exhibit

Create you exhibit or booth to convey your theme and reinforce you unique selling proposition (value). Other considerations as you prepare your display:

- What do you need and can you acquire it without additional cost?
  - Have an electronics store to donate use of a large screen TV in exchange for promotional signage
  - Team up with companies with complementary products or services to offset costs
  - Access co-op marketing dollars from vendors or suppliers

## 5. Marketing

Devise a simple campaign around your participation in the tradeshow, launch the theme, and encourage interaction before, and at the show. Some things you might execute:

- Gather contact information for clients, prospects and referral sources
- Consider direct mail offering free or discounted tickets
- E-mail and/or fax invitations to visit you at the show
- Consider offers to encourage visits to your exhibit space
- Highlight your participation in the show on your website
- Include promotional flyers or message on outgoing communication
- Create something of value giving sales staff a reason to call customers/prospects
- Include in newsletters
- Promote participation at other events

## 6. Staffing & Logistics

Create a schedule and plan for needed resources to staff the exhibit appropriately. Things to consider:

- Travel accommodations
- Shipment of materials and exhibit
- Who should staff (is this an opportunity to provide access to technical staff or other expert resources in your company)?
- What attire best supports your image/brand?
- Are there peak times that require additional staff?
- Use your best people, don't relegate the opportunity to junior staff or you may miss opportunities

### Use TOP Executives!

Trade shows can be the perfect place to give lots of clients and prospects access the top executives of the company.

Get their commitment and then promote the opportunity through the sales team.

If done right, the president of the company can potentially interface with more clients in one day than he or she could in a month.

## 7. Sales Process

Consuming too much time with any one person is your worst enemy. Your focus at a tradeshow is to efficiently identify opportunities, positioning follow-up, and move on so that you meet as many people as possible.

- Develop an opening question that will both qualify and attract people into conversation
- Create a next step that is easy to say "Yes" to. (May I add you to our e-mail list, etc...?)
- Develop a simple, fluid process for capturing information and creating a next step
- Practice politely winding conversations down with prospects and non-prospects

Talking too long to a prospect is just as bad as talking too long to someone who has no ability to do business with you...**be efficient!**

## 8. Follow-up Plan

Develop a plan for following up on leads and opportunities from the show.

- Who will follow up?
- What will the process be?
- Scripts, Mailings, Offers
- Schedule follow-up time on calendars in advance!
- Be prepared to execute the follow-up within 2 weeks of the show

### Exhibit Preparation Tips

- Design the booth so it's not crowded
- Remove barriers between staff and the customer, convey openness
- Keep messaging simple
- Practice setting up and breaking down the display in advance
- If possible have customers give you feedback
- Most visible areas include the lower front of the booth and the background
- Plan for extra supplies and materials to be out of the way and hidden
- Identify specific tasks for staff setting up the display
- Prepare forms to collect information in advance
- Plan for product demos if appropriate
- Carry the theme through the display

## Execute

Have fun! Use the sales process you developed!

Show Floor Tips

- Use this opportunity to scope competitors.
- Pick up information, take photos of good exhibits.
- Identify complimentary exhibitors (those companies that sell to the same target)
  - Possibly discuss cooperative follow-up or lead exchange
  - Opportunities for partnerships, etc.
- Introduce yourself to neighboring exhibitors.
- Stay professional – don't disrupt other exhibitors or visitors with loud music, laser pointers, etc.
- Don't sit – you send the wrong impression and attendees won't engage with you.
- Don't read eat or drink – you appear disinterested and discourage people from approaching.

- If you're busy when someone approaches, either acknowledge him or try to include him in conversation.
- Keep talking amongst staff to a minimum. If you're talking when someone approaches, break it off immediately.
- Don't talk on your cell phone – it takes away from time with potential prospects and reflects poorly on the company.
- Don't be a border guard – don't stand where you block the exhibit, stand near the aisle and off to the side.
- Don't hand out literature too freely, it just ends up in a bag with all your competitors and rarely gets looked at again. Better yet, gather contact information and offer to mail literature.
- Don't assume – don't size people up by the way they look, engage and truly qualify them.
- Don't cluster into groups of friends or other booth personnel.
- Make yourself approachable, make eye contact.
- Take business cards frequently and write notes on the back once the person has moved on. You can't possibly remember everyone and how to follow up.
- Don't pack up early. A consistent complaint of tradeshow attendees is that exhibitors are packed up early. Stay the extra few minutes; your best contact might be with the busy executive trying to catch the last few minutes of the show.

## Follow-up

1. **Celebrate** – all the hard work that went into a successful show!
2. **Execute Follow-up Plan**

- **IMMEDIATELY** contact the hot opportunities.
- Hold everyone accountable to following up
- Use incentives and make the follow-up fun.
- Enter all leads and contact information into your customer/prospect database
- Follow up on any cooperative marketing opportunities from the show

The vast majority of exhibitors don't follow up in any significant way...  
...this is an opportunity for you!

3. **Debrief**

Conduct meeting(s) to identify:

- Gems – those things that worked well.
- Opportunities – those things that could be better next time.

4. **Track & Decide**

- Identify and track the immediate results and long-term opportunities from the show.
- Compare this to your break-even analysis and begin tracking ROI.
- Continue to track and update the ROI for the following 12 months.
- As soon as possible determine if the tradeshow should be repeated.