

Tradeshow article for Inprint

Word Count: approx. 1,000

Possible titles:

Showing savvy: Maximizing the value of your trade show exhibit **Simple strategies for maximizing a trade show exhibit's potential**

Trade shows are an excellent way to bolster your brand, introduce new products and meet face-to-face with customers and prospects. For many businesses and industries, trade shows provide an opportunity to meet with those you might not reach through more traditional sales channels.

Make the most of your trade show exposure by properly preparing and executing your marketing communication plan. By implementing these five proven and cost-effective strategies, you can maximize selling opportunities at your next exhibit.

1. Plan your display with brand image in mind

Trade show attendees want to see and experience products and services for themselves. It's easy for exhibitors to get so eager to make good on attendees' desires that they end up with a chaotic display and a misplaced message.

To enhance brand awareness at trade shows, it's essential to focus your message and display. Choose a single, strong, provocative, "What's in it for me?" idea you want visitors to walk away with, and select just a few key products to highlight. If possible, choose an interactive demonstration to attract and engage visitors to your booth.

Everything you develop—from overall booth design to sales and promotional materials—should have the same look and feel. Color scheme should compliment your logo. Signage should be large enough to be read from a distance, simple and direct enough to be read in three seconds, and striking enough (using a unique shape, for example) to make a lasting impression.

2. Apply effective booth marketing

A friendly, pro-active staff knowledgeable about your show objectives and prepared to engage and qualify visitors is essential. To increase booth marketing success:

- Keep a dedicated person in charge. An executive manager to meet decision-makers can be equally important as technical experts.
- Make it easy for attendees to get assistance by using uniforms for your staff. Choose colorful, but tasteful, blazers or shirts embroidered or printed with your logo.
- Encourage smiles and eye contact. Avoid standing around the booth with arms folded across your chest and talking with other staffers. Never ignore someone entering your booth.
- Ask open questions instead of the ubiquitous close-ended, "May I help you?"
- Place tables off to the side and leave the center of the exhibit open to increase traffic.
- Display only one or two product samples, gifts, brochures and other sales materials at a time.

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- Avoid spending too much time with existing customers if they are not part of your trade show objectives.
- Collect contact information from interested visitors.
- Develop a system to categorize prospects according to their level of interest. This will aid the follow-up process after the show.

3. Invest in pre-show promotion

Show attendees have selective agendas and a limited time frame, making pre-show promotion essential for getting prospects to visit your booth. According to the Trade Show Bureau, pre-show promotion increases attendance by up to 33 percent—yet fewer than 20 percent of exhibitors use it.

To increase attendance results, mail eye-catching invitations to customers, prospects, journalists and trade show attendees. Be sure to provide your booth number and tell them what they'll be able to see. You can give them extra incentive to visit by enclosing a coupon that can be redeemed for a gift at the show. Follow up on the mailing by calling customers and prospects with a personal invitation to stop by.

In addition to invitations, send press releases to trade publications and local papers. Use Internet resources like Trade Show News Network (www.tsnn.com) and Internet Trade Show List (www.internettradeshowlist.com) to register information about your company and its products. Be sure to check with trade show management to see if your booth space fees include opportunities to create virtual trade shows or participate in other promotions.

4. Cross promote

Does your business have a Web site? A toll-free number? Are you running ads in trade publications prior to the show? You'll want to take advantage of the outstanding opportunities to cross-promote your appearance at the trade show.

If you are investing in a pre-show mailer, be sure to include your company Web address on the invitation. If you are spending money on advertising, use the pre-show mailer to direct recipients to see your ad in a key trade pub. On your Web site, be sure to include information about the highlights of your presence at the trade show. If you have an automated voice service on your telephone system, consider inviting callers to visit your company at the trade show. Don't forget to provide the necessary details like booth number, show dates and location.

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5. Follow up promptly

Following up on leads is as important as pre-show promotion and booth marketing, yet according to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 80 percent of exhibitors fail to do it. Don't give good prospects the opportunity to forget about your product. Phone your hottest prospects within a week after the show ends then send a hand-written note and even a gift. Sometimes it's possible to set up a meeting and deliver these in person. Send others some kind of follow-up mailing, including a thank you note. Keep any promises you made at your booth. Have enough brochures and product sheets on hand before the show so you can send out requested information quickly.

Even when times are tough and budgets are tight, trade shows remain a great way to showcase your company, introduce products and services—and generate sales. Keeping these often overlooked tips in mind for planning and executing smartly can help you make the most of your next exhibit.

Pull out

Did you know

Nearly 85 percent of show attendees buy one or more products exhibited? This percentage actually increases during strained economic times.¹

80 percent of exhibitors fail to follow up with prospects after a trade show?²

Pre-show promotion increases attendance by up to 33 percent—yet fewer than 20 percent of exhibitors use it?³

Source:

¹Society of Manufacturing Engineers

²Center for Exhibition Industry Research

³Trade Show Bureau