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Trade Show Boothmanship and Follow Up

A Step-by-Step Guide to Successful Trade Show Execution

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1. On-Site Preparation

No matter how much preparation goes in, there will bound to be changes and surprises. Be prepared for change and be prepared to adapt!

Arrival

- Aim to arrive at the show at least 24 hours in advance. You may need to allow for extra time if exhibiting overseas.
- When you arrive, get in touch with your local contact (if you have one) to stay updated on what is happening locally.
- Check that you have all documentation related to shipping invoices, booth registration etc. with you.

Booth set up

- Ensure you obtain a floor plan and take time to familiarize yourself with the surroundings and other exhibitors.
- Check that your display is set up properly.
- Ensure all promotional material is ready.
- Organize a final staff briefing to go over objectives, plan of action, and schedules.
- Reconfirm your upcoming trade show appointments.

2. Effective Boothmanship

Understanding buyers

Trade show crowds exhibit certain behavioural patterns. Taking the time to understand the audience will ensure that you develop a good approach to getting them interested in your booth, products and services. Cues can be taken from the type of workshops or seminars organized in conjunction with the show, local events, as well as the local/regional culture. Trade Commissioners and regional office staff can also provide advice.

Fact	Attendees spend on average 8.3 hours over 2.3 days at a trade show. *Source: CEIR*

Staffers have to understand your organization's business plan and target audience and not just push a product. Their efforts will be lost on attendees if they are not able to transfer important product and company information as well as provide a professional and competent representation to prospective clients.

Spotting genuine leads

The key to garnering successful leads is being able to recognize a genuine prospect. Building a profile of your target audience beforehand and being aware of whether you are seeking local partnerships or international business alliances can aid staff in identifying the right leads. Developing qualifying questions beforehand can also help staff.

Clear business goals will assist in the identification of qualified booth visitors. For example, if you have decided to focus on business expansion into the United States, then all visitors to your booth from the U.S. have already met one important qualifying variable. The more variables met, the greater the significance of product samples and information.

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Networking Tips

- *Be prepared to have your company information and contact details on hand, whether it is using business cards, pass scanners or QR codes.*
- *Be proactive in approaching prospects. Introduce yourself. Develop an elevator pitch or opener that highlights your business and product.*
- *If your staff need to sit, provide stools rather than chairs so that staff members can greet booth visitors at eye level.*
- *Avoid closed questions – you want to understand what your prospective clients are looking for and what has caught their attention at your booth.*
- *Ensure booth staff know your key messages. Active listening is important and booth staff should pay attention to body language, use of words, and tone of voice.*
- *If you are conducting a demonstration, spot individuals who express above average interest in your products or services. Get them involved in the demonstration or ensure you reach out to them afterwards.*

Lead Management

Your exhibit should target specific prospects that are interested in the products you are selling. Once targeted, the next step will be to initiate person-to-person contact. A system should be developed to record down the contacts made. Capturing the leads generated can be done by filing away business cards received or noting down each interaction in writing or electronically.

Fact	Trade shows attract attendees who have a major say in purchasing decisions. Half of all attendees have a buying plan in place before their visit. *Source: CEIR*

Manning the booth

- *Tip: Ensure booth staff are clearly identified and are wearing appropriate show badges.*
- *Tip: Ensure booth staff are professionally dressed and focused on being open and approachable to attendees.*
- *Tip: Do not deter attendees from your booth by looking disinterested, standing far from the aisle, making phone calls in public, sitting down, or taking coffee and lunch breaks at the booth.*
- *Tip: Limit the number of booth staff; space can be overcrowded and unapproachable with too many staffers. The general rule is one staffer per five square meters of space.*
- *Tip: Never leave the booth vacant. A booth staff member must always be present.*

3. Promotional Items

The process of giving away samples or written material often detracts from the ability to develop one-on-one dialogue in order to qualify a potential lead. Ensure only the most interested booth visitors are able to access this information. In the end this is a time and money saving approach to information distribution.

- *Tip: Limit the amount of product on display; excessive product can become overwhelming. Only a small percentage of written materials disbursed at trade shows are actually read.*
- *Tip: Product samples should be offered to qualified booth visitors with high clientele potential as opposed to every passerby. Remember, smaller sample sizes often send out a higher perceived value.*
- *Tip: Consider promotional methods that extend beyond merely product samples and the handing out of written materials. Consider mailing product samples and written information of a larger quantity to qualified leads after the show. This addresses the importance of follow-up and ensures costly samples are being dispensed in an effective manner.*

4. Follow-Up

After a trade show ends, it is easy to fall behind on lead follow-up. In most cases trade shows are about generating qualified leads and not about conducting final sales. The longer one leaves leads unattended, the less likely they are to evolve into business opportunities.

- *Tip: Ensure there is a lead management system in place during the show. Staff can breakdown leads into several categories, such as high, medium and low interest/potential to prioritize who to follow up with.*

- *Tip: Decide on a common method of follow-up prior to a show for staff to follow and allocate sufficient time and resources for post-show lead follow-up.*

Within one month

Professional follow-up within a recommended 30 day period helps to ensure your business reaps the most benefit from trade show participation; otherwise the effort and time invested in participation can be lost.

Initial follow-up can be conducted in a variety of ways. It can be made by a simple phone call within a few days of the show, while more intensive follow-up should be made within the span of a month (time frames can vary depending on the nature and seasonality of your business). Examples of follow-up include thank you letters or e-mails, trips to visit leads, and distribution of product samples and information packages.

- *Tip: You may decide to extend your stay following a trade show to conduct immediate face-to-face follow-up with serious leads.*

From six months to one year

Stay in touch with your leads by keeping them informed about new and upcoming products and services, as well as updates on existing ones. You may offer a newsletter for subscription or develop social media platforms to disseminate your company's latest news.

Are you thinking of attending or exhibiting at other trade shows? As your company plans ahead for future trade show opportunities, let your leads know which upcoming trade shows you are looking to attend, as they may be considering attending too, providing additional opportunities to connect.

Performance Evaluation

However formal or informal, ensure an event debrief and show evaluation is conducted analyzing what worked, what did not, and what could be improved. It is best to hold a debrief soon after the event has concluded while the experience is still fresh in your mind.

Feedback can be useful to ensure that each trade show experience is an improvement from the last. It can also serve as the basis for selecting the "right" shows to attend in the future. The quality of the leads generated, sales revenue generated, as well as visitor traffic are examples of what can be measured to get a picture of the overall success of your booth.

- *Tip: A post-show report covering show description, market opportunities, new trends, lessons learned and recommendations for future trade shows can be useful for future event budgeting and planning.*

In addition, a debrief on your marketing strategy and its impact and correlation to results achieved can aid in crafting future marketing plans.

Use your trade show participation, however frequent, as an opportunity to consistently refine your approach to business within a trade show setting. Ensure it satisfies your business needs, fulfills your business goals and provides some form of return on your time and financial investments.

There is no definitive approach to trade show participation, only suggestions as to how to better approach this valuable marketing method. It is important to customize your approach to exhibiting to maximize your success.

5. Resources

Preparing for Trade Shows – ATS

Exhibit Planning Timeline – Exhibitions Program

Centre for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR)