

TRADE SHOW PLANNING:

TIPS FOR SUCCESS!



Skyline®



INTRODUCTION & TABLE OF CONTENTS

In this book, Skyline has compiled 28 blog posts originally published in *Skyline E-Tips* (formerly *Skyline Trade Show Tips*). The posts combine valuable information about trade show and management, planning and budgeting.

BEGINNERS REFERENCE TOOLS

- 3 MUST KNOW BEGINNER TRADE SHOW & EVENT TERMS – *Kayla Goeman*
- 6 10 OF THE MOST COMMON TRADE SHOW MISTAKES – *Natalie Jedlenski*
- 8 TRADE SHOW MUST HAVES – *Amy Armstrong*
- 10 TRADE SHOW BASICS – *Chris Rowe*
- 12 DOMESTIC TRADE SHOW TRAVEL CHECKLIST – *Nicole Klein*
- 14 IS YOUR TRADE SHOW STRATEGY WORKING? – *Brian Gordon*
- 16 AVOID SERVING THESE 7 TYPES OF FOOD AT A TRADE SHOW – *Sofia Troutman*
- 18 TOP 10 STRESS-FIGHTING HACKS FOR EVENT AND TRADE SHOW PLANNERS – *Sofia Troutman*
- 22 HOW HAS THE ROLE OF THE TRADE SHOW MANAGER EVOLVED? – *Kristie Jones-Damalas*

PLANNING

- 25 PLANNING A PRIVATE EVENT – *Steve Hoffman*
- 28 BUILDING YOUR TRADE SHOW RESUME – *Rick Krautbauer*
- 30 PLANNING FOR IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES – *Lisa Maniaci*
- 32 KEEPING YOUR EXHIBIT PROJECT ON TRACK (WHILE STILL DOING YOUR REGULAR JOB) – *Anne Madigan*
- 34 PROTECTING YOUR TRADE SHOW EXHIBIT – *Kristie Jones-Damalas*
- 36 5 BIG SURPRISES FOR CANADIAN EXHIBITORS GOING TO USA TRADE SHOWS – *Sandra Kennedy*
- 38 EXHIBIT DESIGN IS GREAT, BUT WHO’S RUNNING THE SHOW? – *Victoria Conti, CTSM*
- 39 SET GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS – *Avalon Hartman*
- 40 A TRADE SHOW MANAGER’S GUIDE TO EVENT SELECTION – *Shelley Speciale*
- 42 THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL TRADE SHOW: PLANNING, PLANNING, PLANNING! – *Michelle Smith*
- 43 GOING A NEW WAY: CONVINCING MANAGEMENT TO TRY NEW TRADE SHOW STRATEGIES – *Jeanette Armbrust*
- 44 BACK CORNER BOOTH? NO PROBLEM! MAXIMIZING YOUR EXHIBIT LOCATION – *Shawn Lacagnina*
- 46 HOW TO SELECT THE BEST EXHIBIT LOCATION ON THE SHOW FLOOR – *Matt Waterwall*
- 48 NIGHTMARE EXHIBITIONS – *Greg Johnson*
- 50 DISTRACTIONS ARE EVERYWHERE: HOW TO GET YOUR VISITORS FULL ATTENTION – *Greg Johnson*

BUDGETING

- 53 HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR 10×10 TRADE SHOW BOOTH SPACE – *Tammy Scordo*
- 54 BOOSTING YOUR TRADE SHOW AND EVENT BUDGET – *Bobby Scott*
- 55 SEVEN TIPS FOR STRETCHING YOUR EXHIBIT DOLLARS – *Jon Althoff*
- 56 CUTTING TRADE SHOW MARKETING EXPENSES – *Scott Price*

BEGINNERS REFERENCE TOOLS



MUST KNOW BEGINNER TRADE SHOW & EVENT TERMS

— Kayla Goeman

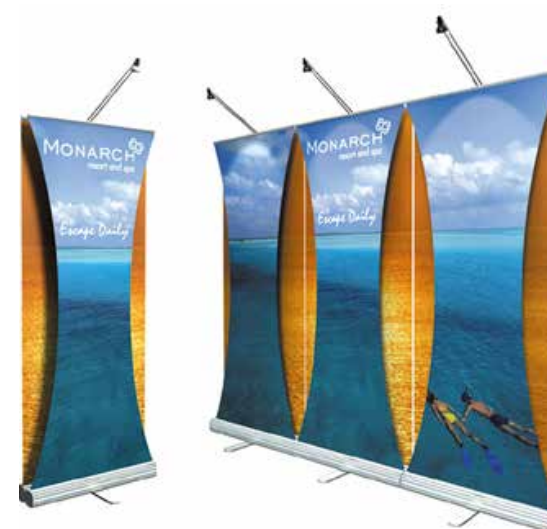
You have just started out in your job as a trade show coordinator or event manager. Congratulations! Everything is new; a new company, new office space, and new industry-specific lingo to master. “What the heck is a pop-up? Can someone explain ‘drayage’ to me?”

Below are definitions of common terms related to the events and trade show industry, so that when your boss asks, you’re prepared to talk shop.

“What the heck is a pop-up? Can someone explain ‘drayage’ to me?”

BANNER STAND

A banner stand is an efficient, lightweight, convenient way to showcase your brand at a trade show, special event, recruiting fair, lobby and more. There are many different styles to choose from when deciding on a banner stand; there are retractable stands that simply roll up, and configurable stands that quite literally give a heightened, cost effective presence to a 10’x10’ booth.



Single and multi-unit banner stands



10’ curved pop-up display with magnet-attached graphic panels.

POP-UP

Pop-up displays consist of a portable, lightweight frame that’s made of fiberglass or aluminum, vertical channel bars for stabilization and graphic attachment. The pieces connect easily and quickly. To install pop-up displays, you simply need to lift and ‘pop’ the frame into place, attach the channel bars and hang the graphic panels. No special training or tools required.

TABLETOP DISPLAYS & TABLE THROWS

Tabletop displays are smaller and are usually placed upon a 6’ or 8’ table near the back of the booth space. There are a variety of tabletop displays available including banner stands and pop-ups. Table throws or table covers conceal the table for a cleaner look. They can be solid colors or printed with your company name and logo, adding a personal touch to your exhibit space. You can use your exhibit space to showcase your products or display marketing literature on your very own branded table. We all know that first impressions

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3



Backlit display with LED lights and printed fabric graphics.

last, so make sure that your table throw is spread neatly and is wrinkle free for visitors as they walk down the aisle.

BACKLIT GRAPHICS

Backlit graphics are made with a very tight-weave fabric that when lit from behind create a glowing appearance. These graphics are typically attached to an aluminum or steel framed structure that can be purchased or rented. Many sizes and shapes are available.

INFLATABLE DISPLAY

There are two types of inflatable trade show exhibits: sealed air and continuous air. A sealed air inflatable exhibit is an innovative and cost-saving approach to exhibiting. Depending on size and model, a sealed air exhibit can be inflated in approximately 10 minutes with the simple push of a button. These types of exhibits seal automatically with the push valve and can be used for the entire show without the constant flow of air. This structure is covered in fabric to create a backdrop, tower or hanging structure. You will avoid the continuous hum of an inflator with a sealed air exhibit. Fully inflated, a properly-designed inflatable exhibit will last you



10' sealed air WindScape® display with pre-attached fabric graphics.

through the entire week of the show. There are many benefits to a sealed air exhibit including cost savings of a lightweight display and the ability to pack up at the end of the show and leave right away! Typically, with a traditional larger display, you would have to wait for your exhibit cases to be returned to you, then pack up your display for transport, then head home.

A continuous air display requires, you guessed it, continuous air to be pumped throughout the time it is used. This exhibit is typically made of vinyl and is often used for outdoor events. You will need a constant power source for this type of exhibit, which can cost you big money on the show floor. It can also be noisy. You will have to request and pay for access to a power outlet at the show unless specifically noted when purchasing booth space. It's also important to be aware of the regulations regarding labor and rigging when setting up your booth, whether inflatable, custom modular or portable.

DRAYAGE

Material Handling and Drayage at a basic level refers to the same thing: the movement of your exhibit items

between your carrier's vehicle or off-site storage and your trade show booth space. This is a highly coordinated effort that is happening behind the scenes. For most shows there are hundreds of exhibitors and all their booth materials are being received at one central location.

I&D

'Installation and Dismantle' of your trade show exhibit, also referred to as "labor," can be handled by the show or by your exhibit company partner. Usually, this is a crew that comes in the show hall to set up (install) your exhibit and come back once the show closes to dismantle and pack your exhibit up. It's like magic!

CRM

A 'Customer Relationship Management' system is invaluable when it comes to tracking trade show leads. This system helps marketing and sales teams continue the relationship with a customer. Your trade show leads can be entered into this system shortly after the show if you are using paper lead cards, or instantly if you are using technology to capture your conversations from the show floor. Segmenting your leads within this system allows your sales team to follow up in a timely manner with prospects, or further nurture the lead until they are ready to purchase.

LEAD CARD

A lead card is a pre-printed piece of paper or tablet with a section to record contact info, written answers, qualifying questions, and a notes section where you can record follow-up items and other relevant comments with prospects that visit you on the trade show floor. Lead cards are usually printed on a half sheet to a full sheet of 8 ½ x 11 paper. A booth staffer fills out the lead card as they have conversations with trade show attendees. Many companies are transitioning to technology-centered lead retrieval apps, making a smooth



Exhibit installation costs vary greatly depending on size and design. Rigging structures from the venue ceiling can add significant cost.

transition from show floor conversations, directly into your CRM system for immediate contact by sales reps or further nurturing from marketing.

Planning an event or trade show is no small task and is an important investment for companies. Your trade show is an integral tool within your marketing plan so make sure that your exhibit considers the overall goals of the company and brand, and that you are prepared to quantify the benefits obtained by participating. Your vendor should be able to help you do that.

10 OF THE MOST COMMON TRADE SHOW MISTAKES

— *Natalie Jedlenski*

In the more than 35 years that Skyline has been in business, we've designed thousands of effective trade show displays for our clients. However, the best booth design won't make up for a poor trade show strategy. To ensure your exhibits are a success, watch out for these most common trade show exhibiting mistakes:

1. No Overarching Goal. Your trade show or expo presence needs to accomplish more than just raising brand awareness for a handful of attendees. Whether it's expanding your prospect list, acquiring a set number of sales-qualified leads, or solidifying a new partner relationship, there should be a clearly defined and attainable goal each time you exhibit.

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2. Planning Too Late. While it can be relief to put a recently completed annual trade show behind you, that's actually the best time to make concrete plans for next year's event. If you put that show out-of-mind for six months, you'll likely forget the key insights you gained from it. By beginning your planning 12 months in advance, you'll also avoid much of the frantic, last minute preparations that are too common in exhibiting.

3. Placing Form Before Function. Overly bright or dark lighting, abstract colors, or nontraditional layouts may seem like a way to set your booth apart, but they may create a psychological barrier to attendees. Studies have shown that booths that contrast too greatly with the hall carpeting or are surrounded by high walls can often be intimidating to show attendees. Rely on a professional designer's insight for creating an inviting display.

4. Ineffective Interactive Marketing. Postcards and



other traditional forms of marketing are still important. Today though, social media is king. Combining a Facebook event page – with live streaming from the event – a series of advance blog posts, an event-specific Twitter hashtag, a dedicated landing page on your website and regular LinkedIn updates with pictures or videos are critical to building awareness. If you make your updates playful and entertaining rather than promotional and incorporate user-generated content when possible you'll get much better social sharing and brand awareness.

5. Bad Graphics. Graphics that are cluttered, damaged or outdated have no business on your exhibit and can be deal breakers. In addition, graphics or text that are small, poorly lit, displayed below eye level, or that don't clearly communicate your benefits will hinder your trade show effectiveness. Take a look at your current graphics to decide if they need an overhaul before your next show.

6. Sending the Wrong Staff. Many sales directors think that sending a new hire to the show is a good way for that person to hit the ground running. However, you need people who are experienced in the process and are focused on success. Get your new hires up to speed on how you manage your trade show, but don't let the newcomers lead the way until they learn the ropes.

7. Not Having a "Plan B." What are you going to do if your display doesn't show up? What if one of your booth staffers gets the flu? What's your plan if you run out of brochures or your video doesn't play? You'd better have a back-up plan for all of these situations and more.

8. Failure to Properly Follow-up. Approximately 79% of leads are not followed-up after a show. But, blasting show attendees with the same boring email doesn't count as an effective follow-up. Instead, immediately

after the show, organize the list of qualified leads so you can target people with content tailored to their product interests or market.

9. No Post-Show Marketing. Just like not following up on leads, a lot of people fail to continue marketing after the show. Attendees who were on the fence after the show may be swayed your way with your post show marketing. In other words, those B & C leads should still receive contact from you to be nurtured into sales-ready A leads.

10. Forgetting to Celebrate Success. Nothing demotivates a staff more than singling out every imperfection from an otherwise stellar event. Remember to focus on the positive outcomes of every show and pat your team (and yourself) on the back for a job well done!



Award-winning exhibit design is clean, interesting, and well branded with a prominent value statement. Workstations and A/V are a big plus.

TRADE SHOW MUST HAVES

— Amy Armstrong

We love trade shows; the buzz, the energy, the opportunities, the networking; everything about them. But it is no surprise that the hard work begins the very moment you decide to exhibit at a trade show. From the mental strategizing to the logistics, to the budgeting, to training your team and designing your booth...the work is nonstop from beginning to end. In order to get the most out of your investment of time and energy, we have some tips for all expo-goers! Although there are many, here are a few that stand out as those I have found to be useful.

LOGISTICAL MUST HAVES

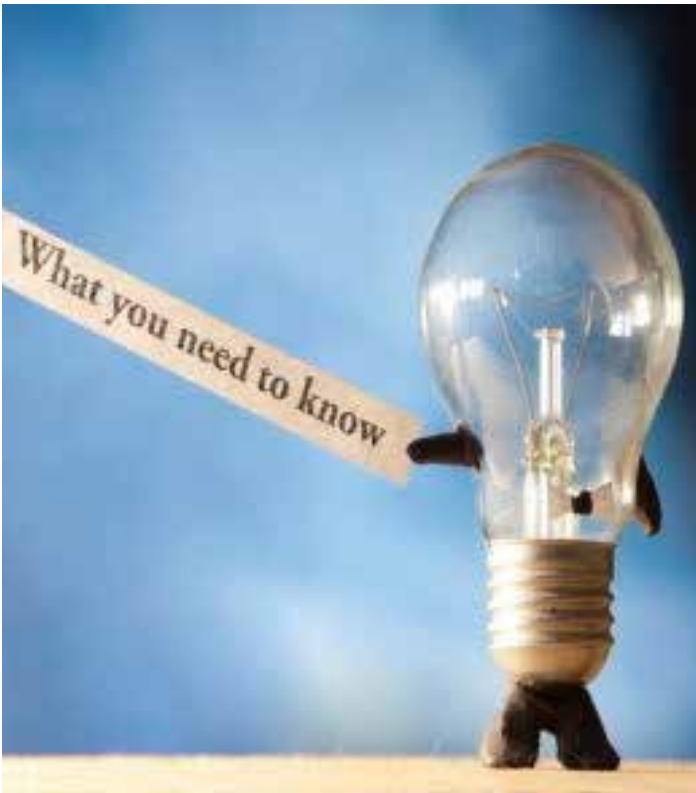
OFFICE-IN-A-BOX

This is a term I can't take credit for, but one I learned during my former life as an event manager. This box included everything you could possibly need on the show floor. Including items such as a stapler, paper clips, markers, double-sided tape, stickies, pens and pencils, scissors, etc. In other words, your office at your fingertips.

This box included everything you could possibly need on the show floor...

MULTI-SURFACE WIPES

You've got to keep your investment clean! After all the work you did to design, create and then build your booth, you'll want to make sure that it looks its best for the entirety of the show. At the end of the day, you're going to want an easy way to clean everything off to start fresh the following day. Another great idea is to put a pack of unscented baby wipes inside of your trade show crate. Ever see how dirty those crates get by the time they arrive on the show floor; and how dirty your hands get during set up? The baby wipes are wonderful for cleaning your hands, too!



DUSTBUSTER AND STEAMER

These are great items to have if you have room to pack them. Save on cleaning costs for smaller booths by bringing your own hand-held vacuum for carpet and surface touch up. The steamer is good to have for any last-minute wrinkle corrections on graphics.

A SMALL TOOL KIT

Either as part of your office-in-a-box or in their own container, having some basic and essential tools are a must. You'll want to have the correct tools to not only be able to set up your booth and materials correctly, but to be able to correct any unexpected issues during the show such as a falling graphic or wobbly table leg. On-hand items such as double-sided tape, industrial tape (for wire management), scissors as mentioned above, as well as regular tools such as wrenches and screwdrivers are essential.

SNACKS AND HYDRATION.

Although you may mentally pre-plan your schedule, including meals for the day, you may be surprised as to how busy you can get when all those potential customers start walking up. Before you know it, hours have passed and the lunch break is long gone. Since you'll want to be at your best while representing your company the entire day, make sure to replenish your energy with snacks and to stay hydrated. Just be sure to step away from the booth when indulging in your snack as eating while staffing can look unprofessional.

...make sure to replenish your energy with snacks and to stay hydrated.

BUSINESS MUST HAVES

STAND OUT BRANDING

That next big trade show looming on your event calendar can serve as a perfect opportunity to take a close look at your graphics, marketing materials, media and promotional items. Are they adequately telling your story? Are they in sync? Do they tell the world who you are and what you do in an effective and eye-catching way? You will want to put your company's best face forward.

TECHNOLOGY

Multiple mediums of interaction in an exhibit aren't the exception any longer, but the norm. Visitors expect interactive presentations, touchscreens, easy and fun access to information, etc. This includes your lead generation tool, which makes collecting visitor information faster, fun and leaves more time for your team to do what they do best, engage prospects.

PLENTY OF BUSINESS CARDS

You may be shocked as to how many business cards you'll be handing out, so you'll want to bring twice as



In-booth technology continues to grow in popularity and is a great way to communicate, demo and sell.

many as you think you'll need. We've all been in that awkward situation where we reach for a card, see that we are out, realize there are two days left of the conference and must make that call to the office to get more shipped to the hotel. Another fun tip is to use your plastic badge holder as a holder for business cards and a pen. As you meet people on the show floor, you can tuck their cards behind your badge and can also pull from a small stash of your own cards. You can also keep a pen so that you can write down notes on those cards.

Investing in a trade show can have incredibly beneficial returns; if you do it effectively. Make sure to properly plan so that you come out of the experience knowing that you hit your goals for you, your team, and your company!

TRADE SHOW BASICS

— Chris Rowe

As companies are consolidating roles left and right, the responsibilities of the Trade Show Manager are often passed to Marketing Coordinators, Generalists and Sales Managers. If you are someone who has had a company’s trade show program added to your already full plate, you may be feeling a bit overwhelmed. Here are five things to keep in mind as you’re running your trade show program:

KNOW WHERE YOUR MONEY IS GOING

When your boss says: “Get me a trade show booth for that show and don’t spend more than X,” what does she mean? It is no secret that trade shows are expensive endeavors. Designing and building the booth is often only a small portion of the total cost of doing a show. Securing a spot at the show is at the top of the list for expenses. Shipping costs and drayage (getting your exhibit from your carrier to your booth and back) are costs that are very dependent on the weight of your booth. Install and dismantle costs should be considered if your booth is not a do-it-yourself solution.

Designing and building the booth is often only a small portion of the total cost of doing a show.

Remember that in some markets your hanging sign is required to be assembled by the local union. Other trade show expenses include electrical, internet access, lead capture and carpet rental, not to mention hotel accommodations, flights and meals. By considering all these costs when planning a show, you (and your boss) won’t be surprised when the bill comes.

GIVE YOURSELF TIME

There is nothing worse than trying to rush through a project – especially one with a lot of moving parts. Often there are deadlines for your show months before



the show floor opens. Being timely can ensure that you get the best spot on the show floor, you’re taking advantage of all available early bird prices and you can snag the best rates for your hotel.

PREPARE FOR THE SHOW

The days of going to a show and expecting to sop up leads from the crowd are gone. You and your sales team should be spending the weeks leading up to the show reaching out to prospects and clients to schedule that face time at the show. Plan to get to the show with several meetings already on the books. This is the time to utilize your social media skills and tell everyone who will listen about the details of your show presence. Don’t forget to include the show’s hashtags so you appear on searches people do when preparing for the show.

BE ENGAGING

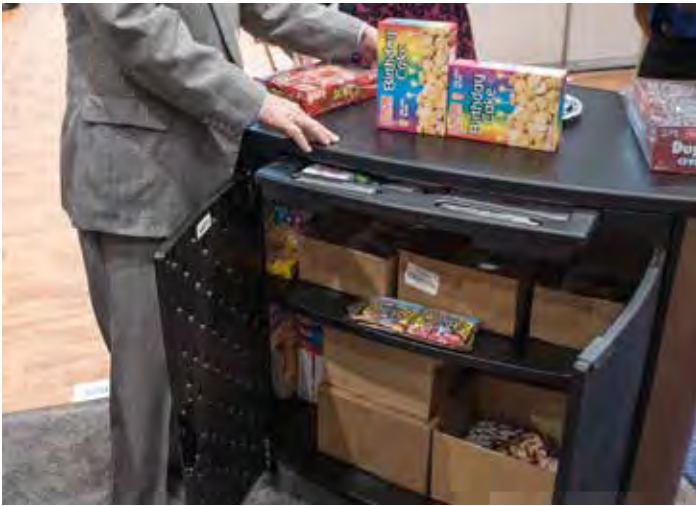
If you will be on the show floor this is critical. The show floor is not the place to check your emails (if you must,



it’s best to step away from the booth). As much as you’re able, try to be on your feet interacting with guests in your booth. Resist the urge to let guests pass through your booth to collect their swag without connecting with them. Of course, there will be opportunities missed, but limiting them as best as possible is the single easiest way to get a higher return on your trade show.

COLLECT DATA

The only thing worse than a poor performance at a show is not knowing how you did at all. It’s impossible to adjust to improve your show outcome if you can’t identify the



problems. “Was the show worth it?” questions become much easier to answer if you’ve captured leads and can answer confidently how much money you made from the connections the show facilitated.

Qualitative data is also important. Be prepared to observe traffic flow in your booth – which direction are people coming from? What parts of the booth do they pause at? For larger booths, do you notice any dead zones where a visitor cannot see any relevant information? These observations will help to inform how you adjust your booth for your future shows.

DOMESTIC TRADE SHOW TRAVEL CHECKLIST

— Nicole Klein

Despite decades of work and personal travel, anxiety still plagued me that I'd forgotten to pack or do one last thing. It wasn't just my own packing list, but the myriad details my team needed to feel confident when they arrived that caused the stress to build. The stress was truly unnecessary since all could be controlled with a little prep and planning. So, my thanks to all the Road Warrior Wisdom I borrowed to start my list...and I hope you find some worthwhile tidbits below to make your life on the road a bit more Zen!

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- **Review your advance** shipment one last time to ensure nothing was missed. Any last-minute items can be overnighted to your hotel for safe keeping prior to your check-in.
- **Compile a binder for each attendee from your company** that includes local maps and information, instructions and photos of the booth setup, everyone's flight and hotel arrangements, and anything else that trade show staff may need on site.
- **Update your calendar and your out-of-office message** and leave your complete itinerary for the team staying at the office.

PACKING

- **Maintain a backup of all your critical phone and email contacts**, including your 24-hour show contact and designated booth setup personnel. A lost, stolen or damaged phone can really leave you feeling helpless at a time when you need it most. In addition to a cloud backup, a physical address book (along with printed copies of core documents) can be a lifesaver.
- **A first aid and personal care kit** is a must. In



addition to your usual list of toiletries, breath mints and hand sanitizer are important for all the meeting and greeting you'll do. Band-Aids and antibacterial creams will be helpful for unexpected papercuts or heel blisters from long days in dress shoes. In addition to your prescription meds, be sure to bring painkillers, eye drops, antihistamines and anti-diarrheal for any unforeseen issues. Be sure to follow current TSA guidelines for packing liquids.

- **Your personal and professional travel supplies** should include snacks, business cards, tweezers, duct tape, small scissors, a needle and thread, a Leatherman or related multi-tool, travel iron, travel pillow, extra luggage tags, zip ties to keep booth wiring neat, and few zip lock bags.
- **Your personal tech supplies** should include redundant systems in the event of loss or power. Your phone, laptop/tablet, a portable WiFi hotspot, multiple

device charging cords/stations, a portable power bank, noise-cancelling headphones for the flight, and two USB sticks should get you through a tech crisis.

- **For trade show attire**, two pairs of comfortable shoes are a must. Be sure to pack a range of clothing for the exhibit floor, after-hours events, sleepwear for the hotel stay and airline travel.

TRAVEL DAY

- **Prepare your airline documents.** Most travelers now check in online and are increasingly using digital boarding passes. Still, it can be helpful to print out a backup copy of your boarding pass, reservation number, itinerary number and purchase confirmation number.
- **Have proper ID.** On Oct. 1, 2020, the Transportation Security Administration will ask all travelers to have a Real ID-compliant driver's license or alternate acceptable identification to fly domestically. Travelers won't be able to pass through security without it. Most state DMVs

already issue compliant licenses, while others have been granted an extension to make their internal processes and IDs compliant. There are a number of other forms of currently acceptable IDs. To ensure you can travel to all destinations of your choice, the State Department highly encourages any U.S. citizen who does not already have a passport to apply for one now.

- **Observe rules for checked and carry-on baggage.** TSA recently considered loosening security checks at some small and medium U.S. airports. Due to these constantly-changing regulations, it's best to always check current regulations. And since each domestic airline also has unique rules and fees related to checked and carry-on baggage, it's worth checking the airline's website for acceptable weight, baggage dimensions and other restrictions. Applying and paying for the TSA Precheck service may be a worthwhile investment for frequent travelers who want to save time at check-in and avoid the hassle of removing shoes, belts, etc. at security checkpoints.



IS YOUR TRADE SHOW STRATEGY WORKING?

— Brian Gordon

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines strategy as “a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim.” So, is your trade show plan helping you achieve your sales and marketing goals?

Let’s tackle these two ways. First, discuss the two least effective “strategies” that are the default strategy for too many exhibitors, and second, what strategies work best for the most common trade show sales and marketing goals.

FAULTY DEFAULT TRADE SHOW STRATEGY #1: KEEP DOING THE SAME THING FOR YEARS

Some trade show exhibitors (hopefully not you!) are stuck in a rut. They go to the same shows, they bring the same booth staffers, they offer the same promotions, they have the same booth design, no matter what show they go to. This is the strategy driven by inertia.

Some trade show exhibitors are stuck in a rut. They go to the same shows, they bring the same booth staffers...

There is no measurement of past shows or research of potential new shows to alter their show schedule – no measurement of qualified lead counts from booth staffers to identify keepers and staffers to stop bringing to shows, no changing of booth graphic messages to adapt to different industry shows, no testing of anything to find a better way.

FAULTY DEFAULT TRADE SHOW STRATEGY #2: LOGISTICS OVER MARKETING

Whoever manages your trade shows must handle hundreds of minute details about shipping, hotels, plane tickets, vendors, executives, timing, and more. It’s a lot to keep track of, and without it, the show doesn’t go

on. So, all that must-do activity crowds out the optional, but actually essential marketing activity.

What gets put on the back burner, and then often not done, is training the booth staff on how to take more leads and then qualify them in the booth, creating a marketing campaign with promotions that get more attendees into the booth, better lead management to ensure better follow up, and more measurement to then decide what is generating sales and marketing results and what needs to be improved.

MOST COMMON TRADE SHOW GOALS: GENERATE LEADS, INCREASING AWARENESS, STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

Do you already have a primary business goal that you are trying to achieve by your trade show activity? It helps to hit a target if you know what you are aiming for. It may be that your trade show goal has also been stuck in a rut, and it’s time to reevaluate why you are exhibiting at trade shows today, as your company – and its place in the marketplace – may have changed substantially.

The most common goals are generating leads, increasing awareness (of your company, of a new product, in a new industry), and strengthening relationships (with key clients, dealers, business partners). Achieving your primary strategy involves excelling at several trade show tactics and adapting them to your specific needs.

WAYS TO GENERATE MORE TRADE SHOW LEADS

To get more leads you need more booth traffic, and then have your booth visitors want to continue the conversation after the show. To get more booth traffic, you need to be at shows your buyers attend, have an attractive exhibit with desirable promotions and, most

of all, more and better staffers to get people out of the aisle and into a fruitful dialog. So, do you know what shows have a higher number and percentage of attendees that match your buyer profile? Do you know what kinds of promotions appeal to their demographic? Does your exhibit have enough visual impact to stop attendees? Have you trained your booth staffers on how to convince attendees that your company offers a viable solution to their problems? These tactics will boost your lead counts.

Do you know what kinds of promotions appeal to their demographic?

WAYS TO INCREASE AWARENESS AT TRADE SHOWS

While the tactics you use to generate more trade show leads will also help increase awareness, your focus alters some if your main goal is to increase awareness. Increase your company visibility with an entertainer or activity in your booth that creates a buzz. Or use a promotion that will get talk value, or a giveaway that everyone will see, like a bag or a sponsorship. Run ads, send email and direct mail, and interact on social media promoting your at-show presence. Try to get your top management or subject matter experts placed as speakers at the show. If you are launching a new product and want to increase awareness of that, then enter any contests or special show floor areas or public relations opportunities the show offers for new products. These activities may also bring you leads, but they will boost awareness even more.

WAYS TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS AT TRADE SHOWS

When your goal is to strengthen relationships via trade shows, you are almost always deciding to focus on a smaller audience than when your goals are awareness and leads. That means a shift in scale. Your exhibit may



be designed more like a lounge or an office with spaces for comfortable meetings to honor your key contacts. You may even have a double-deck exhibit with a conference room on top. Your promotions will be fewer, but more expensive, and your booth staffers must be top-notch, either part of executive management or the best people-persons you have. When your goal is relationship-building, your show plan extends beyond the booth, to include meals (dinners, breakfasts) outside exhibit hours, and even special events (a fun activity in the show city, a night on the town) with the most important people you want to bond with. And your promotions will be more personalized, with account managers contacting their clients, or channel managers inviting their partners.

For business-to-business marketers, trade shows are perhaps the best medium to achieve your business goals. I hope you now have better ideas on how to focus your trade show strategy so that it aligns to reach those goals and ensure your strategy is working.

AVOID SERVING THESE 7 TYPES OF FOOD AT A TRADE SHOW

— Sofia Troutman

We are observing an emerging trend with exhibitors. More and more are moving away from having the generic candy dish to serving beverages and “real” food to their visitors at the booth – from a simple bottle of branded water, coffee or tea to higher-end chocolate or sandwiches. Some shows in Europe even serve a full sit-down meal. People get tired and hungry walking a show and there are few things that are better than free food.

People get tired and hungry walking a show and there are few things that are better than free food.

There are some things that while great at a college party, are not as good of an idea to offer at a business event.

7 FOODS TO AVOID SERVING AT A TRADE SHOW

- **Messy foods.** No one wants to get ketchup or ice cream on their business suit or to be seen by a prospective business contact with cilantro on their teeth. Serving fajitas, hot dogs, and spaghetti are probably not a good fit. One year we served ice cream in our booth. While people loved it, there are still stories about how messy it was and the difficult cleanup issues we had.
- **Smelly Foods.** I love garlic and seafood. Many people love fish sauce and other foods that are fabulous to eat, but may not be so great to smell when you are not eating them. A big objective at events is to make new connections and have in-depth business conversations. Questioning your breath, or whether your hands smell like roast beef, are not confidence inspiring when you are trying to decide whether or not to introduce yourself.



- **Controversial foods or beverages.** Yes, it is likely that serving shots or martinis at the show can get you a lot of talk value, and possibly many more leads. However, you may want to consider how your clients and other industry contacts may interpret that choice. If your brand image is pretty relaxed, high-end, or you work for a company that produces the product, then it may be the perfect offering. However, make sure it does not conflict with your messaging at the show or distract from the product or service you are trying to promote.
- **Dangerous foods.** It should go without saying that anything that requires you setting the food on fire should probably be out. Yes, that means no Bananas Foster, sorry. However, you may also want to avoid anything that requires cooking food at high temperatures. Fire regulations are very strict at trade shows. There is a

good reason for that, you have a very large number of people in an enclosed and somewhat unfamiliar space. You don't want anyone to get hurt or, worse yet, to cause a fire.

- **Highly allergenic.** This could easily fall into the dangerous category if you serve peanuts to the wrong person. Other possible foods to avoid would be shellfish, tree nuts, fish, milk and eggs. For a more detailed list of food allergens visit the World Allergy Organization. Even if allergies are not an issue, you may want to be mindful of food sensitivities such as gluten or lactose intolerance when planning your menu as well. In some of our events, we have found we get much better attendance when people know that we will have food options that will be sensitive to their preferences.

Even if allergies are not an issue, you may want to be mindful of food sensitivities...

- **Very expensive.** You don't have to serve caviar for your food expenses to exceed your budget at a trade show. Note that any food not regularly included in the catering menu provided by the convention center or host hotel is likely to be significantly more expensive than what you would pay outside of the show. Also, be aware that if you plan to bring your own food to the show you are likely to be charged for corking fees which may make you question the importance of a particular brand of coffee or water. Corking fees may include flat service fees per booth, per day as well as corking fees per item. Candy Adams has a great article in *Exhibitor Magazine*, “Food on the Floor” that outlines how to minimize expenses. Be sure to contact the Convention Services vendor for your particular show well in advance to get estimates.



Serve treats that have widespread appeal and are brand appropriate.

- **Not brand appropriate.** The food does not need to be controversial to fit into the “not brand appropriate” category. For example, if you are a premium provider of a particular product or service, it may not be brand appropriate for you to offer sub sandwiches at your trade show. However, if your brand is playful it may be just fine to serve custom cake-pops at your booth.

Once you have noted these potential pitfalls, have fun planning your menu! There are few things as effective for forging a relationship as being able to break bread with them.

TOP 10 STRESS-FIGHTING HACKS FOR EVENT AND TRADE SHOW PLANNERS

— Sofia Troutman

Did you know that meeting planners have one of the most stressful jobs in the nation as reported by *Business News Daily*? The meeting planner profession is listed fifth after military personnel, firefighter, airline pilot and police officer.

I believe it! I only have one or two trade shows per year. Yet it is the time before these shows that I get the most stressed. Below are some “hacks” or strategies that will help you not only beat your stress, but maybe channel that energy and eventually boost your productivity.

1. DO SOME BREATHING EXERCISES EVERY NIGHT BEFORE YOU TO GO TO SLEEP

Research shows that keeping a bedtime routine facilitates good sleep. However, this is hard to do when you travel. Likely, most of your routine is subject to change; your schedule is different, your room is different, your diet is different...you get the idea. While you can try to keep all of these as consistent as possible the one thing you can reliably control is having a routine about how you use your breath during bedtime. You’ve heard it before; in the face of stress and change, you can always just BREATHE. One idea for breathing exercises from *Prevention* magazine is to exhale through your mouth, close your mouth and inhale through your nose, hold your breath for seven seconds, exhale for eight and repeat three times. This should settle you down and if you do it consistently at home and during travel it will help signal to your body that it is time to sleep.

2. DRINK SOME HERBAL TEA ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE YOU GO TO SLEEP

Bonus points for bringing your own when you travel. This way you will always have some on hand when all they offer in the plane or at the hotel is black tea. Just



ask for some hot water and you are set! You can use the hotel coffee maker to make some or order it from room service if you were not able to stop at Starbucks. Herbal tea will help hydrate you after a busy day and you can get some that will actually help promote sleep like chamomile. My favorites are Celestial Seasonings Sleepytime and Yogi Bedtime (no they did not pay me to say that).

Herbal tea will help hydrate you after a busy day...

3. TAKE A WALK OUTSIDE IF POSSIBLE

Taking a morning walk will help you set your circadian rhythm in a new time zone. You don’t have to go very far, a walk around the block once or twice is enough. In the afternoon, it will help you de-stress and re-energize before going back to work and it is much healthier than that can of soda or candy bar you may be craving. In the evening, it will help you relax after a long day and keep you away from email. During the summer months I like to get my kids and walk to the park almost every day. Most of the time they don’t want to do it, but once I get them outside, they run ahead of me and I get a little quiet time.



Skyline’s ‘Zen’ themed exhibit at **EXHIBITOR**Live focused on easing the stress of trade shows and featured a digital koi pond.

4. DO SOME YOGA IN YOUR HOTEL ROOM

You don’t need a mat if you happen to be travelling just use your hotel towel. You can buy some of those funky sticky gloves and socks if you really want to avoid sliding around when you travel without a yoga mat. However, I usually don’t bother. I know people who are not familiar with yoga often think it entails contorting yourself into a pretzel and, although you could do that as part of your practice, it can just be doing some very simple moves for about 20 minutes. *Medical Daily* has a good article that shows some basic poses. Bonus points: Use your phone to play relaxing music or use a meditation or yoga app on a regular basis.

5. USE A FOAM ROLLER TO RUB AGAINST ALL THOSE TIGHT SPOTS IN YOUR BACK

If you forget or don’t want to buy one, go ahead and roll up a towel or use a tennis ball instead. You can



also use the foam roller to do some ab work or, probably more realistically, prop up your legs while you are catching up on entertainment tonight in the hotel room.

6. GET A MASSAGE BEFORE AND AFTER YOUR EVENT

I know you think you don’t have the time or can’t afford it. However, consider that you can’t afford not to do it. Whether it is a professional massage at a spa, a nice backrub from your sweetie or just sitting on a massage chair at the airport, the health and stress-reducing benefits will pay off with a healthier and more efficient you. Mayo Clinic reports that massage benefits include “reducing stress, pain and muscle tension.” In fact, they indicate that some studies found massage to be helpful for anxiety, digestive disorders, headaches, insomnia related to stress and more. Check, check, check.

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 19

7. DO SOME MEDITATION. I KNOW IT SOUNDS A BIT INTIMIDATING AND TIME CONSUMING, BUT...

You can meditate on your walk to the show floor instead of going over the list of everything that could go wrong. Concentrate on breathing in and breathing out evenly as you walk. You can meditate as you are waiting at the baggage claim rather than giving the dork in front of you – who will not let you get your bag – another dirty look. Breathe in, breathe out. Swimming at the hotel pool for half an hour can be a wonderful opportunity to meditate. I have heard that going for a run can be meditative. I am too busy catching my breath on the rare occasion that I run to meditate, but I do have to confess that I feel better afterwards.

8. HAVE SOME CHOCOLATE!

I know this could be dangerous, but work with me here. I don't mean scarf down a whole bag of M&M's. I mean buy a wonderful piece of Belgian or local chocolate from your favorite vendor and then make a special time to eat it, and enjoy it, slowly and mindfully. By this I mean, do not eat it while you are checking your email or texting your booth vendor. Instead, take the time to look at it, enjoy its aroma and then eat it. Slowly!

9. HAVE A BEER WITH FRIENDS

I am really getting crazy now. Bear with me. There is ample research that social support can reduce stress. The national institute of health says: "Numerous studies indicate social support is essential for maintaining physical and psychological health." So, I guess technically you don't have to have a beer to reap the benefits. Wine or even lemonade will do as long as you have a chance to talk to friends and connect. If you are travelling you can take the opportunity to call your sister, best friend or shrink if things have gotten really out of hand.

10. CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Some people knit when they are stressed. I think that knitting can be a meditative activity. But part of the allure is making something beautiful that is one of a kind. You can take those stressful times, when you feel total lack of control from getting ready for the trade show and use that energy to take a break from planning and make something tangible. Art can take your mind off your problems like few things can – whether it is a watercolor, knitting a scarf or designing something unique to display in your home or office. The project can give you a much-needed breather and a sense of accomplishment that can be a lifesaver when there appears to be nothing but delays beyond your control at work. Also, according to an article by *Entrepreneur Magazine*, taking breaks can make you more productive!

...take a break from planning and make something tangible. Art can take your mind off your problems like few things can.

As you strive to manage your work stress with these "hacks" consider this; According to a study by Shawn Achor, the author of *The Happiness Advantage*, you can use stress to your advantage. He argues in an article published in *Harvard Business Review* entitled *Make Stress Work for You* that individuals can be trained to rethink stress and use it to improve their productivity and health. A lot of the negative effects of stress are balanced by positive effects, like creating mental toughness, improving memory and speeding up recovery. By recognizing that stress is going to be part of our daily lives and that it is something we can manage and even take advantage of, we can take a deep breath and tackle our next event planning meeting with a smile.



HOW HAS THE ROLE OF THE TRADE SHOW MANAGER EVOLVED?

— Kristie Jones-Damalas

The trade show industry is changing. It’s not a big mystery; on the contrary, it’s been happening gradually over the past decade, and savvy event managers have evolved to keep up.

A CHANGING INDUSTRY

The industry is officially at a tipping point where businesses are being forced to acknowledge the staying power of technology and social media and accept the younger generation of workers and show-goers, who have completely different strategies and expectations than the older generation who has been the leader of the pack up until now.



These changes have made it essential to revisit everything, from what shows your company actually attends, to pre-, at-, and post-show marketing strategies, training and retraining of your booth staff, setting customer expectations, and even overhauling the design of your booth and the collateral you have available.

So, what does it mean to today’s event manager? In a nutshell: they need to be open to change, and agile enough to implement the strategies that are good for business.

CLOSING THE GENERATION GAP

Some trade show (and workforce) veterans who have been working shows for decades have very clear ideas about what makes a successful show. From loads of printed collateral to a fish bowl for business cards, shaking hands and collecting leads used to be the name of the game. Younger generations prefer technology and social media over face-to-face communication, and so they tend to focus more on pre-show marketing to ensure they only engage with qualified leads at the show.

A trade show manager has the challenging task of bringing older generations “up to speed” on how their younger customers prefer to communicate while training the younger generation on the importance of building relationships IRL (In Real Life) for clients who aren’t on the technology bandwagon or want to get to know someone at a deeper level before signing a contract.

MEETING TECHNOLOGY PREFERENCE

Speaking of technology, does your company have an active social media presence and following? Do you have content marketing and email marketing strategies in place to communicate with customers and prospects on a regular basis? When was the last time you mailed something to a client? The pattern that’s emerging here is that many businesses have gone nearly totally digital. Even 1-800 customer service numbers seem to be a thing of the past as “chat now” boxes pop up on virtually every website. While your company may fully embrace the digital model, there are many customers and show-goers who vehemently rebel against technology and who still appreciate a glossy, full-color catalog and a long conversation with your top sales rep over scanning a QR code and setting a follow-up meeting.



A trade show manager needs to have a thorough understanding of how your company uses technology, and more importantly, how your customers use it. As with any marketing, you need to meet your customers where they are, even if that means stepping out of your comfort zone to learn or dial back on certain technology.

THE EVOLVING TRADE SHOW MANAGER MUST CONTINUE TO EVOLVE

Sites like PayScale still list a very general job description for trade show managers that includes, “managing all aspects of trade show operations.” It refers to the barebones logistics of getting to the show, setting up,

making nice with everyone, cleaning up and going home. What it fails to highlight is the importance of agility and a strategic mentality that an excellent event manager needs in order to go beyond the basics and execute a successful event.

While being highly organized and detail-oriented used to be the main traits of a trade show manager, today’s candidates must have a much deeper understanding of the evolving trade show industry and, most importantly, how they can use that knowledge to implement innovative strategies for success.

PLANNING



PLANNING A PRIVATE EVENT

— Steve Hoffman

Hosting your own private event can give you a level of control and client interaction well beyond what you can expect from exhibiting at someone else’s trade show.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before reviewing some of the critical considerations for pulling off a successful private corporate event, be sure you have addressed these three critical questions:

1. What are your business goals and objectives for doing “something?”

I work with several technology distribution companies. One holds “partner” conferences with the goal being to enhance awareness of the full range of solutions their re-sellers can purchase from them. Another tech company holds user group meetings which are a combination of training classes and occasionally morph into app development workshops. Goal = people using their stuff should do it right!

Another client manufactures tires of many types and for a new product release decided it was essential to have their retail customers fully educated so a road show was created.

2. Is creating an “event” and this particular type of event the most efficient approach to achieving the goal?

By creating the event you are assuming a lot more work and responsibility than if you just attended someone else’s event or trade show. However, the benefit is you can exclude the competition and control the attendees as well as the content. Using the examples above: Tech Company #1 has its vendors fund the bulk of the expense for the partner conferences. In addition to money, they benefit from assistance in promoting the event, tapping into their vendors’ databases for attendance and receiving greater expertise for programming.



Tech Company #2 knows that at most industry related shows the attendees may be their customers’ top execs, but not the users. If users don’t get the right training, contracts don’t get renewed and grumbling tarnishes their image. Conversely, having a bunch of happy raving fans together on a stage (paying their money to come to your event) praising your stuff in a panel discussion as part of training is an efficient way to strengthen renewals, upgrades and reputation.

A tire company could have done a video for consumers or even their retailers. But, the presence of a traveling display mounted inside a pop-out trailer enabled retailers to promote a local event and bring bodies to their stores. In preparation for the local events the retail staffers had a focused new product training. More knowledge, more focus, more excitement and likely better results for the manufacturer and the retailer.

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

3. Do I have a laser focus on who participants would be, should be and will be?

Defining your business objectives and evaluating the efficiencies in your concept will reveal the players. If your event concept involves sponsors or exhibitors you'll need time and manpower to execute that sales campaign. If everything will be handled internally, you'll want to be sure the planned time frame for your event doesn't conflict with available internal manpower or the schedules for essential personnel.

If you're considering organizing your own event, the following best practices will make the process smoother:

PLANNING AND SURVEYS

The success of a private event depends on understanding what your attendees expect to get out of your event.

Conduct extensive surveys of your stakeholders (attendees, exhibitors, etc.) to determine why they'd attend your private event in lieu of some other show.

SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

Maybe for purposes of revenue or sharing the work load you don't want to go it alone. But remember having "partners" in an event means you also have more people to answer to and they could possibly slow your decision making. Also ask them what they would like to learn and do.

CREATING A REALISTIC BUDGET

The costs of sponsoring your own event can be a real eye-opener. Even if you own your own event space, all the operational expenses that would otherwise be borne by some other organizers will now fall squarely

in your lap. Don't forget to include line items for everything from booth design, setup and tear down, venue/exhibit facility rental fees, marketing expenses, insurance, and security.

ONSITE PRACTICALITIES

Think carefully about your venue. Does it have the adequate space, ambiance, and amenities for your audience and your programming?

Consider the varying needs of main lectures, break-out events, or accommodating your VIPs. Do you have sufficient furniture and A/V resources? Do you have banquet and janitorial help on-call? Is parking adequate? If you need ancillary hotel or contractor help, research and secure those six months in advance. You'll want to book a block of rooms at a nearby hotel and check to see if the hotel is willing to provide shuttle transportation to and from your venue.

EVENT PROGRAMMING

Map out a timeline for all events you hope to hold, and include a sufficient buffer to make up for latecomers, lunch breaks, technical difficulties, and other common sources of delays. Decide who will give your introductory and closing remarks, what type of programming will fill the morning and afternoons, whether you'd like to include a guest speaker or demo/product launch, and any after-the-event parties you may want to organize. Always keep in mind:

- Why are they coming to your event and what do they want to accomplish?
- What do you want to accomplish once face to face over the course of the event?
- What do you want them to take back with them (literally and figuratively)?

SIGNAGE AND DISPLAY MATERIALS

The display materials you've used for external trade shows will likely need to be supplemented for your private event. You will need way-finding signage, designated staff to help with attendees needs, and perhaps digital signage that you can update on-the-fly to present news and developments.

A follow-up assessment is critical in determining if you have obtained the results that justify the extra work of hosting the event. You will make some mistakes and find things to improve in your inaugural event. However, it's when you think everything is perfect and smooth that you need to really think about shaking it up so your event doesn't get stale in participants eyes!



BUILDING YOUR TRADE SHOW RESUME

— Rick Krautbauer

People enter the trade show world from a variety of gateway careers. But to grow and to avoid career burnout, professionals need to be mindful and focused when it comes to personal development. Whether you’re a newcomer to trade shows or a seasoned professional, the following represent “must do” activities for career enrichment:

ACTIVE ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

With a hectic trade show calendar of your own, it may be hard to envision adding even more activities to your busy schedule. But active membership in a trade association (like the International Association of Exhibitions and Events, the Exhibit and Event Marketers Association or the Exhibit Designers and Producers Association) is perhaps the best thing you can do to further your career. Professional organizations not only keep you informed of changes in the industry, they offer an invaluable opportunity to network with (and learn from) peers. Add to this the tangible benefits of newsletters and magazines, seminars and conference discounts and a range of other members-only benefits, and it’s easy to see how annual association dues pay for themselves many times over.

CERTIFICATION & CONTINUING ED

For those working in events, a range of industry-specific certifications—from healthcare to IT—are currently available. Certification programs vary considerably, with some available only to those with undergraduate or graduate degrees, and others that focus on teaching a specific skill required for highly specialized work. If you’re not interested in adding a few letters after your name, Continuing Education Units are available through a host of sponsoring bodies, as well as countless informal seminars and webinars. Take a look at the dates on the education section of your resume. Has it been awhile since you’ve obtained anything beyond



on-the-job training? If so, the coming year may be the time for you to add certification or CEUs to your professional goals. Another great option is the Certified Trade Show Manager (CTSM) program offered by *EXHIBITOR Magazine*. More than 3,200 trade show and corporate event marketing professionals from every type and size of company who are currently enrolled in CTSM, the industry’s only university-affiliated certification program.

DEGREE PROGRAMS

If you’re a student or entry-level employee interested in the trade show industry, you may have considered getting a formal degree. Undergraduate degrees in business, hospitality, communications or public relations are common springboards for trade show careers, as well as a growing number of degrees specific to event management. For mid-level professionals considering returning to school, a range of graduate and doctoral level programs exist. *US News* has long been the jumping-off point for beginning a search for the best colleges and universities in a given field.

MENTORSHIP

Whether your career has plateaued or if you have your sights set on a given company or position, a mentor can help you take your career to the next level. While some formal mentorship programs exist, this is the one area of professional development that really comes down to interpersonal inquiry. Finding a mentor begins by thinking about the professionals in your industry who you know personally, and whose work inspires you. Ideally, it should be someone who already recognizes your worth. And getting that person’s guidance rarely means literally asking him or her to mentor you. Instead, it’s usually a more informal process that begins by asking an initial question or volunteering your time, and that gradually leads into a long-term, mutually-beneficial partnership.

TRADE SHOW & EXPO ATTENDANCE

There’s a strange irony in the fact that many who organize, or staff trade shows have never attended one specifically intended for their own profession. Gatherings such as **EXHIBITORLIVE**, Convening Leaders or The Special Event Show serve the overarching community of event professionals, but there are countless specialty organizations dedicated to specific disciplines or to niche aspects of event planning and marketing. In addition to exposing you to emerging thought leaders and the latest industry vendors, attending event and field marketing expos can help you better understand and communicate the benefits of trade show attendance to your own audiences.

Your professional development can not only reinvigorate or lift your career, it can have a profound effect on your company’s growth. Make a resolution this year to expand your resume, and you and your employer will reap the rewards.



PLANNING FOR IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

— Lisa Maniaci

In case you haven't noticed it, the Immersive Experience is already a thing at trade shows.

As you walk through the show hall, you see people with goggles on, acting as if they're about to step off a cliff or return a tennis ball over the make-believe net. It's fun, it's exciting; and usually, in this situation, it's free. Your only payment is the scan of your badge and answers to a few short questions that may or may not qualify you as a key demographic for that exhibitor.

As an exhibitor though, competing for the business of so many show attendees, what is it about this experience that can actually provide a return on your investment? Of course, people will take the goggles off and proclaim, "Wow, that was awesome" or something to that effect, but that doesn't necessary translate to a sale.

...what is it about this experience that can actually provide a return on your investment?

Here are some suggestions for making your VR or AR station in your exhibit a cost effective one:

1. Keep the budget for this experience separate from your trade show budget.

There's nothing worse than having to decide if you want the coat closet in your exhibit design or the ability to receive data from your AR experience. If you're show is in Calgary in February, you're going to need that coat closet. But, should it be at the expense of good reporting tools on the virtual fly through of your warehouse in Germany? If you can't afford to create a separate budget that doesn't impact your exhibit requirements, then plan to have it in next year's design and come up with another idea for this year's shows.



Trade shows are an expensive investment, splitting a budget between your exhibit and your immersive experiences will cause you to fall short on both fronts.

2. Consider how digital experiences can impact your clients and prospects in the long run.

Exhibitors see a digital experience as an enhancement to their event, and then it gets packed up and put away until the next show. Instead, consider it a tool for the long term. Do your sales reps travel to see clients? Do they meet locally, but in the client's office? Do you have impressive facilities that are located in places other than the one you work in everyday? Why not create a VR tour of your assembly line, with all of the state-of-the-art equipment that your competition doesn't offer? Show it off at the trade shows. Make it an app that can be sent to your qualified leads, and let them walk away with the goggles – the ones that have your company's branding on them. Arm your sales force with the goggles and load the app on their phones. When they visit

with clients, they can show a client in New Jersey how the product is made in your sister facility in Kentucky. Bring the immersive experience on your sales calls so your prospect can walk through your facility from the comfort of their own desk.

3. Make sure you are purchasing a tool, not just a game.

Of course, whatever you do, you want it to entertain your guests; but if you're investing in this technology, it must pay you back somehow. Say you are in the charter airline business. Maybe you have two different size planes to offer for individual and business use. Maybe you can provide trans-continental flights on charters that are more equipped for red-eye travel. You can't really bring both planes to the show floor and, as much as you'd like to travel in one of those planes to your client meetings, I don't think you can expense it. So, what is a highly successful sales rep to do?

How about a virtual tour of the planes? In these immersive environments, your clients can open the overhead bins, browse the restrooms, see how the seats recline to beds, and even look out the windows. They can browse the cockpit and, as they walk up the steps from the tarmac, be greeted by their flight attendant. Every action can be reported on. How much time did they spend in each plane? Maybe they're leaning toward the smaller ones for individual travel. Gear your inquiries/sales pitch in that direction. Maybe they travel more at night, because their flights are long, but they're not sure of the price tag for a charter. Give them the goggles; take them on a tour of the transcontinental model, all while watching every step on your tablet or laptop. Explain the ergonomics of comfortable seats that convert to flat beds, while they watch them recline and move back to a seated position in the goggle tour. Guide them toward the business suite that provides the ability to plug in and get

work done, while reclining and having dinner.

Telling prospects about all of the benefits of your product is one thing, showing them is a whole other ball game, and data that proves their interest in one product over another can cut down on how much time your sales reps spend spinning their wheels on the items the client doesn't want.

Yes, Immersive Technology comes with a price tag. It's important to work with a company that asks the right questions when planning how you will use it, so every dollar is spent wisely. You will want a platform that can provide the best return on your investment. It may not be the example above, but your company requirements will dictate in some way what the best plan is. A good discovery meeting will hash that all out. Don't be afraid to qualify prospects, though. Maybe you want users to sign in with an email address and phone number. Reporting can be as simple as that.

Maybe you want to know how many times a person backtracked to a portion of the experience and how much time they spent engaged overall. What did they touch? Where did they look? What kinds of questions did they ask while inside this experience?

Have orders increased since introducing this technology on your sales calls?

Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and Immersive Experiences of all kinds can foster positive emotions about a company's key offerings. Seeing the Green initiatives that an organization has implemented in their production line might be the deciding factor in whether a prospect chooses to work with you or someone else. It is a value-add to your sales and prospecting initiatives, and, when used right, the payoff can be quite rewarding.

KEEPING YOUR EXHIBIT PROJECT ON TRACK (WHILE STILL DOING YOUR REGULAR JOB)

— Anne Madigan

Many companies decide to exhibit at a trade show for all the right reasons (grow the business, find new leads, see current customers, etc.). But when it comes to planning the exhibit and the trade show, it often falls upon someone who already has a full plate. How can you handle this additional responsibility while still performing your regular duties and responsibilities? It isn't easy, but here are a few tips to help make it more manageable:

How can you handle this additional responsibility while still performing your regular duties and responsibilities?

- **Research the show.** Every show has a website, and most have a Quick Facts page. The quick facts will be very useful in planning your show.
- **Plan your budget and get early approval.** This is a huge time saver because you will not have to ask for approval every time you make a purchase or commitment. Waiting for approvals can often be a hidden time waster that is not included in a timeline, and can lead to rush charges, expedited shipping and added stress.
- **Create a timeline.** Planning a successful trade show can be overwhelming. There is so much to do, but since it's a full year away, you get behind by procrastinating. Don't fall into this trap! Take a few moments to create a timeline. Begin with the dates of the show and work backwards. This way you can break everything down into manageable chunks with deadlines to keep yourself on target.
- **Prioritize.** Once you create your timeline you can prioritize and tackle. Since you have created a timeline, assign deadlines for each task, and stick to them!
- **Spread the love.** If you are lucky, you may be able to delegate some of the tasks. But if that isn't an option for you (as it's not an option for many), schedule



yourself a calendar reminder/task (daily, weekly, monthly, or whatever works for you.) Spreading out the responsibilities will prevent you from getting bogged down and will help to give you a fresh perspective as you take time between segments.

- **Build in time for the unexpected.** Things happen. Emergencies come up. Shipping is delayed. The last person required to approve something takes vacation. You get the gist. Build in a little wiggle room so that you have a little breathing room when the unexpected happens.
- **Work with a vendor that you trust.** Does your vendor have access to designers, artists, and installers? Can they work with you to provide solutions that fit your specific needs? Does your vendor have 24-hour support? And most of all, can you rely on them to be there when you are on the trade show floor setting up and you need a tool, or are missing a part? Your success and the success of your company depends on careful planning.



PROTECTING YOUR TRADE SHOW EXHIBIT

— Kristie Jones-Damalas

So, you just finished nailing down the booth design and budget. So now what?

How can it continue to look as good as it does the first time after 10 more shows? Did you confirm that your investment was protected? How long do you plan to keep those assets? Shipping, transporting, installation, dismantle and storing all can take a toll on the exhibit. Make sure you are investing in quality crates to protect those assets. Crates can come in a variety of materials. You will need to determine what will be best for you.

Shipping, transporting, installation, dismantle and storing all can take a toll on the exhibit.

Are you storing these in your facility or with your vendor? Is your facility equipped with the proper freight doors, ramps, etc.? Will you need wheels or will skids work for you? Also, be sure you know the venue that you are shipping to. Some hotels do not have the ability to accept large skids or crates. Be sure to do your homework.

What about other items that go along with my exhibit?

1. A/V and monitors require specialty crating to protect the electronics. These crates are typically customized with special foam inserts based on the make/model and accessories of the system you have. Protecting your monitor is extremely important as the technology or electronics will easily be destroyed if they are not packaged correctly. Too often customers want to just use the original box that the monitor was shipped in. That box was not intended for multiple use. Using the box can also be an easy target for thieves. They just see “I’m a monitor – TAKE ME!” The constant shipping and jostling during shipment can be very hard on the fragile motherboard.



2. Carpet: If you are planning to purchase your own carpet or flooring, you may want to consider crating the carpet. Too often rolls of carpet are put aside and end up missing or placed in the wrong booth space. Show contractors often mistake these rolls for their own rolls and they end up in another booth space. Additionally, shows often charge special handling fees/ rates for carpet rolls. Package carpet rolls into one crate and label appropriately – flooring and carpet. This way it is not treated as “special handling” and all the crates can be accounted for within your booth space. The install crew will know exactly what crate needs to be opened first and could actually end up saving you time on installation by having everything labeled clearly.

3. Products & demos: It would be best to have a separate crate for all your products. In addition to being



able to keep a good tracking system on what is shipped and returned, you have everything in one crate for easy access – labeled and easy to find. You can also easily update or change the elements if you need to from event to event.

It would be best to have a separate crate for all your products...labeled and easy to find.

4. Literature & giveaways: These should be packed into a separate box or case within the crate. Again, keeping these separate from the other items will be the best way to track and maintain the items. The volume will always change since these are items that are given to attendees. From a marketing perspective you can easily track how many items were used, to help you



determine how many you need for future shows and/or the value of the items.

Being organized with your crate packing as well as investing in quality packing and crating systems will really help you take the headache out of trying to manage your events.

Crates are costly (especially custom crates) but are well worth the investment. Durable crates and packaging are the best way to protect your investments. After all, when you spend a significant amount of money on a show from the booth design, construction, graphics, show space, and hotels, you will want to protect the exhibit you worked so hard for. Also, when removed from durable crating, that exhibit has an amazing impact on your success on the show floor – and representation of your company!

5 BIG SURPRISES FOR CANADIAN EXHIBITORS GOING TO U.S.A. TRADE SHOWS

— Sandra Kennedy

Whether you work at a Canadian company that already participates in a trade show in the U.S.A. or are thinking of getting into the U.S.A. market, here are exhibiting facts that may surprise you:

1. ALMOST ALL U.S.A. TRADE SHOWS REQUIRE UNION LABOR

Almost ALL of the U.S.A. trade shows require you to use union labor. This is by far the biggest surprise that hits my Toronto trade show clients when they exhibit south of the Canadian border for the first time. This is not flexible or negotiable; it just is what it is. While some shows have rules allowing you to do under 30 minutes of work, if done without tools, most exhibitors will still have to pay to have a union employee set up their booth. And of course, with union labor come higher costs and more complexity in arranging set up times.



2. YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO USE THE U.S.A. SHOW'S CONTRACTOR FOR UNION LABOR

Even though you have to use union labor, that doesn't mean you have to use the labor provided by the show. You can appoint your own labor crew, especially useful if that labor crew is more familiar with your exhibit. They are called an Exhibitor Appointed Contractor, or EAC. You, as the exhibitor, only need to submit an EAC request form at least 30 days before the show. You can get access to this form on the show's website. A great article from *Exhibitor Online* describes the types of labor contractors found in the U.S.A.

Whoever you use as your exhibit provider, whether in Canada or the U.S.A. side of the border, ask them: Do you have your own qualified unionized installers? You will be surprised at how many trade show companies indeed have their own qualified teams. If yes, GREAT,

get a quote and save valuable dollars on using this outside team. If not, look for one! Google "install/dismantle trade show booths" with the area you are exhibiting and see what teams come up. Call them, ask for references, check their website for jobs done in past.

3. YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO RENT FROM A U.S.A. SHOW'S VENDORS

There is a HUGE misconception that you are required to use the show's other vendors, such as for furniture rentals, AV rentals and more. The simple fact is this is not the case. So you may be able to get other sources for these trade show services, too.

4. IT IS HARDER TO FIND YOUR EXHIBIT & CRATES SENT TO A U.S.A. ADVANCE WAREHOUSE

At a Canadian show, if you need to find your crates before or during the show, we are fairly relaxed here so



you can stroll into the crate storage area and get at your crates. However, in the U.S.A., it can be much harder to find your crates, especially if they are in a marshalling yard, which can either be inaccessible or even physically removed from the trade show convention center.

5. YOU CAN AVOID THE COST & HASSLE OF SHIPPING AND CUSTOMS WHEN EXHIBITING AT A TRADE SHOW IN THE U.S.A.

This brings us to our next point and one of the most VALUABLE for you to take away. There are so many pieces to consider when crossing the border to exhibit, shipping and customs just being a couple of them. Did you know you have the option to RENT your exhibit? Yes, trade show displays are available to rent and customize with your own company branded graphics, so you stand out on the show floor but don't have the hassle of shipping and customs.

I know, I know you are thinking, "Yeah, I have seen those booth rentals where everyone looks the same and that just isn't for me." Well, GUESS WHAT? You can work with your trade show exhibit company on a rental just for you, that is NOT provided by the show, and that helps you stand out on the exhibit floor. The rental can be designed by a local, trade show company and shipped to the show from the U.S. as if it was your own booth, minus the extra shipping and customs. Yes, true story. We help our customers do this every month!

These are 5 of the most common surprises our Toronto customers experience. Now you can avoid those surprises, and also have a smoother and better trade show experience at your new show in the United States. Good luck and happy exhibiting!

EXHIBIT DESIGN IS GREAT, BUT WHO'S RUNNING THE SHOW?

— Victoria Conti, CTSM

I've been immersed in the world of trade shows for more than two decades, and it's part of who I am. I live and breathe trade shows every day, and I've spent my career as an Account Executive learning and building relationships while delivering many, many successful projects. But, what really makes a successful trade show delivery? To me, it's all about relationships and trust.

But, what really makes a successful trade show delivery? To me, it's all about relationships and trust.

Trade shows are complex and come with high stakes. Companies that exhibit put forth a significant investment of time, money, and manpower – and I don't take that investment lightly. I personally value the trust my clients put in me, and my team, to manage their trade show program. So, I would like to share some thoughts on what makes a great trade show partnership.

Often, people choose an exhibit company based on a booth design. It's a VERY important part of the investment. The presentation of your brand, the functionality, and the versatility of an exhibit hit many of the key requirements that exhibiting companies need to consider. But I also challenge you to think about what happens AFTER the design phase?

Choosing a well-designed and well-functioning exhibit is only the first of many steps in forging a successful partnership with your exhibit company. Do you know WHO is going to manage your project? WHO is your main point of contact for EVERYTHING? What is their background and level of experience? You need to be able to trust them and communicate effectively with them. Asking these questions up front could help



ensure you are setting your program up for success and that your exhibit company is in tune with your expectations (and can meet them).

Your exhibit Account Executive should really play the role of a strategic partner, understanding your goals and providing ideas that help maximize your trade show results. And yes, when something unexpected happens on the show floor, they are your immediate go-to. They fix, they find, they take responsibility. They are your advocate, and they have a highly effective support team to get it all done for YOU. As an Account Executive my goal is to be a one-stop resource for my clients. They call me for anything and everything, and I'm okay with that! It shows that they trust me, and they know I'm accessible.

SET GOALS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

— Avalon Hartman

Successful trade show programs do not happen by accident. You will look like a company superstar by taking the extra steps to achieve outstanding results. Abundant online resources are available to help measure your return on investment, set an appropriate budget and develop appropriate timelines.

COMMUNICATE COMPANY GOALS

Set goals for your booth staff and get them involved on how best to interact with attendees. Strategy sessions prior to the show allow staffers to think about the importance of their interaction at the exhibit hall. If you are taking people who are more technical in nature provide clear instruction on how you intend to use their expertise. Guide them to offer relevant solutions and personal anecdotes about how your business has successfully worked in the past. Ask them to develop a vision statement about where you are headed. In vertical markets stress to your staff that lead quality, is more important than lead quantity.

CREATE A VISIBLE SCHEDULE

Everyone in your exhibit should be engaged while at the show. It's tempting to spend the evening hitting the hosted receptions and engage in late fun but set the expectation that everyone needs to be at the booth on their A-game when they are scheduled. Allow for some flexibility about who is to be in the booth when. Also, make sure to communicate to your staffers that they are uniquely qualified and very important to the success of the show. Encourage a team atmosphere that includes their manager's buy in to provide guidance about their responsibility to engage attendees.

DETERMINE WHAT INFO TO CAPTURE AND HOW

Your sales manager will appreciate you asking for their feedback on what type of information is most helpful for the sales team. Even though leads are digitally cap-

tured, sales people appreciate notes on a conversation or specifics about a prospect's needs. Consider keeping in contact with your sales manager and providing lead information while you are at the show. Sending follow-up information immediately shows that you are responsive and engaged. It may spur the attendee to stop by your booth again for a second look. Sales managers will appreciate the extra time to research a company or a prospect during the show. These days electronic lead applications are widely used to capture data. You can rent one from the show or download it from one of the many options available online.

PLAN FOR LEAD FOLLOW-UP

Adjust your mindset from "when the show is over the work is done" to "the show is over, but the real work is just beginning." Leads must be assigned, qualified, tied back to the event, followed up on and placed into your sales cycle. This is vital to be able to calculate your ROI and set an estimated budget for next year. It will allow you information to make an informed decision about your company's participation at next year's show.

DEFEND YOUR BUDGET

Smart trade show managers are prepared to defend the money allocated to their trade show programs. They understand overall market spending increases and don't expect to do more with less money. Many costs, (shipping, drayage, travel, I&D) must be estimated months prior to the event and costs can vary based on a whole host of factors. Underestimating these costs is a mistake and makes your shows look too costly.

Regardless of what goals you set, make sure to track your progress and review your results after the show to see if you achieved your objectives. A post-show meeting is a great time to determine what worked and what didn't so you can use that information for your next show!

A TRADE SHOW MANAGER’S GUIDE TO EVENT SELECTION

— Shelley Speciale

How do you determine if a trade show or conference is going to be productive for you, especially if you’ve never exhibited there? Will your existing core trade shows and events continue to reap rewards in the future? When does an upgrade to a more premium booth placement justify the increased investment?



If you have found yourself asking these questions recently or if you are asking yourself these questions now (for the first time after having just read them out loud) take a moment and review these helpful tips below.

KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN FOR NEW SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

Most exhibitors are loyal to their favorite trade shows and expos. But if you start to see diminishing returns on your exhibit dollar, or if you’re attempting to expand into a new market, it may be time to broaden your horizon. The Skyline Trade Show Selector Tool is a great resource to help you uncover new opportunities and events for your exhibits.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Approximately 40-60% of trade show attendees come from a 200-mile radius of the host city. Take a look at your largest potential buyers and determine, given this data, which shows they are most likely to attend. While big, national or international shows may be your “bread and butter,” over half of exhibitors say they experience most of their success reaching target audiences at smaller, more regional trade shows.

RESEARCH EACH SHOW

After settling on a core group of trade shows, check the history of each one to see how many registrants and vendors were in attendance. You can even call a few past exhibitors (not your direct competitors, of course) and ask them about the quality of the show, overall turn out and the sales viability of the attendees.

SECURE IMPROVED LOCATION BY REGISTERING EARLIER

The early bird gets the worm. If you habitually register late and find yourself in a less than ideal location or having to reconfigure your booth components to fit within the spaces available, the adjustments may be adding unnecessary expenses to your budget, not to mention the possible loss of time and opportunity. Registering early to secure premium space can pay later dividends in saved productivity and added ROI.

IMPLEMENT AN INTERNAL, POST-SHOW SUMMARY

It’s important to assess the effectiveness of your booth immediately following each trade show. Gather your team while their perceptions of the event are still fresh, and ask the following questions:



- Did you achieve a suitable ROI? How many qualified leads did you get, and what was the cost per lead based on our overall exhibit costs?
- How would you classify the attendees? Were there more browsers than buyers? If you exhibited at this event previously, did this year’s crowd include new prospective clientele, or mostly existing customers?
- How did you look in comparison to the competition? Was your booth design more professional, and did it draw in more attendees?
- What, if any, suggestions do you have that might make this trade show even more successful for future years?

By conducting the above pre- and post-show research, you will gain valuable insights to help you plan, prepare and select for your future trade show and conference while also generating a better overall ROI at each event.

THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL TRADE SHOW: PLANNING, PLANNING, PLANNING!

— *Michelle Smith*

Your exhibit has been designed and is ready to go. You've chosen your shows and committed to the schedule. All you have to do is ship it and show up, right? Wrong.

There is much more involved in going to a trade show than selecting your space and having your exhibit built. The first step involves extensive planning before going to the show. This should be done weeks, if not months, prior to the show date. Review your exhibitor manual and place your orders prior to the advance order date deadlines. Doing so will save you hundreds of dollars.

...place your orders prior to the advance order date deadlines. Doing so will save you hundreds of dollars.

Review your exhibit layout and placement on the show floor. In-line booths are fairly simple, you don't have to worry about booth orientation, which way faces front or where the electrical drops will be placed. You will want to know how much power you require for your exhibit lights and ancillary equipment, so you order enough electrical service. Consider things such as monitors, computers and whether staffers will need a place to plug in and charge devices. Where will you want these plugs to be located? Providing a layout with detailed information with your electrical order can save you a lot of hassle on the show floor.

If you are an island exhibitor, make sure to provide a booth orientation using the booth numbers around you for location placement. What you see as the "front" of your booth may not make sense to the electrician laying the power lines or Installation and Dismantle (I&D) crew setting up your booth space. It is imperative that you communicate this information, clearly and ahead of time. Having to

tear down a booth and re-run electrical on-site, can significantly increase I&D and electrical labor costs.

When you're shipping your exhibit, consider shipping to the Advance Warehouse. The deadline for delivery is about a week before the first day of install and your booth will be delivered to your space by the time you arrive. This is typically less expensive than shipping direct to the show. Make sure to track the shipment to confirm the delivery. If something seems off, you will have an opportunity to locate the shipment or prepare an alternative before the show starts.

Look at the delivery dates and post-show pick up dates. These dates can fall on a weekend or holiday. You'll need to know what your delivery and shipping options are in those cases. Be prepared to pay higher shipping and labor rates for weekend or holidays.

Most importantly, plan for something to go wrong. Murphy's Law: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." Be flexible and ready to go to plan B. If your monitor shows up damaged, what are your alternatives for replacing it? If graphics are missing or damaged, who can print them and deliver quickly? Doing pre-show set-ups of your exhibit can help you determine if hardware is missing or damaged before you arrive at the show and it will give you time to replace what you need.

Taking the steps to plan well before the show will help make your experience all that much better. Add a portion of your budget dollars to a slush fund that can be available in case anything happens unexpectedly. Don't be afraid to ask your exhibit provider for guidance, they will be glad to help you along the way. Following these simple tips will put you on your way to a successful show.

GOING A NEW WAY: CONVINCING MANAGEMENT TO TRY NEW TRADE SHOW STRATEGIES

— *Jeanette Armbrust*

Do you think your business' trade show strategy is in need of an overhaul? Oftentimes, the greatest challenge to a new approach is convincing leadership to abandon their standard way of doing things. If you feel like your exhibit efforts need rethinking, the following steps may help you win your management's approval.

MATCH EXISTING INITIATIVES

Whether it's a goal they've set for themselves or a strategic initiative being pushed by senior leadership, most managers and directors are tasked with exploring new ideas at the start of each fiscal year. Yet the day-to-day demands of event marketing and staff supervision can often end up putting these plans on the back burner.

Framing an idea within the context of these goals can help your concept get approved. Has your supervisor been tasked with breaking into new markets? If so, then now might be a good time to suggest exhibiting at that new expo you've been eyeing. Has your boss wanted to better capitalize on the popularity of mobile device charging stations? Now might be the time to bring up your idea of renting one of those new lock-and-charge stations that turn your booth into a secure place for attendees to leave their devices.

THE BANDWAGON EFFECT

Spend some time visiting other people's booths to see what they are doing right, and follow-up on the trends seen at large expos by reading industry blogs. Showing that the competition has been having success with your idea can be a great way to instill a sense of urgency in adopting the approach in-house. You can also present examples of specific companies in allied industries that are using your idea. If you can use an example from an organization your boss already respects, that's even better.



PREPARE BUDGET & ROI DATA

Your idea won't have a chance at approval if it doesn't align with existing budget constraints. Determine whether funds are available, and then come up with a plan for measuring results. You can use Skyline's Trade Show ROI Calculator for example to estimate the ROI of past events you participated in and use that information to convince leadership to try something new. One way to overcome budget constraints is to partner with another department that may have use for some of the same assets you plan to purchase.

We have seen clients share videos used at a trade show with the Marketing Communication team for use on the website or marketing campaign, as well as clients re-purposing a kiosk for their lobby or event activation. Present it all in a strategy document that outlines how it can enhance the effectiveness of your trade show exhibits. When combined with a reasonable budget, this may be all of the persuasion you need!

BACK CORNER BOOTH? NO PROBLEM! MAXIMIZING YOUR EXHIBIT LOCATION

— *Shawn Lacagnina*

Don't let a less than desirable booth location get you discouraged. Sure, certain booth locations are better for high foot traffic and visibility, but booth location is only one of the many factors that can determine the effectiveness of your display. By using creative booth design, having the right employees present, and implementing a holistic marketing strategy, you can more than make up for a corner booth. Take a look at some strategies to mitigate your booth location.

LIGHTING

Lighting is an effective way to quickly capture an audience's attention. By adding up-lights and moving lights to your display, you can draw in attendees. From there you need to prioritize what you want them to see in your space. Whether it's a logo, products, or something else, strong accent lighting will make specific elements of your display stand out. You may also want to consider a backlit graphic which can really make your message pop.

TABLE DISPLAY

Be strategic with your table position. If you want to invite people in, make sure it is located somewhere that it is not impeding their ability to enter your space. In addition, keep the text on your table to a minimum. Remember, the text is a hook, but the majority of the information should be provided verbally by your employees. Lastly, complement your table with technology. Graphics, videos and other engaging media are now easier than ever to effectively display at your booth.

INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES

Don't be boring and simply give attendees an elevator sales pitch. Engage your audience by doing product demos or scheduling presentations. Give away promotional items that link to your offering or company value. Maybe



create "at show specials" to reward visitors for attending the show and visiting your exhibit. And whenever possible, allow the guest to interact with your exhibit in some fashion to explore more deeply what your organization is offering. This can be accomplished through touch screen programs, tablet games, or even handling products. Be creative.

Engage your audience by doing product demos or scheduling presentations.

BOOTH STAFF

Booth staff not only provides attendees with information about your company, products, and services, but they are also your most visible brand ambassadors. They are the immediate face of your company and its culture. The interaction that potential clients have with your booth staff can determine whether or not they want to do business with you.

Everyone staffing your exhibit should understand your company show strategy and the role they play in its

success. Having clearly defined roles gives the staff member a level of comfort in knowing what is expected and how to accomplish the goal. You know the saying, "you can't hit what you aren't aiming for."

Friendly and outgoing individuals that are capable of addressing a diverse audience are necessary. Don't mistake this for obnoxious and loud. Nothing turns off attendees like a disingenuous salesman. You may also need a technical person there to answer in depth questions about your product or solution. Regardless of the mix, make sure everyone is comfortable with their role.

IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY

Trade show success is not solely determined during the show. Before, during, and after the event, you need to strategically market your organization. Before the show reach out to any contacts you already have and also ask the event organizer for the pre-registration list of attendees. Let prospects know you will be in attendance at the event and would like to meet.

You can use email, physical mail, or even telephone calls to promote your organization's attendance. You can also promote your attendance on social media and use the trade show's specific hashtags. Tie all this together by creating a landing page where you can direct your audience to a centralized source of information. You'll also be able to track analytics of digital; comparing it to the analytics of in-person visitors.

During the show, stay active on social media and continue notifying attendees about the demos, promotions, and presentations you are doing. Build up the hype of the event within your communication and social media; this



is another way to ensure more traffic to your booth. A creative promotional item can also increase traffic (still have one of those square yardsticks?).

Almost 80% of trade show leads are never followed up. Don't become part of that statistic! Once you have gathered information from the event, post-show follow-up is vital to convert them into clients. Make sure any promises made on the show floor are kept. Send out an email to anyone that provided contact information and thank them for attending. At this stage, offer them something that shows your appreciation such as a special offer or exclusive information. For those that are still interested, you can prepare a strategic nurture contact campaign with your sales team.

Remember, don't let your booth location define the success of your show. Even your back-corner booth can generate leads, new connections, and an enjoyable brand experience for all. Follow these steps and enjoy the experience.

HOW TO SELECT THE BEST EXHIBIT LOCATION ON THE SHOW FLOOR

— Matt Waterwall

There is an adage in real estate that also serves well on the trade show floor. When looking for property, only three things matter: location, location and location. It doesn't matter if you are shopping for a 40,000 square foot headquarters or a 400 square foot exhibit space on the show floor. The key to success depends on location.

When you register to exhibit at a trade show, you know instinctively that some locations on the convention floor are better than others. Some guarantee you'll be seen by a majority of attendees and others practically guarantee you'll be overlooked.

When you register to exhibit at a trade show, you know instinctively that some locations on the convention floor are better than others.

The question is, how do you know which locations are prime real estate and which should be avoided?

Exhibitors who don't know or can't tell the difference can certainly sabotage their trade show efforts by choosing booth space in the wrong places. Don't let that happen to you! Check out the seven secrets below for selecting a great booth location.

1. GET 'EM WHILE THEY'RE FRESH

When the show floor opens, attendees are usually refreshed, alert and excited to be there. That's the perfect time to reach out to them, as they tend to be more receptive. Exhibiting near the convention hall entrance puts you in a great position. Not only are attendees most likely to see your booth, they'll also be more likely to remember their experience with your brand.

2. AVOID YOUR COMPETITION

There's seldom any advantage to setting up your trade show booth next to, or across the aisle from your competitors. It may seem like a good idea, after all, if attendees find that your competition is unable to meet their needs or budget, they can just walk next door where you'll be waiting for them.

But that's rarely how things turn out. Instead, attendees roam in information-gathering mode. Exceptions aside, they're not there to commit. Most will take your marketing collateral, as well as your competition's, back home to evaluate who can best help them.

3. TALK TO THE SHOW MANAGER BEFORE THE EVENT

This is one of the easiest steps you can take to identify great locations for your booth on the show floor. Simply get in touch with the person tasked with managing the show. He/she should be able to highlight the best spaces in the venue and describe how those spaces are distributed among exhibitors. Every show works a bit differently but contacting the show manager may reveal an opportunity you can take advantage of to secure a great spot.

4. BEWARE OF THE BATHROOMS

This is a slightly controversial position. A lot of experienced exhibitors like to rent space near the venue's restrooms. The motivation stems from the idea that most attendees will need to visit that area at some point during the day. Why not take advantage of the high-volume traffic and exposure? First, the timing is terrible as no one is visiting the restroom thinking about your products and services. Second, the restrooms carry a certain "ambiance" that may reflect poorly on nearby booths.



5. ASK WHETHER A SPONSORSHIP CAN LEAD TO A BETTER LOCATION

Becoming a sponsor at the show can often give you access to prime real estate on the convention floor. That's useful if the show manager normally doles out spaces based on criteria you're unable to compete on, e.g. seniority. Sponsoring the event may help you to leapfrog ahead of other exhibitors. While sponsorships won't always guarantee a better location, it certainly doesn't hurt to ask.

6. DON'T OVERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF TRAFFIC

Traffic is definitely important. You want people to see and visit your displays, but you need to attract the right type of traffic. Having the best trade show exhibit won't matter if you fail to draw people in. With all your marketing endeavors, you must appeal to the folks who are most likely to want and need your products. To that end, avoid paying too high a premium for a location just because it gives you exposure to a lot of



attendees. Make sure your exhibit is exposed to the right attendees.

Choosing a great booth location is mostly a matter of identifying opportunities to leverage your brand and avoiding low traffic areas. The upside is that a good spot all but guarantees your exhibit will receive the attention it deserves.

7. RESERVE YOUR SPACE EARLY

The majority of space selection is done many months in advance of the event. Often the floor plan for next year's event is being plotted and assigned during the current show. Be sure you know when the space draw is taking place and arrive well in advance of your scheduled time. This will allow you to survey the spots still available. It's a good idea to select at least three options as some of the spaces can be sold as you are waiting to reserve and place a deposit.

NIGHTMARE EXHIBITIONS

— Greg Johnson

Planning for a big trade show can take up to, or longer than, a full year. And no matter how long you plan, no matter how detailed you are, something could always go wrong. Have no fear! We have some tips to help you get past some of the most feared trade show situations.

BAD LOCATION

If you're planning on being a regular exhibitor at a show each year, reserve a booth space for the following year each year you attend. This helps ensure that you get one of the first choices in the location and size that you want the following year. Some trade shows base exhibit location on the amount of advertising money you spend with the organization, or how actively your organization promotes the show. This varies by industry and show size, but it doesn't hurt to reserve your booth space as soon as possible. Reserve early even if that means reserving the year prior!

If you didn't have time to plan and you find yourself in a less than ideal location, use the power of networking! Make sure to leave some staff behind at the booth, but go out and network with different exhibitors. Thankfully there is no rule about staying in your booth during the entire show, which means you can use that to your advantage.

MISSING MATERIALS

Think of the collateral that you bring to a trade show as gold. The banners, pamphlets, balloons, or digital material that you invest in before the show is what will catch people's eyes and create intrigue. But what happens if the printer misses your deadline, or something is lost in shipping? Plan to find a reliable printer in the same location as your event beforehand so that if the worst happens you can be prepared to print new materials. To avoid this, plan as far in advance as possible and be in frequent communication with your designers and printers during the months before the show.

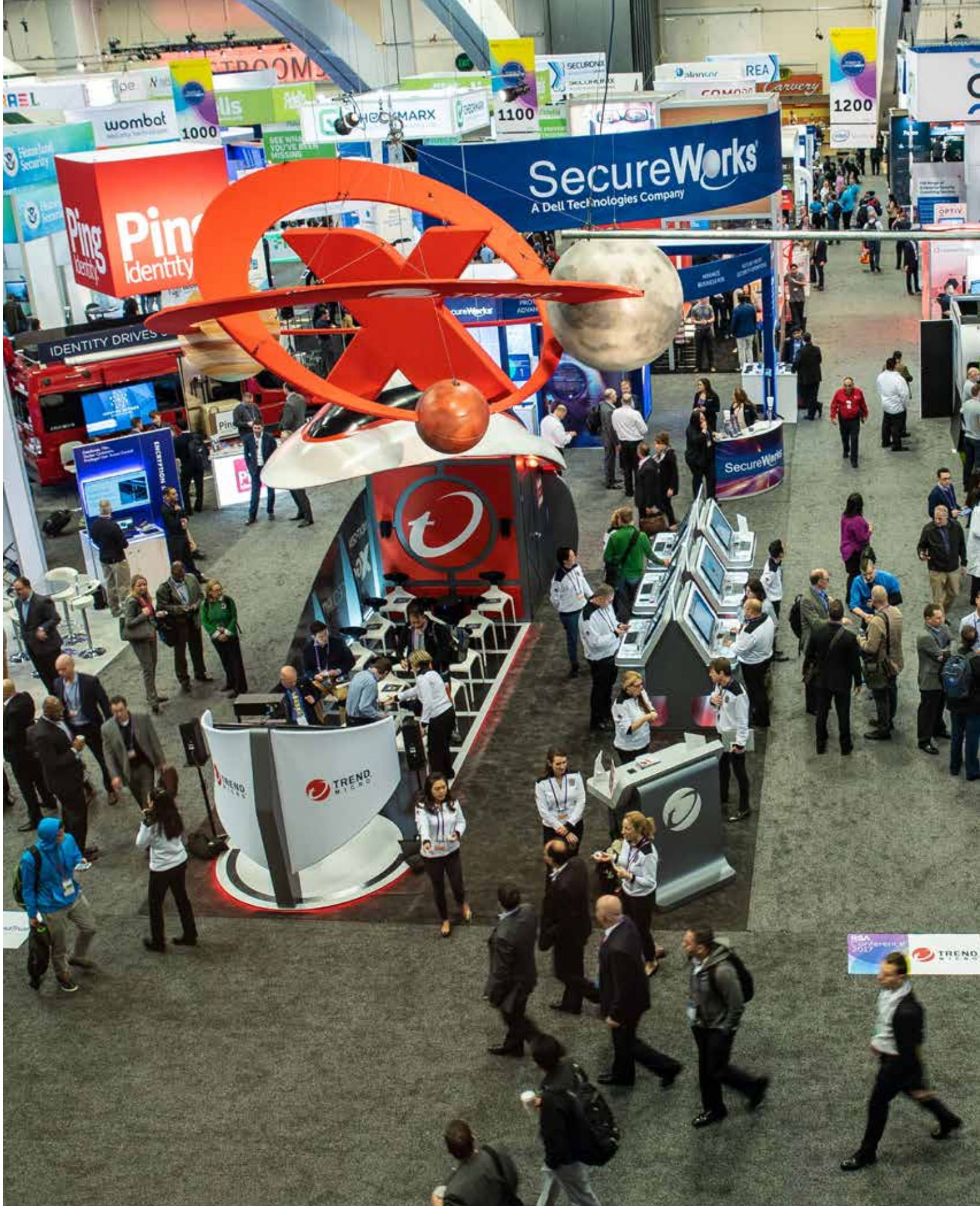
There is less of a chance of someone dropping the ball if communication is clear. Some exhibitors avoid the hassle of hauling hard copies of marketing collateral to the show by having all of that content available in the form of a USB giveaway. Better yet, you could ask for the attendee's contact info to send them materials that are only of interest to them. This means you've got an interested prospect AND valuable contact information for your sales team to follow up on.

LIMITED RETURN ON INVESTMENT

You are going to this exhibition for a reason. Whether you're trying to gain new clientele, display and sell a new product, gain recognition or become a leader in educating others in your field, you want the expo to be worth your time and money. Unfortunately, many people that attend trade shows go into them with limited knowledge, thus finding that the ROI was not worth it. Because there is so much work and money spent on the front end of expo planning, you'll want to do everything you can to make sure the show is worth your time.

A few simple tips are: Standing near your booth instead of sitting behind a table, engaging with those that pass by. Invest in prizes and giveaways. Talk with prospects about their needs and how your company can help, and make sure to send follow-up contact emails to every single person after the show so that you can keep your name in front of people. Use social media before and during your trade show so that people know you plan to attend, and so they know where you are during the show!

We believe that trade shows can be profitable and favorable to any company or individual that goes into it with the correct knowledge. Simply doing your research, planning, and being assertive will get you very far as an exhibitor!



DISTRACTIONS ARE EVERYWHERE: HOW TO GET YOUR VISITORS FULL ATTENTION

— Greg Johnson

Studies show that we have 7 seconds to capture someone’s attention. That means your trade show booth must be designed with the correct intention. In this blog post, we’ll discuss a few ways you can become a better “attention grabber.”

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

What are the goals of your booth? Are you looking to distribute giveaway items, trying to get direct sales, or simply collect information from the visitors? No matter which it is, understanding what your goals are at the trade show will help you dictate the appropriate ways to grab an individual’s attention. Here are a few examples:

1. Giving away items: If your goal is to distribute items as a giveaway and to build your brand voice, try making it a game. Maybe something with lights, sounds, or by having staffers who encourage passersby to engage. You could try the following games: Pachinko (a mechanical arcade game) – Immediate gift giveaway, Raffle Tickets – Announcement of winners each hour.

2. Getting direct sales: If your goal is to get direct sales, give a discount for individuals who purchase at the show, and provide a means of which they can do so. You could also try the following concepts: Announce a new product – Special-opportunity just at the show or schedule “next steps” appointments to close the sale in your office.

3. Collecting information: If your goal is to just collect prospect information, provide some sort of a trade for their information. Some trade ideas you could use to collect include giveaways, discounts, contests, etc. You can collect information via surveys, a business card scanner or by using lead retrieval software.

ENGAGE THEM IN THE BOOTH

Great, you got people into the booth (or to stop out in front of it). Now what? Well, you must be able to further attract your audiences as they are engaged in what you have to offer. The main elements that you need to have in your booth include:

- 1. The correct people:** As we have discussed in the past, it’s crucial to have the correct people in your booth. This includes individuals who are:
- a. Warm and welcoming
 - b. Passionate
 - c. Understanding and willing to listen

Once you have the ideal audiences in your booth, it’s up to the people to engage them appropriately.

Create & distribute appropriate collateral: Guess what? Not everyone will be looking for a long conversation. So, make sure you have collateral that’s available to be digested at a later time. Some of this data includes:

- a. Business cards
- b. Short brochure postcards with key information
- c. Minizines

Engaging people in the booth should be personal and emotional. This is the time you are allowed to be a little more informal (still professional) in engaging your potential clients.

HOW DO YOU LET THEM LEAVE

How people leave your booth can really determine how they remember the experience. Was it exciting, unique, or just plain awkward? Make sure that you’re intentional about having a “walk away” strategy such as a small giveaway, a follo-up promise if appropriate and a

sincere ‘thank you’ for visiting us.

Think about Jimmy John’s for example. Part of their branding is yelling “hello” and “goodbye” in a friendly way. Because of this, you leave Jimmy John’s with a good sandwich and a memorable experience.

What’s your “Jimmy John’s goodbye” for your trade show booth?

Grabbing the attention of your trade show audience is completely up to you. Go ahead and be intentional, you know your audience better than anyone.



BUDGETING



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR 10×10 TRADE SHOW BOOTH SPACE

— *Tammy Scordo*

You don't need to have a large booth space to make a big impact at a trade show. There are plenty of successful exhibitors that use 10' x 10' spaces. It really all comes down to maximizing your brand and building relationships with prospective clients. Below are some ideas to help you maximize your brand while increasing lead generation:

- **Budget** – Set a realistic budget and buy a quality exhibit. Realistically a 10' x 10' exhibit can range from \$2,000 – \$15,000. An exhibit is a representation of your company. You don't want to buy an inexpensive one that will break down after a couple uses and represent your company poorly.
- **Work with a Reputable Exhibit Company** – Working with a company that has a local presence and a good reputation will put your mind at ease. Make sure they offer great service and continued support long after a purchase is made. You may be tempted to purchase an exhibit online because it's a great deal but remember that sometimes things are too good to be true and you get what you pay for.
- **Graphics** – This is a great way to tell your brand's story. When designing the graphics think about the target audience. People don't need to know everything about your company upfront. You want to pique their interest, so they want to talk to you and building a relationship.
- **Lighting** – Don't skip the lighting. LED lights are durable, help highlight graphics and brighten up a space.
- **Backlighting** – This is a great way to make your graphics and brand pop. It adds interest to the booth space and will make your exhibit stand out from the competition while attracting attendees.
- **Merchandising** – Only bring products you want to showcase at the show. You can store a couple of additional products, add other product photos to the graphics, or add them to collateral or videos.
- **Movement** – Use a monitor in your booth with a looping video or images to add movement to the booth space.

- **Booth Staff** – Having well trained staff is a necessity at trade shows. They are meeting the prospective clients face to face and need to be able to qualify what type of leads they are.
- **Qualifying Leads** – Create a ranking system to qualify leads: low, medium and high. Doing this will help your sales team be more efficient with their time and close more deals.
- **Games and Promotions** – Attract attendees with interactive games and promotional giveaways. The participants will be more likely to give their contact information if they have a chance to win something or have fun.
- **Social Media** – Post about the upcoming trade show and create hashtags for attendees to use. Also use the show hashtag. Create live videos during the show and post photos to encourage attendees to stop by.
- **Email Marketing Campaigns** – Create targeted campaigns before and after the show.

If you follow all of these tips you will have great success gathering leads and attention with a small space and achieve positive return on investment. Good luck at your next show!



BOOSTING YOUR TRADE SHOW AND EVENT BUDGET

— Bobby Scott

Few event planners are given the luxury of setting their own budget for a trade show. Working with a predetermined budget is common but can be tricky to work around. When planning for a large exhibit, you may be surprised at how quickly your budget can dwindle down into pocket change. Certainly, there are always cheaper options to everything – from promotional materials to staff members. But the goal isn’t to be cheap, the goal is to cut unnecessary costs and invest in your non-negotiables.



In order to cut out unnecessary expenses, ask yourself, and your team, these questions:

- What are our goals?
 - To sell a product?
 - To expand our brand recognition?
 - To perform multiple product demos?
- How much space will we need to meet those goals?
 - The average space for an exhibitor is a 10’ x 10’ cube. Will you need more space or less?
- How many people do we need to meet those goals?
 - Do we need to bring along our entire team?
 - Will volunteers be able to represent our company well?
 - Remember, your budget must include feeding, housing and transporting everyone you bring along.
- What are our non-negotiables?
 - Create a list of absolute non-negotiables. What are the things you absolutely cannot go without at this specific trade show?

Having a clear idea of your specific trade show needs is a vital part of the planning process. Once you’ve determined those answers, organize your needs by category:

- Employee salaries
 - Are you outsourcing staff? What are their rates?
 - Using volunteers at a trade show would certainly cut your costs, but will a volunteer represent your company to its fullest potential?
- Travel
 - Hotel costs
 - Food costs
 - Transportation costs
 - Shipping of materials
(Shipping of booth and marketing materials can be one of the most unexpected costs along the planning process. If you are traveling for a trade show, consider your shipping costs, to and from, on the front end in order save yourself surprise expenses.)
- Marketing materials
 - Printing costs of banners, posters, flyers, pamphlets, business cards
 - New technology and content to display
 - Video/audio/design
- Miscellaneous costs (giveaways, staffer attire)

Outside of all of the necessary items you’ll be planning for, don’t forget all the random must haves along the way.

Once you’ve determined the answers to these questions, the budget planning process can begin. Your list of non-negotiables may be long, but don’t let yourself be overwhelmed! Tackle one item at a time with your team. And remember to take note in your budgeting spreadsheet of what you learn at each show you attend. You may learn that you forgot something crucial, or that one of your largest expenses could have been avoided.

SEVEN TIPS FOR STRETCHING YOUR EXHIBIT DOLLARS

— Jon Althoff

Whether you’re planning your company’s first exhibit or taking over an exhibit schedule previously handled by another trade show manager, the associated costs can be a little intimidating. If your budget is limited, these seven tips can help you get the most out of your exhibit dollars:

1. CONSIDER RENTAL

Booth rental can sometimes be a more practical solution than owning, particularly if you’re uncertain about your long-term commitment to exhibiting. Short-term rental expenses may make more sense than buying and amortizing custom materials that may later end up going unused. When locally sourced, rentals can often save you shipping and storage expenses.

2. REFURBISH RATHER THAN REPLACE

Trade show exhibits can start to show their wear after several years of cross-country travel. If your budget is tight and you can’t commit to a brand-new booth, consider updating your signage or adding a few new components.

3. CONSOLIDATE YOUR SHIPMENTS

Although it’s not always possible to send your materials in one shipment, any minimum parcel fees can really add up if you end up sending 15-20 additional boxes after your initial pallet. When you do send follow-up shipments, try to shrink-wrap them into a single unit, which will save you parcel fees, and reduce the chance of lost boxes.

4. REMEMBER: “FREEMIUMS” AREN’T FREE

Your booth giveaways may seem small and inconsequential, but their costs do add up. As nice as it can be to have swag customized for each event, the costs of those short-run orders can really break the bank. Strive for “evergreen” giveaways that you can use at every show and buy in bulk to lower your unit costs.



5. CONSIDER VIRTUAL SWAG

A lot of mass-merchandise premiums end up generating no leads or are essentially exchanged for hundreds of cold leads that your sales team will never have time to follow up on. Instead of giving away lots of mediocre giveaways, put several pieces of highly-visible, highly-valuable swag on display. When attendees inquire about it, offer to mail it to them after the show in exchange for answering a detailed digital marketing survey. You’ll likely see a better ROI on your investment this way, and your sales team will have better qualified, post-show leads.

6. LESS IS MORE FOR BANNERS

Keep your trade show graphics as simple as possible, so you can reuse them from year to year. Save the details, limited time offers, etc., for your booth staffers to share in show floor conversations.

7. EXPLORE COOPERATIVE BOOTH SPACE

Sharing a booth with an allied local business can not only let you split booth costs, it may allow you access to a better location in the show than you could afford if exhibiting solo. In addition, you can often capitalize on each other’s marketing leads.

CUTTING TRADE SHOW MARKETING EXPENSES

— Scott Price

There are times when the growth in your spending will outpace the growth of your revenue. This is certainly common among start-ups, but it also applies when you’re expanding into new markets or product/service areas, undergoing an economic downturn, or if you’ve just become a little lackadaisical in managing aspects of your budget.

Since you need to “spend money to make money,” you want to be careful never to cut marketing efforts in a way that will hamper your business’ ability to grow. But if your promotional expenses have never been clearly tied to strategic goals, if your marketing efforts are out of sync with sales priorities, or you’re not getting an effective ROI on your expenditures, then it’s time to reexamine where and how you’re spending your marketing and advertising dollars.

FIRST, MEASURE EVERYTHING

Your key performance indicators (KPIs) will vary depending on your marketing goals. Sales and leads are some of the most obvious KPIs to track. But if you’ve had concurrent goals related to brand awareness, engagement, customer loyalty, etc., then you need to have unique defined KPIs to help you monitor performance. These KPIs might be social media mentions, website referral traffic, traffic from your branded search campaigns, etc. The critical thing is to have those measurements in place. Without a clearly defined KPI, you can’t defend the necessity of any marketing or advertising campaign.

OPTIMIZE RATHER THAN REDUCE

It can be tempting to make across-the-board cuts to marketing budgets. But this can lead to reduced sales, leads and missed “fire sale” promotional opportunities. Look at which campaigns are generating good ROIs,



and consider shifting your spend there. If you’re a department in a larger organization, retaining your budget this way is often easier than having to later go back and ask higher-ups to rescind a previous year’s cut. And in all cases, it can allow you to continue to grow your business during economic downturns, while your competitors are actually reducing their visibility. You’ll end up enjoying much better market share and brand awareness after the economy improves.

SHIFT DOLLARS TOWARD TRUE CONVERSIONS

If you’ve been focusing your spend on generating site traffic, you might want to shift more of that toward lead generation instead. Or, if prior marketing efforts already generated a lot of leads, you may want to focus on nurturing them, rather than on generating new leads.

If all these efforts seem to result in nothing but non-converting prospects, it may be time to put more focus on cross-selling or upselling your existing

customers. The standard cost comparison between a new customer and old one is five times the expense, so it often makes sense to spend the bulk of your marketing dollars regularly targeting your best customers, rather than prospecting widely.

FOCUS ON EMAIL AND SOCIAL

Targeted email marketing typically provides more measurability than a brand-awareness campaign, and can be done at a comparatively lower cost. But be careful not to badger your list members too much or you risk fewer email-opens or even dropped subscribers. Instead, segment your audience, personalize your messaging, and think of innovative ways to reward your best customers for their loyalty.

Similarly, social media offers many opportunities when your own budget – or the industry’s – is tightening. In comparison to other marketing outlets, social media allows you to reach a large number of people organically or through low-cost promotions. In turn, budget-conscious buyers often turn to social media for peer recommendations before making purchasing decisions, so social media is a great place to be when everyone else is feeling an economic pinch. Social platforms also become a defacto meeting place when personal or business travel budgets have been cut, providing the social marketer with a growing audience when attendance elsewhere is seemingly shrinking.

OUTSOURCE SOME WORK

Outsourcing some of your marketing tasks can have a dramatic effect on your bottom line, converting some of your highest, fixed payroll costs into variable costs. Outsourcing also allows you to focus more of your energy on generating sales and leads rather than



scrambling to find tasks to keep your internal staff busy.

AUTOMATE YOUR MARKETING

If you are still not using marketing automation software, you’re wasting valuable staff time doing something that software can do on your behalf. Marketing automation lets you send instant thank you notes to prospects from the trade show floor, reiterate your value proposition, and engage prospects with links to site materials that support your trade show message. After that, it’s an easy matter to use it to schedule “drip campaigns,” nurturing segments of your list with custom case studies, white papers, webinars, exclusive offers and more.

Cutting the fat from your trade show marketing budget doesn’t necessarily have to reduce your visibility to a shadow of its former self. Through smart budget reallocation, outsourcing and automation, you can optimize your marketing and ad spend in a way that will find you accomplishing more with less.

