

# Trade Show Success: You Can't Just Show Up

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*Did you know a trade show exhibit can produce a 10-to-1 return on investment? The problem is many exhibitors let profits and prospects slip away because they don't utilize a trade show correctly. For example, if you measure results by crowded aisles or quantity of leads, you're out of touch with the reality of shows. Attendees have changed from brochure collectors to serious shoppers. Today, the most effective exhibitors are ones who are prepared to spend more time with a visitor than just handing out company brochures or collecting business cards. Making trade shows work for you means providing answers and solutions with personal attention to visitors at your exhibit. Assuming you've found the right show, there are certain basics to keep in mind about what you display and how you display it.*

## **1. The Right Message.**

You might draw lots of people with games, giveaways or drawings for a prize, but they won't be your best prospects. Serious prospects are resistant to gimmicks. So says, Dr. Allen Konopacki, a trade show consultant and president of InComm International, a Chicago-based research and sales training organization. "Explain what your product or service will do for them," he adds.

## **2. Set Your Goals.**

The single biggest mistake you can make as an exhibitor is to focus on image or awareness rather than trying to achieve a specific goal. A specific goal would be something like reaching 50 people able to buy your \$10,000 piece of equipment within four to six months. Don't overestimate the results of exhibiting. Despite predictions that thousands will attend, reality says that a 10' x 10' exhibit will probably reach 400 to 600 people. Using 24 show hours as a time frame, that gets down to making talking to 10 people per hour or 240 prospects per booth staffer. Konopacki emphasizes that 10% to 20% can be excellent prospects if you actively greet visitors and not just wait for them to come to you with questions.

## **3. Don't Create Barricades.**

Granted, most shows throw in a skirted table or two with your booth package. However, studies show leaving the center of the exhibit open will increase traffic by 25%. Place your tables off to the side and always have an open entry. People have a tendency to stand behind a table with their arms folded looking like a palace guard or a sentry protecting the booth. So, don't create a barricade.

## **4. Avoid Stacking Brochures.**

If you want to avoid the "grab-and-run" effect, don't stack hordes of brochures on counters and tables. This only causes attendees to walk by freely grabbing brochures and then dashing away with an armload of your company's brochures. Literature acts as a barrier to conversation and chances are, will be discarded at the first opportunity. Solution: display only one or two copies of a brochure and this will more likely create a request from a visitor.

## **5. Don't Overcrowd the Booth.**

Companies often send several reps to major industry shows. These people feel compelled to gather at the company booth not only outnumbering visitors, but also monopolizing staffer time and restricting visitor interaction. Company executives are often the worst offenders. Have strict rules regarding

employees visiting the show and insist staffers not scheduled for booth duty stay away until their assigned time. As a rule of thumb, you need two booth staffers per 100 square feet of open booth space.

## **6. Follow Up Promptly.**

The key to your trade show success is wrapped up in the lead-management process. The best time to plan for follow-up is before the trade show. The longer leads are left unattended, the colder and more mediocre they become. It's to your advantage to develop an organized, systematic approach to follow-up. Make sales reps accountable for leads given to them and then measure your results.

*Hopefully these tips will help you better understand there's more to trade shows than "just showing up." Unfortunately, many companies believe that trade shows last only for a few days; they interfere with the normal selling routine and are often a hindrance to the employees involved in them. In reality, exhibiting is a powerful extension your company's advertising, promotion, public relations and sales function and is an opportunity for organizations to become more immersed in their marketplace.*



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