

Make it worth your while

Getting the Most from your Tradeshow Booth

BEFORE THE SHOW:

- 1) It's best not to exhibit at a tradeshow you've never attended. To get the most out of a show, you should know who the attendees REALLY are, as it is sometimes different from who the producer told you they were. If timing allows, ATTEND this year, and talk to exhibitors about their experience and the value they get. This will help you decide if it is worth the trouble and expense to exhibit NEXT year.
- 2) Have solid goals. Long before you go, make sure you and your team know WHY you are going. Do you hope to write orders and sell things from the show floor? Gather leads? Create brand awareness? Something else entirely? There are many valid reasons for exhibiting at a show. Whatever your reason, make sure you set measurable goals so you can know whether you succeeded. Selling products? How many or how much revenue? Leads? How many? Start with your goal and then craft a plan to achieve it.
- 3) If you already have a booth, set it up well in advance of the show in your own facility so you can repair or replace anything that isn't up to snuff.
- 4) If you have time and budget, consider creating graphics just for this show or industry.
- 5) Select your booth space EARLY to get the best spot.
- 6) Make sure you understand and have ordered the booth "extras" you may need like power and internet access. Some shows offer the rental of tables and chairs. You generally should not use these as they entice your booth staff to sit down where they are less likely to interact. But if you need a table to put a display on and have a nice table-cloth to cover it with, this is the time to order it.
- 7) Pack an "emergency repair kit." Put a box cutter, binder-clips, duct tape, extension cords, extra power-strips, and anything specific to your booth, industry or needs into a plastic tub. Make sure it gets loaded with the booth.
- 8) In the month leading up to the show, add a note about your attendance at the show to your email signature.
- 9) It's also great to add a note to your website. If you exhibit frequently, your website should have a spot that lists all the shows you'll be at for the next year or so.
- 10) If you get a pre-show list of attendees, consider very carefully how you use it. Even if it is a big show, DON'T send out a generic "stop by booth xzy" email. DO send out personal invitations to existing clients and prospects who will be in attendance. Call them by name and treat them as individuals.
- 11) Make sure each employee attending the show creates out-of-office email responders and voice-mail messages saying that they will check and reply AFTER the show day is over. They should refer things that need an instant response to a specific human being who will be in the office.
- 12) Make an "at-the-show" publicity plan. How will you get people to your booth? Giving away pens isn't a plan. This is a situation where a top-notch promotional consultant like Reno Type can really help — but don't wait till a week before the show. Two months is about the minimum lead time to do it RIGHT

AT THE SHOW:

- 1) Make booth personnel place their phones in a bin. They don't come out except at planned breaks. Your staff needs to engage with attendees, and they can't do that while staring at their devices.
- 2) Dress appropriately for the audience, and make sure everyone in your booth dresses so they are clearly identifiable as belonging to your booth. Same color shirts and slacks/skirts, or company logoed apparel, or matching hats. The goal is to make sure attendees know who they can talk to.
- 3) Make sure everyone knows their role. Who is recording leads/scanning badges? Who is the product expert? Who handles technical questions? Who will back these folks up in case the primary person is unavailable?
- 4) Engage and be responsive. If you are talking to one prospect and another is waiting, make sure you acknowledge them. "I'll be with you in a sec. Thanks!" or better yet, invite them into the conversation. Very likely they have the same questions as does the person you are already talking to!
- 5) Have a system for recording specific requests and promises or anything that will help you connect with a prospect after the show. Make sure everyone uses the system! A generic "It was nice to meet you at the show, here's a link to my website" email sent to all attendees will not get opened and will not impress your prospect. But a personal email that says "I have a sample of that widget we talked about on the way to you. I plan on sending you the blue one, because that's that color on your business card, but let me know if you'd like something different" will have a profound impact.
- 6) Arrange your booth in a manner to invite people into the space. A table, for example is best at the back of the booth or along the side where it won't be a barrier between your staff and attendees.
- 7) Give away wintergreen lifesavers and promotional pens or some other inexpensive item to everyone who visits your booth. For people you intend to stay in contact with, hand out the nicer items that you have kept hidden, such as the leather padfolios.
- 8) Always keep your booth attended, even if the show appears dead or traffic is light. You never know who might come by. Light and dead traffic times can be a great opportunity to connect with other exhibitors, many of whom are potential clients.

AFTER THE SHOW:

- 1) The show isn't over until you've spent two days in the office after the show following up. This is where the rubber hits the road. STAY IN THE TRADESHOW MINDSET until all your leads are in your CRM, and individual follow-ups have been completed. Follow-ups include sending any requested samples, catalogs or quotes. If you send an email after the show, make sure it is personal and relevant. It should mention something specific about the recipient's interaction with you at the show. DON'T send a generic email to every attendee thanking them for "stopping by" your booth. If you are not committed to personal and relevant post-show interaction, don't go to the show.
- 2) Set-up, examine and repair your booth. Put it away carefully so it is easy to set up at your next show!
- 3) Review. Meet with your entire team and get input from all of them. Did you meet your goals? If not, why? Could you change something next time? Was it worth it? If so, set your goals for next year.



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