

TRADE SHOW TIPS FOR NEW EXHIBITORS



Skyline®

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Introduction

Trade shows are deceptively simple looking. It appears to be no harder than popping up a display, standing in your booth space, and then waiting for all the buyers to waltz in and give you their money. If only it was that easy.

The reality is that trade shows require a wide array of skills, including marketing, planning, organization, communications, team-building, and more. You need an eye for details, and the people skills of a diplomat. You need the creativity of an artist, and the financial drive of an entrepreneur.

You also must build your ability to do specific key tasks for your trade shows to succeed: trade show logistics, booth staff selection, training, and staffing; exhibit design; pre-show and at-show promotions; lead management; and measurement of your program's results.

This book provides you with the tools you need to get started on all these areas. Most of all, it provides you with a base level of expectations you can take to heart about the challenges and potential to succeed at trade shows. These insights will allow you to shorten your learning curve and feel more comfortable even at the beginning of your trade show journey.

Just remember this: all trade show exhibitors were new exhibitors at one time. And while trade shows look daunting at first, you will get through this, and eventually become a veteran exhibitor yourself.

This book contains 25 articles previously published in the Skyline Trade Show Tips blog, and is one of three books in a series for exhibitors at different levels of trade show marketing skills. The three books are **Trade Show Tips for New Exhibitors**, **Trade Show Tips for Inline Exhibitors**, and **Trade Show Tips for Island Exhibitors**. Thanks to Dave Lutz of Velvet Chainsaw Consulting for the idea to create these three books. If you want to get the other two, contact Skyline.

And for up-to-the-minute trade show tips, go to www.skylinetradeshowtips.com for more ideas, insights, and inspiration for your trade show program -- and career.

Your Local Skyline Exhibiting Consultant

The logo for Skyline, featuring the word "Skyline" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font with a registered trademark symbol (®) to the upper right of the "e". The letters have a slight 3D effect with a lighter blue shadow underneath.

Overview of Trade Show Marketing

10 Mistakes Exhibitors Make

Reggie Lyons

You've got a tremendous investment, not only in money, but also time and hopefully training in marketing your business at trade shows. Don't get in the way of your own success!

Here are the 10 mistakes I see exhibitors make again and again:

1) Underselling your company with bad graphics: All too often I've seen companies represent themselves at trade shows with a patchwork of a "display." I've seen vinyl banners wrapped around foam board, dented or dinged up displays, and a variety of hodgepodge displays. Represent your company in the best light possible. A less-than-professional appearance does not give your prospect confidence in you or your products and services. This type of display will send prospects running to the competition.

2) Putting way too much text on your display: You've got literally seconds to get someone's attention as they stroll around the show floor. No one will stop to read a lot of text. Please understand that you cannot tell your entire company story on your trade show display.

3) Not promoting your presence at trade shows: So you've got a great looking booth and you're all ready to go. So where is everyone? Why don't you have any traffic coming into your booth? What have you done to promote your presence at the show? Let your clients and prospects know about your trade show appearances by using an e-newsletter and

social media. Plan the launch of a new product/service around a show to create a buzz. Send invites directly to those prospects that you may not have connected with in the past.

4) Not training your booth staff and discussing proper expectations: So your booth staffers are sitting down instead of engaging with prospects. Are they more concerned with playing games, texting, or chatting away while prospects stroll right by your booth? Make sure you set the proper expectations before the show. Don't make the assumption that because you have professional sales people they will understand the nuances of how to work in a trade show environment. Staff your booth with people who are as good or better than you!

5) Not listening to your prospects needs: Don't be so excited to get your message across and sell your product that you miss out on important info about your clients' needs. Also, be aware of body language and pick up any visual cues that may help you understand your clients' needs even better. Take advantage of everything that a face-to-face interaction has to offer.

6) Depending on a fishbowl to bring in qualified leads: Lose the fishbowl! Is this type of giveaway really giving you the qualified leads you are seeking? Be an expert provider of solutions and you don't necessarily need a generic giveaway contest to drive traffic to your booth.

7) Hauling too much literature to your booth: Most of the literature handed out at trade shows doesn't make it past the garbage can in your prospects' hotel room. Instead, write "Show Sample" on a copy of your literature to display at the show, and then get your prospect's contact

info to email or mail the info to them after the show. It will also save you the expense of shipping your heavy literature around. This gives you a great call to action to follow up with your prospect after the show. Explore technology to get information in your prospects hands. QR codes and mobile marketing platforms are great ways to do this.

8) Not planning for trade show success: We don't plan to fail, we fail to plan! In talking to clients who haven't seen the results they were expecting, this is something that is very prevalent. If you don't have a good plan in place you won't be able to show an ROI to justify future shows and all you've really done is waste a lot of time and money. Discuss timelines with your trade show marketing consultant, get feedback from industry peers, do your homework.

9) Not informing your exhibit service partner: Make sure that the service/I&D crews handling the logistics of your booth understand what's going on with your booth. Get them a lists of shows for the year so that your booth gets from one show to the next, deciding which shows you have time to ship to the advanced warehouse and which events you may have to ship direct to the show. Discuss any unique items such as products in the booth, monitors, height limitations, etc.

10) Not following up on leads: Though it seems like a no-brainer, you need to make sure that your leads are called on in a timely fashion. Discuss next steps, quoting, future meetings, and provide any additional information they need. It's time to deliver on the promises and the expectations that you have set at the show.

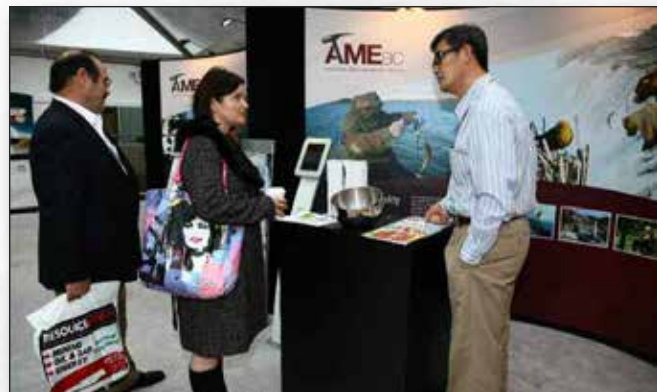
Mistakes of course are common and learning from them is the key. What mistakes have you made as an exhibitor or have you seen that can help your peers?

Avoiding Rookie Mistakes At A Trade Show

Are you currently in the process of setting up a booth for a trade show for the very first time? Congratulations! Trade show displays are one of the best ways for an organization to make a major (and lasting) marketing impact on their targeted client demographic. Businesses in virtually every industry and vertical market have long since relied on this proven promotional tactic to entice the masses to step into to their booths and get an up-close and personal look at what their business has to offer. Sounds like a marketing home run, right?

Success With Trade Show Displays Requires Strategy And Focus

Well, yes and no. While setting up a booth for a trade show does deliver countless benefits such as face-to-face customer engagement, affiliation and partnership opportunities as well as ample chances to eyeball the competition (totally fair game during an event!), reaping maximum benefits from trade show booths does require some pre-event strategizing and at-show focus. All too often, business leaders simply (and wrongfully) assume that they can set up their banner stands and trade show displays, flip the switch to "auto-pilot," and sit back and wait for the leads to start rolling in.



Know Which Missteps To Circumvent For Optimal Return On Investment

Fortunately, just like any promotional initiative, there are some key rookie mistakes that businesses can avoid right out of the gate to help ensure success. If you're ready to start taking the marketing arena by storm, then never:

Overdo it with your trade show displays:

Companies that flaunt for the simple sake of flaunting can be a major client deterrent. Nothing can repel potential clients faster than seeing booths that scream "BRAGGART!" While a few eye-catching bells and whistles are nice, make sure most of your exhibit stays focused on informing the crowd.



Underdo it with your trade show displays:

Nobody likes a cheapskate. If your booth for a trade show looks like something out of a time machine, update it! Remember, this is the first impression many clients will have of your company; you must look financially stable and relevant at all times.

Wing-it with your pitch: Even the most articulate and persuasive salespeople find that pitching to the crowds at a marketing convention



is an entirely different approach than cold calling, appointments, etc. Always train your team (you can even hire an outside provider who specializes in convention sales tactics) to ensure that they are prepared to best represent your organization no matter who peeks into the booth.

Miss an opportunity to check out the other exhibitors:

All too often, rookie exhibitors feel like they have to be chained to their trade show displays at all times. Yes, there should always be at least 1 or 2 staff members manning the exhibits, but it's important to always make sure your team has the opportunity to walk around and check out the goings-on during the function. As previously mentioned, checking out the competition is an event-approved benefit and should always be a priority when attending. However, chances are, there are also a multitude of non-competing businesses there as well; make sure that you and your team make the rounds and network, network, network!

Being a rookie isn't all bad. Remember, there are positive aspects to being a first-timer at trade shows, too. You will bring a fresh perspective and enthusiasm to the show and be able to see things that the veterans may have been overlooking for years. Combine that insight with these tips and you can make your first trade show a success!

Why Didn't That Attendee Stop In My Trade Show Booth?

Mike Thimmesch

He sure looked like a perfectly good prospect. He had the right color badge. He works at a company that is in the right vertical market and the right size. And your uncanny booth staffing sixth sense told you he even had an approved budget for your product.

Yet with barely a glance he sailed right on past your booth. So why didn't he drop anchor? Perhaps for one or more of these 8 reasons:

1. **Your booth looked too boring.** Like too many other exhibitors, your trade show booth has dull colors, too much text, and too many small images.
2. **Your benefit was not clear.** With all that text, or else none at all, your trade show booth graphics didn't quickly communicate what you sell — and why you are worth buying from.
3. **He doesn't know you can solve his problems.** Because he doesn't know your company yet, and what it can do for him.
4. **Your booth staffers didn't appeal to him.** They looked unprofessional, uninterested, unmotivated, and pre-occupied — not the kind of people he wants to talk to — let alone buy from, for that matter.
5. **Your booth staff didn't attempt to engage him.** Rather than offer a greeting or ask a question, they stared into space, or talked with each other, or into the phone.



6. **Your booth space lacks activity.** It looks too dull compared to other exhibitors who are having energetic conversations, presentations, demos, and more.
7. **He wasn't invited.** He has only so much time to visit booths, so those that asked him to visit before the show get first dibs. Or perhaps...
8. **He already has an appointment.** He breezed past you on the way to a meeting with another exhibitor further into the hall. But you can still get him on his return trip — if he walks down your aisle again.

If you want to stop the parade of qualified attendees walking by, but not into, your booth, then improve your exhibit's visual appeal, amp up your booth staff, create engaging activities, and get on attendees' dance card before the show starts.

Then you can have many good conversations in your booth. Which sure beats talking to yourself.



10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started Exhibiting At Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

Recently I posted on our blog the “10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started In Marketing” ([see page 14 in this book](#)) and was amazed at the response. So, in that same vein, here are 10 indispensable lessons I’ve learned about trade shows that I wish I’d had known before I started exhibiting.

- 1. You won’t succeed at trade shows if you just show up.** A trade show first-timer may think that because they’ve paid a couple of grand to rent a 10 x 10 space for a few days, they automatically will reap the whirlwind of leads and sales from the show’s attendees. If only. Surprise: you’ve actually only paid for access to this great audience of buyers. Now you have to do your part, such as train your staffers, create a promotion that attracts qualified prospects, and design your trade show display to entice the right visitors to your booth.
- 2. Trade shows are not as glamorous as they looked from the outside.** To the uninitiated, this is what trade show marketing looks like from the outside: Flying around the country to sunny or metropolitan locations, staying in top-tier hotels and meals on the company dime, and access to top-level company execs. But seen from the inside, trade shows are not so glamorous. Trade shows themselves are very hard work with a lot of stressful moments before, during, and after exhibit hours. There are so many details to master, and so many vendors you are depending on. You can sweat more during exhibit set-up than a month of work outs. And while travel can be exciting, it gets old fast when you are repeatedly away from home and your family.

- 3. Inertia determined much of your company’s show schedule.** In the many years before you were handed the reins to your company’s trade show marketing, your company cobbled together quite a list of shows. But are they all still worth it? Were some trade shows chosen because your target market was there, or because your competitors were? Has your client base evolved away from the demographics of some of the shows you exhibit at? Have some shows eroded their attendee base by not reinvesting in strong marketing and educational content? Are there new vertical markets that you have yet to find good shows to market to? It’s up to you to break the inertia — and create some new momentum.

- 4. Trade show labor is way more expensive than you think, and sometimes it’s even worth it.** It’s an eye-opener to find out how much you will pay someone else to set up your booth, hook up your lights, or rig that hanging sign, especially if it’s on a weekend, or God forbid, on a Sunday. The union rules in most venues require that you pay labor a wage that adds up in a hurry, even if they don’t. You can minimize labor costs by getting easier to set up trade show displays, trying to schedule your set up for straight-time labor, and by lining up dependable contractors. I’ve found some Exhibitor Appointed Contractors are worth it, as they work hard to earn your business, show after show.

- 5. You will blow your trade show budget if you don’t plan well.** You can never plan too far ahead, especially for overseas shows. Your budget was likely set with the best-case scenario for your trade show expenses, without room to pay for late fees and rush charges. That’s

powerful incentive to quickly master the show book. Fortunately, after several shows you learn what you really need to order (electrical, leads machine, carpet) and what form pages you will likely skip (plumbing, signage, security). A pad of Post-It Notes or a good electronic scheduling software helps you flag your most pressing deadlines.

6. Everybody wants to help you pick the trade show exhibit color. No one wants to help you track the leads. When it comes to exhibit design, everyone has an opinion. And in the time leading up to the show, they will all clamor to offer their ideas, making it harder to get the booth built on time without rush charges. Yet after the show, you will have a harder time getting similar participation in tracking the leads from the show – ostensibly the reason you designed your exhibit in the first place. Remind your colleagues that if you can't prove the results from this year's show, you won't be exhibiting at the show next year.

7. The 10 minutes after the show closes is when most damage happens to your trade show exhibit. The show ends with a voice booming over the loudspeakers saying, "The show is closed, see you next year." But to impatient booth staffers, it's as if they had actually shouted, "Drivers, start your engines!"

Booth staffers hurry to win the race to the taxi stand, hotel, bar, restaurant, or parking lot. And if you have a portable trade show display that your booth staffers pack up, this is when they break it, by shoving it in its case as fast as they can. Close that expensive window of time by getting a more durable display, getting better packaging, or just by having a frank conversation with your staffers before the closing bell. Or, if you're the one who wants to win the race, take a deep breath and slow down before you make a costly mistake.

8. Drayage is the most expensive way to move your exhibit the shortest distance. As a trade show newbie, one of the biggest surprises is that you have to pay to have your exhibit moved from the shipping dock to your booth space. Even more shocking is just how much you'll have to pay — about the same to move something across a convention center as it does to ship it across country. Drayage rates have risen by double-digit percentages in some of the last few years, probably because more exhibitors switched to lighter weight trade show booths like Skyline's. To offset the lower weight of exhibit properties, drayage charges per pound have increased. If your exhibit is still made the old-fashioned way, it's a double-whammy.



9. **It's hard for booth staffers to take their very first lead at a trade show.** In our lives we go through various, potentially scary rites of passage: learning to ride a bike, going to your first day of school, asking for a date to the prom. While all of these have been immortalized in film, no movie has yet to bring to the silver screen the epic tale of a first-time booth staffer engaging and writing up their first trade show lead. What would yours have been, a horror film? A comedy? A tragedy? Whatever kind of movie it would be, it would also be a drama, because it's you're likely filled with nervous energy as you go out and ask a perfect stranger face to face if they'd like to do business with your company. Just remember that your booth visitors actually paid to visit the show, and many are shopping for solutions to their problems that your products can solve. Practice the process of engage, qualify, present, and close, and you'll be more comfortable taking your first lead.

10. **Trade shows can be addictive.** With the hard work, long hours, and time away from home, some people can't wait to return from their trade show. But for others, trade shows are a calling. They get jazzed by the performance aspect, the blitz of direct client contact, and the relationships built before and during the show. They like the ability to create a successful marketing program in a medium built upon the value of face-to-face interactions. And that's when trade shows really become addictive: when you master the medium and drive serious revenue to your company's bottom line.

I hope that if you're an experienced exhibitor that you've been nodding in agreement as you read this, and that you share this with your newer trade show marketing staff. What important lessons of your own would you add as #11? Think about that as you get ready for your next show.

10 More Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started Exhibiting At Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

My recent article, "10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started Exhibiting At Trade Shows," generated a lot of response, ranging from nostalgia to chuckles to gratitude. So I dug a little deeper and came up with 10 more things I wished I knew before I started exhibiting at trade shows:

1. **There are attendees at the show who are actually looking for what you offer.** While some booth staffers work the booth with a nearly invincible sense of confidence, there are some who are reluctant to engage attendees. To give yourself a mental push towards the aisle, remember that trade show attendees actually paid to travel to the show and they want to be there. Most come with a shopping list, and provided you've chosen a show where the attendees match your target market, there's no reason you can't be the one they buy from. Many times I've had attendees who turned into leads thank me for engaging them, because we offered what they came to the show to find.

2. **Promotions are a huge help for your booth staffers.** It takes a high level of skill for trade show booth staffers to pull lots of attendees out of the aisle. Many lack that skill. Give them a hand with a good promotion. Send a pre-show promotion that gives attendees a strong reason to plan a visit to your booth, and visitors will walk in and engage your staffers, not the other way around. Have a great at-show promotion, and motivate attendees to cross into your booth on their own. Good promotions help booth staffers start conversations that lead to leads, which leads to sales.

3. **Time may seem to be passing slowly, but it's actually precious.** At almost every show there comes a time when your watch seems to be moving in slow motion. If you had three wishes from a genie, you'd use one to have the show end. However, trade show time is never to be wished away. Your company has made a big investment to get in front of hundreds, if not thousands of potential clients. It's a worthwhile investment, but even still, there is only a finite number of show hours to meet your prospects. Retain a sense of urgency as long as there are attendees walking the show floor. You've paid for the access, get your money's worth.

4. **Your exhibit has too much stuff on it.** When your trade show exhibit is designed, it's usually from your company's perspective, not the attendee's perspective. So it gets loaded up with too many fun facts, figures, and other text, plus too many small images, and perhaps lots of products, too. The result? A visual morass that attendees avoid. Instead, put fewer elements on your exhibit, but make them bigger. That way, your message will be crystal-clear to your attendees, and they will understand why they will benefit visiting your booth.

5. **Go to bed early the night before you booth staff.** I can remember just after college hitting the bars until the early hours night after night, and then getting up for work at 6 am the next day without any problem. Regretfully, my body doesn't work that way anymore, and chances are, yours doesn't either. And yet, when we are away from home, in a town designed more for fun than our own, it's tempting to stay out late. Resist that temptation, because your company is counting on you to be sharp and alert in your mentally and physically challenging role as a booth staffer. Get a good night's rest, and fulfill the faith your company put in you when they sent you across the country to represent them.



6. **It's okay to take breaks.** You don't need to be a martyr and never leave your booth. Because you're not only hurting yourself, you're hurting your company. After a couple of hours of staffing you can lose your edge. When you're not fresh, attendees can see it, and you will harm your company's perception. (This applies to #5 as well!) Get yourself a change in scenery, a bio break, some food and drink, and clear your head so you can greet attendees with a genuine smile again. Just don't let your breaks get too long, as your time in the booth is valuable. Also, your booth captain should schedule enough booth staffers so when one takes a break, there are still enough to meet the needs of the show.

7. **Don't expect perfection.** Trade shows are complicated affairs, with so many chances for problems. The question isn't if something will go wrong, but when and what. Once you realize that, you can only do your best to alleviate problems when they come up, and not freak out about it. You'll learn that some issues that seem like obvious errors to you will go unnoticed to all but the most perceptive eyes. That's not to say you shouldn't seek The Perfect Show. It's just that you shouldn't crucify yourself when you don't achieve it.

8. **Lead cards are worth their weight in gold.** As the ancient Chinese proverb goes, "Weakest ink better than strongest memory." A lead card is

a sheet from a pre-printed pad of paper for writing down notes about each interaction your staffers have with attendees. A lead card holds a lot more info than the back of a business card. You record the attendee's contact information, product interest, and comments they shared in your conversation that will help your sales person follow up on the lead. A complete lead card gives your sales people greater insight and motivation to turn that lead into a sale.

9. **You will get visitors to your booth who are unhappy with your company.** Trade shows are a large public forum where some people have had poor experiences with your company. If you're the rookie booth staffer facing an angry client, you don't have to handle it on your own. Find the senior company representative in the booth, and introduce the unhappy camper, with a short synopsis of their problem, to show that you have been listening. If you do have to handle it yourself, follow the 3 A's formula that Chris Brogan and Julien Smith write about in *Trust Agents*: "acknowledge, apologize, act." Let them know you hear their issue, that you are sorry they had that bad experience, and tell them how you are going to either solve their problem, or communicate it within your company.

10. **Trade shows require a lot to learn, but in time you can master them.** When you first set foot in a trade show it's a complete surprise to discover that tens of thousands of people gather in a large hall filled with temporary structures to share their common interests for a few days. And when you then become involved in staffing, organizing, or marketing your company's presence there, all the unknown details can quickly become overwhelming. But after a few shows more things shift from the unknown to the known column. Eventually, you can even read an article like this and nod your head in satisfying agreement, because you've earned your stripes and know what it takes to exhibit at trade shows.

Don't Be "That Guy" At Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

You've seen him as you walk down the trade show aisle. You point him out to your colleagues, trying to not let him see you as you do. You let out a nervous laugh as you pass his trade show display — what if he tries to talk to you?

He's "that guy," and he's doing trade shows all wrong.

Here's 8 things you and the other trade show attendees are saying about "that guy":

1. **"Why did that guy even come to the show?"** He's typing on his computer, talking on his cell phone, texting on his smartphone — basically doing everything in his booth except engaging with attendees. He shouldn't be doing things he would normally do back at his office; he should be working the show.
2. **"What did that guy just say to me?"** Starting a conversation with a stranger in the aisle takes a delicate touch. But there are offensive booth staffers who still think it's okay to obviously read a person's badge and say, "Hey Mike, how are you doing?" without realizing just how cheesy that sounds.
3. **"What does that guy's company do?"** If your exhibit graphics don't make it clear what products you sell and what value you bring to your customers, then trade show attendees (who are already short on time and overstimulated) are not going to take the time to find out.
4. **"Why is that guy's company at this show?"** There are thousands of shows, whose attendees have various mixes of job titles, vertical markets, company sizes, and buying authority. The guy who tries to sell products to attendees who are not a good fit can stand out for the wrong reason.

5. “When did that guy last get a haircut?”

From a bad haircut to a rumpled suit to a pair of scratched-up shoes, poorly groomed booth staffers can look more like the guy people want to cross the street to avoid than a person who you want to talk to. As a representative of your company’s brand, it’s up to you to look the part.

6. “Why did that guy give me that giveaway?”

Trade show attendees want giveaways that are useful, fun, valuable, durable, and most of all, relevant to their specific needs. But some “that guy” exhibitors continue to foist unwanted trinkets to save a buck or in the flawed logic of “we’ve always done it that way.”



7. “What year did that guy’s trade show booth come from?”

Some guy’s booths look like they should be on The Antiques Road Show, instead of at their industry trade show. Don’t be the guy with a trade show booth that attendees confuse with an artifact, or an escapee from a time machine.

8. “Why didn’t that guy call me after last year’s show?”

If you put all your energies into getting leads at the show, but don’t follow up on them after the show, you’ve broken your promise to your booth visitors. They’ll remember that next year, and skip your booth.

So while you may not be “that guy” with a comb-over hairstyle or the loud cell-phone talker at a restaurant, you still don’t want to be “that guy” at trade shows. Instead, demonstrate class, intelligence and market-savvy to your trade show visitors, so they recognize that you’re actually a good guy to meet — and even do business with.

21 Things You Never Want To Hear In Your Trade Show Booth

Mike Thimmesch

It’s great to hear visitors to your trade show booth say things like, “You’ve got just what I need!” or “We love working with your company!” or “Your booth really caught my eye!”

But because trade shows are so complicated, it’s possible that, no matter how much you prepare, something could go wrong. And as the trade show manager, you’re probably the first one who’s going to hear about it.

How bad could it be? Well, hearing any of these 21 things in your trade show exhibit will sound as bad as fingernails on a chalkboard:

During set up:

1. “Your shipper’s truck driver never arrived at the loading dock.”
2. “We can’t find your shipping containers.”
3. “Sorry, that early-bird discount has expired. Now it costs 30% more.”
4. “I don’t know how to set up your booth – and I can’t find the instructions.”
5. “You’re not allowed to set that up by yourself.”
6. “Our other booth staffer missed his flight last night.”
7. “Our other booth staffer got violently sick last night.”
8. “Our other booth staffer shaved his head and joined a cult last night.”
9. “Your trade show booth breaks 3 trade show booth size regulations.”

During the show:

10. “Is that a typo on your booth graphics?”
11. “Our internet connection went down.”

12. “Actually, we just signed a deal with your competitor two aisles over.”
13. “According to our lawyers, your new product infringes on our patent.”
14. “Hi, my boss asked me to sub for him booth staffing. It’s my first day of work for the company.”
15. “Wow, you’re still offering that technology?”
16. “I want to talk to your boss, right now!”
17. “That’s not what your local office said.”
18. “That’s not what your headquarters said.”
19. “That’s an interesting product feature, but it really doesn’t solve my needs.”
20. “So, what is it that your company does?”

After the show:

21. “I thought you packed the leads!”

What can you do if you hear words like these in your booth? Forewarned is forearmed. Have a thick hide, but a soft touch. Keep your calm, and be flexible to find unconventional solutions. Handle the situation well, and then you might hear your boss say, “I’m sure glad you were there to save the day!”

5 Quick Tips For The Occasional Exhibitor

Mike Thimmesch

Trade shows are not your whole job, just a part of it. You only do, at most, a few small shows a year, and you’ve got lots of other responsibilities to handle. So all this detail in our blog about doing trade shows better? You simply have no time for it all.

But you still would like to boost your results – but only if the changes are simple and quick. So in that vein, here are 5 tips to



help you — quickly — get more out of trade shows:

1. A large, clear message is easier to grasp, so make your next set of booth graphics colorful and easy to understand, with a benefit statement that will then get your prospects into your trade show booth.
2. Create a demo with motion in your trade show exhibit to get more of the right people engaged and interested. That will also get people to remember you.
3. Collecting business cards is not enough. Print paper lead cards to write more notes for the sales force to do better follow up, or get electronic lead machines from the show to get their attendee data with every badge scan.
4. Your booth staffers make a huge difference. Bring staffers who want to be there, give them support, training, and treats. Count how many qualified leads each one takes in your trade show displays to help decide who staffs the next show.
5. Do everything you can before the show to set up appointments with qualified buyers and existing clients in your booth at the show.

Okay, I could write another 10 bullet points, but as the occasional exhibitor you won’t have time to do more than these first 5! But you’ve got to do these 5! Once you enjoy the greater success you’ll have at your shows, then dig deeper into this book, and go to the www.skylinetradeshowtips.com blog and read some more!

Marketing

10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I Started In Marketing

Mike Thimmesch

Recently I was asked to speak to a college marketing club that was touring the Skyline Exhibits International Design Center about what it's like to work in marketing. So I shared with them these 10 things I wish I had known over 20 years ago before I began my marketing career:

1. **Know your customers better than anyone else.** Marketing starts with solving the customer's needs. So figure out what your customers' needs are and which needs are the most important. Find out how they look for products, what language they use to describe your products, who they trust for ideas, and what they can't get today that they wish they could. Get a mental picture of who they are as people, and if it's a B2B customer, what is their job title, and the size and industry of their company. In learning how they think, you will also be learning what they value most about your product or service.
2. **Market segmentation is essential.** Good marketing depends on knowing how to segment your markets. Figure out how your market can be divided into groups of similar customers with the groups being distinctly different from each other. Then target the most attractive segments big enough to be worthwhile (segments with growth opportunities, or that match to your core competencies, or have the greatest profit potential). Use segmentation that makes it easy to identify prospects. If you can, segment your market according to which key benefits they

seek. Once you've picked your segments, invest your time in them and ignore the rest.

3. **"Push" marketing is broken, because the customer is in control.** Thanks to the Internet and Google, with just a few clicks, the customer can find hundreds of choices. And with social media sites to engage them, consumers have broken away from the old media that once held them captive. Anything you do to get their attention must add value in terms of what matters to them. Which usually means their jobs or personal needs, and not directly your products. Prospects will consider you less intrusive when you show them how to solve their problems. Even before the Internet, push marketing was dying, but Internet search engines have shoved it into the grave.

4. **Don't just measure ROI, keep improving it.** Marketing is going the way of the statisticians, and also to those who can create marketing that is worth measuring in the first place. Marketing budgets continue to shift to methods that can be measured for results. Almost anything can be measured for its marketing impact, from the color of a direct mail envelope, the change in brand awareness from trade show displays, to the size of a button on a landing page. Aim for marketing that is highly profitable, repeatable, reaches a big chunk of your target audience, and builds your brand.

5. **Marketing goes beyond the Marketing Department.** To create a legion of brand ambassadors within a company requires more than the marketing department, it can only happen with support from the top and buy-in throughout management. The best companies instill a clear understanding of their brand promise into each employee. With that clarity,

employees make better decisions because they know how each decision will support or harm their brand.

6. **Do you have a marketing career path?** It's been said that life is what happens while you're making other plans. Similarly, your career path can be accidental, or you could purposely strive in a direction you intend. Consider which of these different choices you have before you. There's no wrong choice, just perhaps a better choice for you:

- Corporate marketing vs. ad agency
- B2B vs. B2C
- Product marketing vs. marketing communications
- Employee vs. business owner
- Doer vs. manager
- Large vs. small company

7. **Know — and live — the difference between Environmental Sustainability and Greenwashing.**

This long-lasting recession has put value in front of environmental sustainability. But as commodity prices rebound with the world economy's returns to health, consumers will likely soon return to Green thinking. Consumers will also continue to become better informed about what is truly a sustainable product. They will see through Greenwashing and keep ratcheting up their environmental sustainability expectations for their purchases. You will need to invest in learning the science of sustainability yourself because these better informed consumers will turn on you if you fake it.

8. **Bridge the Sales & Marketing divide.** When you get into marketing, you discover that many, if not most marketing jobs are at B2B companies, where your new best friend could be the sales force. Unfortunately there is sometimes a divide between Sales and Marketing and that's truly a lost opportunity. Top B2B sales people know so much that can help you be a better marketer.

They know which questions to ask prospects first, which is a great clue to creating good market segmentation. They've got a gut understanding of your clients' demographics, language, key desired benefits, and budget ranges. They know who your top competitive threats are, and why they are growing. Sales is your natural ally, not your enemy.

9. **Keep your marketing education going after graduation.**

Some things in marketing are eternal, but many things change as the economy, technology, demographics, and media evolve. There's many ways to keep up on the next marketing trends. Get a subscription to marketing, advertising, or communications magazines. Regularly visit top industry websites and blogs. Join one or more associations, and go to your industry's trade shows as well as to events centered around marketing that are specific to your area of expertise.

10. **Market Your Marketing.** It has never been harder to be a marketer. The consumer is in control, you are competing against smarter competitors who are constantly improving their marketing through testing and measurement, and customer expectations for value are higher than ever. So when you succeed against those high odds be sure that you scrupulously document and share your success with your management, using metrics that matter to them. Be sure to also help them understand the new marketing landscape you and your company are competing on.

If ignorance is bliss, then when I started in marketing over 20 years ago I must have been a very happy camper. Now I have a few less hairs on my head and a few more pounds on my belly. I look forward to further insights to be learned in my next 20 years, but hope that for the most part these 10 things will continue to serve me, and today's new marketers, well.

Value of Trade Shows

22 Reasons To Exhibit At Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

While trade shows are not easy, they are many worthwhile reasons to exhibit. How many? In just ten minutes time (and without succumbing to the temptation of a Google search), I came up with these 22 reasons to lug your trade show exhibit down to the nearest convention center and exhibit:

Sales:

1. Generate sales leads
2. Close sales
3. Build relationships with prospects
4. Advance the sales cycle
5. Cross-sell existing clients
6. Meet spread-out buying teams at one time
7. Recruit new sales people
8. Recruit new distribution
9. Train new sales people

Marketing Communications:

10. Build your brand
11. Re-position your brand
12. Increase awareness
13. Survey market awareness
14. Interview clients
15. Generate publicity

Product Marketing:

16. Launch new products
17. Survey attendees about new product ideas
18. Research competitor's products and messaging

Executive Management:

19. Keep up on industry trends
20. Meet with key clients
21. Meet with key business partners
22. Profitably build the business

8 Faulty Reasons To Not Exhibit At Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

There are many reasons to exhibit at trade shows and many reasons not to. While there are some valid reasons not to exhibit at shows, you may mistakenly be relying on reasons to avoid shows that don't hold water. Here are 8:

1. Everyone already knows who we are.

It may seem that way sometimes, that you're so well-known you don't need to build awareness anymore. But that high awareness level has to be invested in to be maintained – there are always new people just moving or hired into your market that have never heard of you before. However, if you truly are universally known, then leverage that high awareness level and shift your exhibiting goals to generating leads and holding face-to-face meetings with clients. Those are even better reasons to exhibit!

2. Our clients love us.

Guess what – clients who love you will tell you that, but clients who don't will tell someone else. Maybe even your competitors who are at the

show. When your clients have problems with you, you can head off problems by meeting them face-to-face at your industry trade show and asking them, “How are we doing? What can we do to improve?” If you listen, and then act on what they tell you, then they really will love you. And what better opportunity to cross-sell and upsell clients who do love you then at that rare time you can meet them face to face – at a trade show!

3. We already have enough customers.

For the few that can honestly claim to have enough customers already, you have my admiration; just remember that nothing lasts forever. There will always be turnover at your clients or among your salesforce, turning your loyal customer into a contested account. Add to that the never-ending efforts by your competitors to dislodge you from your customers, and you have even more reason to keep seeking new clients.

4. We know where the industry is going.

With the more competitive global economy, the speed of new product innovation has increased over that last two decades. There is no better place to feel the seismic shifts in your industry than at a trade show – and especially in your own booth, where a parade of attendees asks you how you compare to the latest developments they are seeing down the aisles. Keep your finger on the pulse by putting your feet inside your trade show booth.

5. Our competitors can't compare to us.

If your competitors can't compare to you, then you should be at the show letting prospects know that. Make your case with a trade show exhibit that clearly reveals your competitive advantages. If you really are the best, but you are not there, remember that shopping attendees will compare the remaining vendors they do see on the show floor.

6. No one is shopping for our products right now.

There have been some drastic downturns in selected industries over the last few years. But while that has reduced their flow of buyers, it hasn't stopped the remaining buyers from attending – and shopping — at trade shows. There are always buyers – so if you are the one who exhibits, you'll be the one they meet when they go to the show. Plus, when the industry rebounds, you'll already be there, ready to welcome them – and their checkbook – into your trade show displays.

7. We don't have any new products.

When product life cycles were longer, companies timed their new product launches for their major industry trade shows. Now, with shorter product life cycles and the rapid availability of product info via the internet, marketers don't want to wait to launch their new products. However, exhibitors still get tremendous value at trade shows from lead generation, increasing brand awareness, and building relationships. And for most exhibitors, their year or two old products will likely be brand-spanking new to the vast majority of attendees they see in their booth.

8. We get enough leads already.

This is similar to #1, that everyone already knows who you are. If you are getting enough leads already, you can shift your goals at the shows to go farther than just taking leads. Take advantage of how the show acts as a central meeting place for your market. So instead of flying all over the country or the world, you can set up meetings with clients, key prospects, and industry partners you want to build stronger alliances with. You save time by meeting all these valuable people in one place.

If any of these 8 reasons have kept you from exhibiting at trade shows, perhaps now's the time to reconsider. Dust off that old exhibit, or perhaps even get a new trade show display, and get back into the show.

Logistics

The Essential Trade Show Checklist

Mike Thimmesch

What do you need to succeed at trade shows? If you can check these 16 points off your list, you're well on your way:

1. Align your trade show goals with your overall marketing and company goals
2. Create goals that are specific, measurable, and timely
3. Pay early to avoid rush charges and (surprisingly high) late fees
4. Booth space rental is about one-third your budget, for the rest invest more in areas that give you the best R.O.I.
5. Pick shows with an audience that best matches your target market
6. Go back to the highest R.O.I. shows from previous years
7. Design your exhibit to boldly and clearly communicate who you are, what you sell, and why your prospects should buy from you
8. Design your exhibit to support your booth staffers as a workspace...and work to keep your ongoing expenses down
9. Reach out to attendees before the show, via social media, phone, email, mail, ads, and the web
10. Offer attendees something of value (information, presentations, demonstration, show specials, giveaways) in exchange for a visit
11. Select motivated, friendly, knowledgeable booth staffers
12. Train your staffers to handle the steps to shorter trade show interactions: engage, present, qualify, and close
13. Capture at-show, on paper or electronically, the prospect info your sales team needs after the show — and then give it to them after the show
14. Before the show even starts, prepare a person, materials, and a database to fulfill your leads...and an all-out effort ready to follow up leads after the show
15. Plan ahead to give yourself more time to adapt to problems, especially for international shows
16. Take a binder with all your contracts and contacts with you to the show, including graphic art files on a thumb drive if your display gets lost

Promotions

8 Wrong Ways To Use Trade Show Promotions

Mike Thimmesch

Done right, promotions increase trade show booth traffic, make positive impressions, deepen relationships, and boost memorability. Done wrong, they can waste booth staffers' time, be a drain on your trade show budget, and erode your reputation.

Here are 8 wrong ways to use trade show promotions that exhibitors unfortunately do again and again – and how you can avoid making these same mistakes yourself:

1. Get the cheapest giveaways possible

That thing you bought to give to booth visitors? It has your company logo on it. Do you want people to equate your brand with cheesy, cheap, and poorly made? And when it breaks in two weeks, do you want your logo on it? Nope, I thought not. So invest in quality, as befits your quality brand.

2. Pile giveaways in your booth – then ignore the people they attract

You heep an enticing stack of giveaways on the edge of your table, and lo and behold, the trick-or-treaters appear. They grab and dash, and you feel helpless. Instead, either put the giveaways further in your trade show displays, or out of sight altogether. Better yet, guard them with a capable booth staffer, who can quickly qualify attendees with a single question. You may find your giveaway trap is worth it, if you can find enough qualified leads amidst the treasure hunters.

3. Offer giveaways that have no tie-in to your message.

Is your strategy to buy the latest cool gadget as a giveaway? While people will love it, that gadget will not help them remember your competitive advantage. Want to be remembered for the right reasons? Find a giveaway that is appealing AND that you can memorably hook into your marketing message or theme. That way, you create a deeper, more meaningful impression your booth visitor will remember after the show.

4. Don't tell your booth staffers about your promotions

Skip telling your staffers about your promotions. Then, have that awkward moment when an attendee hands your staffer your pre-show mailer inviting them to come get your at-show giveaway, only to be met with a blank stare. Feel how your company (and professional) reputation takes a hit. Unprepared staffers won't know about contest requirements, fulfillment expectations, or how to tie your giveaways to your marketing messages. So train them.





5. Offer a prize or raffle – without qualifying entrants

Want a big list of people who just want an iPad? Raffle it off at your next show. Unfortunately, that list will be pretty useless when you get back to the office – unless you are an iPad salesperson. Instead, require attendees to answer a few qualifying questions on an entrance form first, so you know who are the good prospects right away. Better yet, only do a broad-appealing raffle like this when most of the show attendees could be prospects for your products. Otherwise, you waste a lot of time talking to non-buyers.

6. Treat your customers like strangers

Don't reward your customers for their loyalty. Give them the same \$1.29 giveaway you handed over to everyone else. Let them feel how special you think they are for giving you their valuable business. Don't like the way that feels? Then have a second, higher-level giveaway stashed away that's only for clients. A welcome bonus – you'll be surprised how often when you give that to a client while thanking them for their business, that they answer you by saying, "You know, we do have this new project coming up..."

7. Hire a celebrity, then ignore the line

Celebrities, especially those within your industry, can draw a crowd. But that crowd is worthless if your staffers ignore the line waiting to meet the celebrity in your exhibit. Staffers can engage attendees by talking about the celebrity, but then also ask them about their needs, and record their

answers. So your staff will know who the qualified leads are before they get the celebrity's autograph. The same applies to other entertainment you hire that gets a line forming.

8. Give a great gift – but then don't follow up

After you've invested \$5, \$10, \$20 or more on a high-quality, memorable gift with your best prospects, you let those valuable opportunities die on the vine by not calling them after the show. Sure you can hope the gift alone will compel them to pick up the phone and place an order with you. But their desk will be cluttered with work that piled up while they were at the show. Instead, be sure to prioritize your leads by quality, so your sales force can reach out to those top-level prospects while they are hot. And tell your sales people what giveaways the leads received, so the sales people can refer to the gift in the follow up call, and tie the goodwill of the gift to them.

Promotions are a powerful tool for trade show marketers. But like all tools, they need to be used the right way for full effect.

Exhibit Design

How to Design A Trade Show Booth

Judy Fairbanks

If they're lucky, every trade show exhibit manager gets to ask this question at least once in their career. Here are some things to keep in mind during the all important design planning phase.

Express Your Brand Consistently

Brand management is not just for the big players. It is something any company can do in any stage of a business. Over time, consistent branding defines your identity, builds recognition and creates preference. In fact, designing a trade show display becomes much easier (and more fun) when you can follow a clearly established guideline.



Design an Authentic Vignette to Demo Your Product

Case Study: Verbatim was showcasing their LED lighting products at Light Fair. They designed authentic scenarios, placing the products in their natural environment like outdoor patios and commercial office spaces. This strategy can work for any product because nothing communicates like the truth. How would you apply it to your products?



Compress Your Display into Compact Shipping Cases

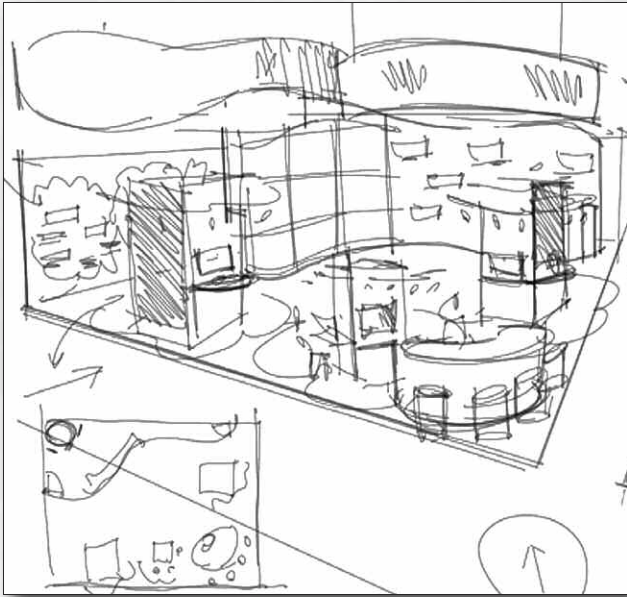
Typically, exhibitors are frustrated with the high costs of drayage, shipping and storage. Modular, lightweight metal and fabric displays that pack down into fewer crates can dramatically reduce expenses. When you are presented with an exhibit design, be sure to ask for its total weight and the corresponding number of crates it will pack down into. The lower the numbers, the better.



Distinguish a Messaging Hierarchy

Especially for companies with multiple product lines, it is important to clearly establish an umbrella relationship between the single, overarching brand and the array of products

underneath. This is often accomplished through signage — and is a fun and creative part of designing a new trade show booth.



Learn More by Networking with Experts

Investigate continuing education seminars on topics like Social Media for Trade Show Displays, Sales Training Techniques, Direct Marketing Strategies and of course, Exhibit Design and Promotion. Gaining maximum value and results from your trade show program is a meets-minimum requirement in today's challenging economy.



The 7 People You Design Your Trade Show Exhibit For

Mike Thimmesch

Who do you design your trade show exhibit for? There may be more people than you realize.

As a trade show manager about to embark on marshaling the design of your company's new trade show exhibit, you have to consider the interests of 7 distinct people:

1. Trade Show Attendee

This is the most obvious person for whom you design your trade show exhibit: Your clients and prospects who attend trade shows. Aim for an exhibit designed to attract attendees with compelling messages, inviting architecture, appealing colors, and impactful, appropriate images.

Existing clients want to visit you at the show to confirm they've made the right decision choosing you. So reassure them with a welcome environment and springboard their visit as an opportunity to cross-sell and up-sell. Prospects rely on the unique venue of trade shows to compare similar vendors at one time. Ensure you come out on top with a clear, compelling message that promotes your value, and by creating an experience in your exhibit that demonstrates your superiority.

Besides clients and prospects, design your exhibit to make a favorable impression on your industry press and potential investors, both potent groups of attendees at trade shows.

2. Trade Show Booth Staffer

While attendees may only visit for 10 minutes, your booth staffers will call your trade show home for several days at a time. Give them a

temporary office that helps them do their job easier. Provide places to meet clients, demonstrate products, and most of all, write and stash those valuable leads. Make it simple for them to maintain an uncluttered booth, with smartly designed and accessible storage spaces for giveaways, their personal effects, and room for snacks and water. Give them enough spots for lead machines, so they don't have to trek across a 30 x 50 booth, visitor in tow, to scan a badge. When you design your exhibit with your booth staffers in mind, they will be more productive, increasing your trade show results.

3. Exhibit Installer

Whether it's you, your sales people, or hired show labor, keeping your exhibit installer in mind during the exhibit design phase will pay big dividends down the road. Many exhibitors choose portable trade show displays specifically to lower their display set up and dismantle costs. In all major convention centers (and all but a few hotels) you can set up your own display without hiring show labor if you can complete set up within 30 minutes without tools.

However, it's worth considering installation and dismantle (I&D) costs even when designing medium and large-sized exhibits. It is not uncommon for large, traditional island exhibits to cost more than \$10,000 per I&D, show after show. Designing with modular exhibit systems engineered for ease of assembly can reap savings at every show. Also, when evaluating an exhibit's design, look to see if there are layers of structure that may hamper your installer from building other parts of your exhibit. And exhibit designs requiring rigging also require (surprise!) hiring riggers, every show, and will cost you significantly more to install.

4. Vice President of Marketing

Your top marketing officer wants your trade show exhibit to fulfill multiple objectives: build or reposition your brand, communicate your primary

marketing messages, and launch new products and services. Sometimes they will want your trade show exhibit to do all of these simultaneously, and that's certainly viable. But trouble brews when your top marketer wants to load the exhibit down with too many products or messages. Gently remind your V.P. of Marketing that an overloaded exhibit loses its ability to quickly capture attendees' attention, which is the exhibit's job. You have other tools beyond the exhibit to communicate lower level messages and secondary products.

Also, because your marketing messages can change from show to show, or your company could potentially rebrand soon after you design your exhibit, your V.P. of Marketing will value more flexible trade show exhibits that can easily change their look and "skin" and let you keep your message fresh.

5. Vice President of Sales

Your V.P. of Sales expects your trade show exhibit design to help facilitate a significant amount of sales – that's why he/she loaned you so many sales people to staff the booth. Your exhibit must pull prospects in and give your staffers the tools and environment to convert visitors into qualified leads. Your V.P. of Sales wants to be proud, not ashamed, when they host their best clients and prospects in your booth. And they want your exhibit design to create such a memorable experience in the minds of attendees, that when your sales people make follow-up calls after the show, they are greeted with "I'm glad you called," rather than "Who are you?"

Depending on how your distribution is organized, your V.P. of Sales may also want to spend quality time with their dealers in your booth, too. If that's your primary goal for the show, then design the space for those meetings. If not, you may need to have an interesting discussion with your V.P. of Sales.

6. CFO

At some phase of your exhibit design process, someone in your organization, from a purchasing manager up to the V.P. of Finance, will scrutinize the cost of your exhibit. And they should: trade shows are often the single largest expenditure to support B2B marketing. Their first instinct is to push for the lowest priced bidder, or to even question the expenditure all together. So bring them persuasive industry statistics about the value of trade show marketing share the average cost of trade show exhibits (\$1,500 per linear foot for inline exhibits, and \$163 per square foot of island exhibits, according to the EDPA), and most of all, your own ROI measurements from previous trade shows that demonstrate healthy sales generated from your marketing investment.

You can more easily advocate for your preferred exhibit design if you can show that it will make the most impact for the lowest cost, such as with custom modular exhibit systems that lower ongoing operating costs. Your CFO may favor that you rent the design you are contemplating, as rental avoids capital expenditures and frees up cash. And your purchasing manager may warm to trade shows when she (as Ed Jones points out) realizes how many productive vendor discussions happen in your booth.

7. President/CEO/Business Owner

The top person in your company will want your trade show exhibit design to create the marketing impact your V.P. of Marketing craves, the sales bump your VP of Sales desires, and the ROI your CFO expects. Depending on the size of your organization, your very top person may have final say on your trade show exhibit design. Try to avoid a nasty surprise after you have expended considerable effort to arrive at an exhibit design that meets all your stated needs, only to have the top dog growl out their own, previously unknown goal that sends you back to a complete exhibit redesign. If you know the CEO will want final

say, spend some time to discover what their overall goals are with your trade show presence.

And if your President is not involved in the exhibit purchase, they may still see your new exhibit design when it debuts at its first show. If that's when they see it first, and your booth staff is very busy, greeting many interested clients and prospects, then your President will be more likely to approve of your new trade show exhibit design.

There's a reason I put Trade Show Attendees as #1

It can be quite the tightrope walk to satisfy all these people with a single exhibit design. You must muster your best communication and diplomacy skills to keep all parties engaged without relinquishing complete control. And perhaps you are also one of the 7 people listed above, and have a better appreciation of the balancing act with your peers.

Just remember that if you primarily design your exhibit to best reach your clients and prospects, and set the right expectations with everyone else, then you give yourself a good shot at winning unanimous approval of your trade show exhibit design.



Double-Stuff Cookies, Not Your Trade Show Exhibit

Mike Thimmesch



Nabisco®, Oreo®, and Oreo Double Stuf® are registered trademarks of Kraft Foods.

Recently, Nabisco made a good thing even better: double-stuffed Oreos cookies, which have twice the sweet, creamy filling of regular Oreos. Unfortunately, double-stuffing your trade show exhibit makes your booth less appetizing for attendees.

Here's why: the job of your exhibit is to get people's attention and reinforce the brand, NOT tell your entire story.

But sometimes when a trade show exhibit is designed, it can be mistakenly designed from the company's perspective, NOT the attendee's perspective. What causes this is:

- The product managers want to show every product
- The marketing director wants to list all the competitive advantages
- The sales director asks for a graphic to recruiting new dealers
- Your partners want their logos on your booth
- Other stakeholders want to have their own say about what is in and on the booth

So your exhibit gets OVERSTUFFED. And you get blah... instead of bold. You get visual clutter that prevents your booth from quickly communicating *why* attendees should visit you.



Sure, it's hard to say no to everyone who asks for their piece of the pie. But in the long run, you're not really helping them by just tossing their messages onto the pile and creating a mess of a display that looks like it could be on the TV show "Hoarders."

Trade Show Exhibits Are Like . . .

Need help convincing others in your company that "Less Is More" when it comes to trade show exhibit design? Here are 3 other mediums to consider:

- **Billboards:** A billboard usually has only one big visual element and a few well-chosen words, because viewers have just a moment to take it in before they're gone. Use this to your advantage. Take your team for a drive. Ask them to count how many images and words are on each. Hopefully they'll have their "Aha!" moment before you get back to the office.
- **Magazine Covers:** Publishers put one big picture on to catch the eye, often with a large headline of the main story. They will also have smaller headlines for a few main stories inside, but only a fraction of what is on the table of contents. Magazines arrived at this formula by

testing multiple versions to find which cover will sell more newsstand editions. And it's not the one that looks like the table of contents. Try this: Count how many stories are in the magazine, compared to mentioned on the cover. Now apply that to your exhibit: tell only your main stories, not all of them.

- **Your Website:** Someone, perhaps you, had to negotiate with every person wishing to add another image, another sentence, another link about their personal favorite product, message, or story. Say yes to them all and you get a cluttered front page that confuses visitors. Say no and you keep a clear path to the main things web visitors usually look for. Have you said no to people, and have web traffic analytics to prove your point?

Simplify, Then Amplify Your Exhibit Design

Once you have reduced your messages and images to the essential core, you can now go bigger, and make a bigger impact, with those that remain. Rather than 100 words that are an inch tall each, you can have 7 words that are a foot tall instead. Similarly, your bold visual 8 feet tall will make a much bigger impact than the bulletin board of 12 images it replaced. And when you

leave most of your products at home, you can better showcase your few remaining new and top-selling products that get a better reaction from attendees.

And the need to simplify is not just for 10-foot and 20-foot trade show exhibits – it applies equally to big island exhibits as well. Display fewer, larger visual elements in your exhibit to cut through the clutter to get your prospect's attention. Cram too much into your booth and you risk looking like a flea market.

Some of your fellow exhibitors have already successfully simplified and amplified the images, messages, and products in their exhibits. When we asked exhibitors how they improved their results through exhibit design for our [What's Working In Exhibiting](#) white paper, the most common answer they gave was “make the booth cleaner and more concise.”

Contrary to what some people think, it's not the exhibitor with the most messages and/or products that wins. It's the one who creates the most visual impact and the most welcoming environment.

So unstuff your exhibit. And go have a cookie!



Trade Show Booth Design: The Art of Attracting Attendees

Sarmistha Tarafder



Marketing has gone through tectonic shifts, especially in the last decade or so. We have made the shift from print media to online media. We are witnessing the introduction of new tools (almost every day) that make our communication with potential customers more efficient. We are in the organic valley of social media indulging in a relentless two-way communication loop. As a result, our addiction to real-time communication is simply voracious and our attention to focus is scattered. And, these are only a few of the recent changes that the marketing industry has gone through.

Given this technological dynamic, we as trade show marketers often question the viability of exhibiting at trade shows. The short answer to this concern is: Trade shows have never presented a better opportunity for an exhibitor to get in front of decision makers. Premium level decision makers now walk the show. They are

there because they have a need that is not currently being met. I guess, technology has not yet managed to eradicate the desire for the high touch of human interaction.

Now that we know who our target audience is, let's fashion a trade show booth that will attract their attention and sustain their scrutiny. We have to become skilled in the art of attraction.

Here are some pointers that always work!

Design with a Themed Purpose: In the illustration above, we designed a 50's theme trade show exhibit with a flair for high touch modernity. Nostalgic times in stride with technologically advanced products! Don't stop there. Use high-appeal promotional giveaways. It is all about perception. How do you want to be remembered? This should be the end game of anything and everything that you do.

Design with a Presence: Your graphics must always be larger than life. Your architecture must be self-defining. Always keep in mind of your target audience.

Design with a Flow: Keep in mind about the laws governing spatial arrangement in relation to the flow of energy. Have ample areas for natural clustering. Have a sculpture or perhaps a multiple screen projection that wows the audience. Again, you are going for memorability. In the above illustration, the corner of the booth was highlighted with a car from the 50's.

Design for a Motion: As Tony Robbins says: emotion is always moved by motion. Movement attracts our eyes and turns our bodies. Implant a juggler, blow bubbles or simply play with a yo-yo. Integrate it with your value statement.

Design for the Limbic System: Our sensory receptors react to the stimulation from our

environment. Make clever use of this proven method for your booth design. Lavish your space with texture, light, sound, smell and color.

“Colors answer feeling in man; shapes answer thought; and motion answers will.”

“There’s a collection of Zen koans called the Gateless Gate. Among other things, koans transcend dualism. The traditional sales process is fully dualistic – there’s a buyer, and there’s a seller. We are witnessing the dissolution of the traditional sales role, as recommendation commerce evolves and storefronts become wherever you happen to be, doing whatever you are doing. Which brings us to the Storeless Store and Saleless Sale.” -- Valeria Maltoni.

And my friends, this is the new face of trade show marketing!



How to Design Great Trade Show Display Graphics

Michael Flavin

Walk around your next trade show and you'll see a lot of great designs. They look good, attract your attention, engage, and tell a story.

You'll also see a lot of bad designs! Too many pictures, confusing messages and, what does that say? It's so small and there is so much text, I can't even read it!

When it's time to design your trade show display graphics, consider a few important points:

- **Who you are:** Obviously you want to be easily found in the show hall. An effective way to accomplish this goal is by not only placing your logo & branding at the maximum height, but also repeating it in several different locations throughout the design.
- **What you do:** Great, your prospect has found your booth. Now, can they quickly understand what your company does? A tagline or short sentence should be near your logo, so that the attendee can relate who you are to what you do.
- **How you can help them:** Now that we understand you're the "Acme Anvil Company" and you make "The most durable, USA-made and reconfigurable anvils" in the world, it's time to explain why this is important and how it will add to their bottom line. For example "Our anvils will increase your productivity by 37% and cut down-time by 1/3rd." Short bullet-points are another effective way to share this message, but don't get too carried away.

In addition, consider the following items in your design:

- **Photos:** Not too many. Make sure the resolution is good. Should they show your



product in action? Does a photo help relate your service to a solution? Think about these questions as you start your design. Do you need photos at all? Maybe an illustration instead?

- **Text:** Think billboards. Keep editing. Less text = more readable, quickly.
- **Lighting:** How will lighting affect your graphics? Exhibiting in Vegas? Did you know halogens are banned at a few locations? Should you use spot lights to accent? Or, maybe backlighting? Just like in your living room, lighting will set the tone & mood for your trade show booth. How about some specialty lighting?
- **Technology & interactivity:** An easy way to gain more attention is to add motion and technology is very cost effective these days for making that happen. Add some monitors, loop a video or pictures and you've easily attracted more people. Now, make those monitors or iPads part of your lead qualifying process by turning them into an interactive game and you've hit a home run. Don't forget about social media too; Tweet some pictures, upload a video to YouTube and share on Facebook.

Banner Stands Grow More Popular: 5 Reasons Why

Mike Thimmesch

Banner stands have become more popular because they can create a high-impact 10 foot trade show display with greater portability, ease of set up, and flexibility than pop up displays.

Banner stands can be found up and down most aisles at every trade show, becoming as common, perhaps even more common, than the ubiquitous pop up display. Here are 5 reasons why banner stands have become so popular:

1. **Three banner stands make a lighter, more portable 10-foot booth.** Originally banner stands were used only as a single unit, presenting a graphic about 8 feet tall and 3 feet wide. It gave exhibitors a very portable graphic they could put almost anywhere. Need a show-specific message as an add-on to your 10-foot display? Slap it on a banner stand. But then exhibitors figured out they could fill their entire 10-foot trade show booth with 3 banner stands that still weighed less and took less space and effort to carry. I've even seen 9 banner stands used in a row to make a 30-foot backwall.

2. **Bolder, more durable graphics.** It used to be that to get sharp-looking banner stand graphics, you had to get a laminated print that either curled or was easily damaged. But with the recent improvements in fabric graphics, exhibitors can now get a bold, sharp graphic that also is much more durable.

3. **Even easier set up.** With some training or experience you can learn to set up a pop up display in 10 to 15 minutes, which used to be considered a blink of the eye in trade show time. But now the bar is set much higher. Three banner stands take only a few minutes to set up, and are much less complicated, with many fewer parts. Retractable banner stands are almost as easy as pulling down a shade, only from the ground up!

4. **Greater flexibility.** With some planning and good design, you can design three banner stands to be used together, and then still use one of the three by itself. You can even design the banner stand graphic to allow its use as a tabletop display, by only pulling the graphic half way out of the housing. And with some banner stands (like Skyline's), you can very easily change the graphic out for a new message.



5. **More uses beyond trade shows.** People who exhibit at trade shows have other marketing responsibilities, and they soon found many other uses for these lighter, more portable banner stands. Because they set up in a flash to put a large format graphic message wherever desired, banner stands make a memorable impact at special events, meetings, lobbies, showrooms, seminars, conferences, and more.

Lighter, faster, and more flexible banner stands have changed the expectations of what a portable display should be, and where to use it. While 3 banner stands in a row lack the curved pop-up's seamless backwall and illusion of mass, for many exhibitors the 5 advantages outlined above make up for it, and then some.

Booth Staffing

Your Trade Show Booth Staffers Are Animals

Mike Thimmesch

Ever hear someone say that trade shows are a zoo? Or perhaps a jungle? Then there should be lots of animals at trade shows, especially staffing the booths.

In that vein, here are 12 animals that your booth staffers might act like. Some are good, some not so much. See if you can recognize anyone from your team in this marketing menagerie:



Ostrich

This tall flightless bird is known for burying its head in the sand when scared. Do you have staffers that similarly get so scared of engaging attendees that they'd put their head under the carpet if they could? Ah, you've got an ostrich.



Lion

They've got a mane of great hair, and they're known as the king of the jungle. But the male lion actually spends most of the day lounging around, letting the lioness do nearly all the hunting. Does that sound like any of your heavy-hitter sales people that merely pose in your booth, acting like they are above the hard work of taking leads?



Kangaroo

Female kangaroos have a pouch in front to hold their cherished babies. So what kind of booth staffer would be a kangaroo? Well, have you ever seen salespeople try to pocket a lead from outside their territory rather than put it into the lead slot? That's marsupial madness on the show floor.



Squirrel

In autumn, the threat of oncoming winter inspires squirrels to ceaselessly gather and store food. They know they have only so much time left, and they use it wisely. Booth staffers would do well to emulate the same work ethic to persistently gather leads during the few show hours they have before the show closes for the year.



Dog

Man's best friend can be an asset when the man (or woman) you're trying to befriend is the buyer in the aisle. We're not thinking guard dog here, we're thinking always happy and smiley Labrador retriever pups. Friendly, approachable booth staffers are a must-have if you want to project a welcome environment in your booth.



Mule

As in "stubborn as a mule." A booth staffer acts like a mule when they bray to another staffer or into the phone, "Trade shows don't work!" while they sit off to the side. They are too stubborn to risk learning how to truly engage attendees, or alter their presentation for different attendee types.



Raccoon

Like a raccoon, do you have nocturnal booth staffers that want to party all night, and then sleep all day? These raccoons miss their booth staffing hours, or if they do show up, they waddle around the booth with dark sleep rings around their eyes.



Fish

It is impressive to behold a glittering school of fish that travel together and turn left and right as one. However, if your staffers stay bunched together like a school of fish, they put up a barrier to entering your trade show display, and also can fall into the trap of talking with each other instead of engaging attendees one-on-one.



Frog

Frogs are amphibians that can adapt and thrive on both land and in water. Prized is the booth staffer who is an excellent sales person in the field, but can also adapt their selling method to the unique environment of the trade show.



Goat

Can you picture a goat chewing away all day at a tin can, or an old shoe, regardless of its nutritional value? Unfortunately, your booth staffers don't have time to waste jawing with a worthless lead. They've got to learn to recognize and disengage from poor quality leads, so they can spend their valuable time speaking with more qualified attendees.



Wolf

Having a wolf in the booth could be a good thing – it's valuable to have someone sharply focused on hunting for new business. But at a trade show, you should be afraid of a really big bad wolf on your booth staff, because overly aggressive behavior scares away attendees and will starve your business.



Bear

A bear is a big, powerful animal that should add considerable strength to any team. But just as a bear hibernates through the winter season, you don't want a booth staffer that gets so tired they sleepwalk through a quarter of the show.

Did you recognize any of your booth staffers in this trade show animal kingdom? I hope you have lots of squirrels, frogs, and dogs in your booth, and not so many lions, ostriches, and bears.

Trade Show Booth Etiquette: How To Be A Good Host

Bryna Kelly

In Minnesota, we are raised to be “nice.” But how far does that really get you? For many, nice means passive-aggressive, nice means bite your tongue, or nice means smile and nod. When you're staffing a trade show booth you are acting as a host, and sometimes “nice”, in any of its definitions, doesn't always cut it.

Go Beyond Nice

When you are exhibiting, you must put yourself in the mindset that all the prospects in the hall are your guests. If you were hosting a party in your home, no matter the occasion, you would go out of your way to accommodate every single guest.



You wouldn't tell them to let themselves in the door, throw their coat over the back of a chair, and help themselves to whatever was in the fridge. Guests in your trade show booth are no different. They need to be warmly welcomed and engaged from the moment you see them.

The Pre-Party Planning

Part of being a good host is proper planning to ensure the event will run smoothly. To have a spectacular trade show, have all your extras prepared. Did you make all the appropriate phone calls and contacts to ensure your trade show exhibit will arrive on time and be set up properly? Does your booth staff know when and where to be and what you expect of them? Do you have an emergency kit with supplies for yourself and your booth?

Whether it's a big theme to the party or the smallest details, having a plan and a back-up plan for everything will set yourself and your

guests at ease. Sure, you can get by without it but it will add a little zest and make everything more memorable if you do. Failing to make your plan would be like having 20 people show up for a Super Bowl party and all you have to offer them is a bowl of stale Doritos — the game is still on but it's just not the same.

In The Booth

Now that you're at the show and in your booth, it's your job to make everyone passing by feel welcomed and important. Easier said than done. Part of making people feel comfortable is being genuine. After all, you are exhibiting because you want to use your product or service to help people, right? Attendees don't need a sales pitch from every booth staffer they walk by. Talk to them, get to know them, uncover their needs, or

show them what you have to offer. Sales can come after the show but the time to make a good impression and develop trust is now. When the show is over, clearly relay those needs to a great salesperson and let them close the deal.

Heading Home

When all is said and done, any host would be remiss if they did not thank their guests for coming. In Minnesota, the cycle of "Thank you" and "No, thank you!" might go on for several minutes until all parties are equally thanked and made aware of their counterpart's gratitude. The same goes for your trade show booth. Let the attendees know that you appreciate their time and offer a closing statement to commit to follow-up.

They will want to hear more about your company after that star treatment, don'tcha know!



Lead Management

Go Beyond The Back Of A Business Card: Creating A More Complete Trade Show Lead Management System

Mike Thimmesch

Does your trade show lead management system begin and end with jotting notes on the back of your booth visitors' business cards?

While it ensures that your notes are "attached" to each contact, relying on business cards alone severely limits the space you can write down the valuable info told shared by attendees visiting your trade show displays.

And that's a **big** problem. Because without meaningful notes about what your booth visitors said and your booth staffers promised, your sales people are much less likely to value the lead enough to follow up. And even if they do follow up, they will more often make a hash of it since they lack a good record of what the attendee already said they wanted. Making your trade show results suffer.

A Complete Trade Show Lead Management System

But this is a problem that's easily solved. Instead of relying on writing on a lead card, graduate to a complete trade show lead management system that makes it easier to record what your booth staffers say, transfer that knowledge to your sales force, and better follow up (and measure the results of) your trade show leads.

Here are the three elements of a trade show lead management system that go beyond jotting notes on the back of a business card:

1. **A lead card**, which is a pad of pre-printed paper with room to record contact info, answers to common qualifying questions, and notes about the attendees' needs and your promises for next steps they agreed upon. They are usually printed on half a sheet to a full sheet of 8 ½" x 11" paper. The pad of paper has a cardboard backing to make it easier to write on the lead cards.

2. **An electronic lead retrieval system**, which is almost always rented from the show, that lets you scan the badges of visitors to your booth. You can also buy your own lead retrieval system to bring to each show, which makes training easier for your booth staffers, as they only have to learn one system. The lead retrieval system records all the leads you've taken, so you can then get a digital record of all their contact info in a format you can import into your computer contact management system. It also gives you a print out when you take each lead, that you can use as the lead itself, or staple it to your lead card so you don't have to write out the visitor's contact info. These systems are now also available as apps on iPads, tablet computers, and smart phones.

3. **A CRM (Customer Relationship Management) database** for entering in those leads, rather than stacking up the business cards on the side of your desk. With a database, you can more easily assign the leads to sales people, do post-show marketing, continue follow up over time, and track sales results by comparing leads to your client database. And no cheating with an

Excel file: while that is better than a stack of business cards, it's still not a true CRM database.

Using either lead cards and a database, or an electronic lead retrieval system and a database, or all three together will help you record more info about each visitor to your booth, help ensure a more complete follow up by the sales force, and make it easier to continue marketing to your trade show leads after the show.

So while it may not be as easy as setting up a banner stand, take the time to set up your lead management system. It's that important to your trade show success. And it will earn you a lot more business than just writing on the back of business cards.

10 Top Tips For Trade Show Lead Management

Mike Thimmesch

Imagine this: You had a great show, with a flood of booth visitors and a pile of leads. And yet after the show, your fine effort fizzled into nothing because your hard-earned leads sat gathering dust atop someone else's desk.

Lead management is the least visible, yet most important final stage of your trade show marketing. To help you bring this essential step into the light, here are the 10 best tips that I've gleaned over the last two decades:

- Seek to get not just leads, but qualified leads, so that your field sales force will value them and follow up.
- Train your staffers to qualify leads at the show according to high, medium, and low qualified levels, and then label them as A, B, or C leads.
- Do more lead follow up! Have a lead fulfillment plan prepared before the show starts.
- Don't rely on just a business card from trade show booth visitors: Have a lead card or electronic lead retrieval system so you have enough space to record details on your booth visitors' wants and needs.
- Do more lead follow up! Get your sales and marketing management to stress the importance of lead follow up — and even put some teeth into repercussions if they aren't.
- Have one person responsible for lead fulfillment, data entry into your CRM database, and lead transfer to sales.
- Do more lead follow up! Build more frequent touches with leads after the show (via calls, emails, or mailers).
- Prepare before the show to be able to quickly send fulfillment right after the show — even during the show. Include in the process the ability to customize fulfillment to include what the visitor specifically asked for.
- Do more lead follow up! Check in regularly with your reps to report on lead progress.
- Watch out for the critical link that is too often broken: What booth visitors reveal to your booth staffer and what your booth staffer responds is not passed on to the field sales rep, which causes lack of motivation for lead follow up and frustration with the booth visitor.

So much of good lead management starts with proper preparation of your booth staffers. Yet what happens after the show is just as important — but gets less attention once the urgency of the show is over.

I hope you enact some of these 10 tips and get even more value from your trade show leads. Your company has invested so much to get them — make sure you succeed at this critical final step.



QUALIFIED LEAD

Measurement

3 Things To Measure If You Are Not Measuring Anything Else At Trade Shows

Michal Flavin

I've heard it many times, "Trade show measurement is impossible", "I wouldn't know where to start measuring" and "Trade show measurement is a waste of time." If these statements were true, why would there be so many stats in baseball? Why are there so many financial statements & quarterly reports? Why do sales reps have quotas?

That's right, metrics give us information to make informed decisions. And, that's why we need to measure trade show results, to some degree.

Ok, now that we're on the same page, let's look at 3 things to measure at trade shows if you're not measuring anything else:

1. Return On Objectives (ROO)

Why are you exhibiting at your next trade show? Everyone should have at least 1, maybe 3, maybe 5 objectives for exhibiting at trade shows. The most common trade show objective is the amount of leads (make sure they're qualified leads!). Others might be the number of customers you met with in your trade show booth, meeting with the media, competitive intelligence gathering, etc. You get the picture. ROO measurement should be fairly easy — Did we meet with all 10 customers? Did we get a story published in the trade magazine?



2. Return on Investment (ROI)

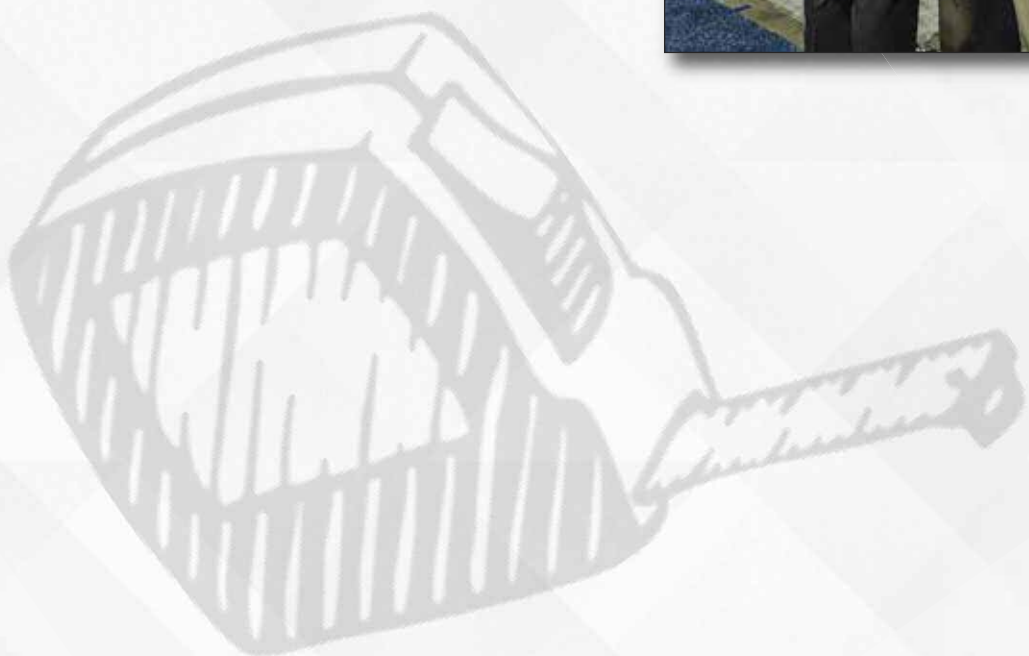
Many people think that you can only measure this from new leads and a sophisticated CRM (yes, the CRM helps). Do you think existing

customers might buy other products or services from you? Or, more products and services? These are opportunities too. Are you looking for a new vendor or partner? You might meet them at the next trade show.

To calculate your potential ROI, subtract your total trade show expenses from the potential profit — that's the easy way. And, for those new vendors, well if they help to lower your costs of production or cost of doing business, you've just increased your ROI.

3. Budget vs. Actual

You outlined a budget before you went to the trade show, right? Well then, all you need to do is track your expenses and find out if you spent more or less at the show. Then compare that to your ROO. If you spent more, was it worth it? Now, get out there and at least measure these 3 things at your next trade show!



What is an Acceptable Cost Per Lead?

Michal Flavin

Question: What do you consider an acceptable marketing cost/lead?

When working with my clients on their trade show marketing program, I project potential ROI using a calculation similar to the following example, which takes into account the total trade show marketing investment:

1. Number of qualified leads generated: e.g. 100
2. % of those leads most likely to lead to sales:
e.g. 25% or 25 total
3. % likely to close & generate revenue: e.g.
50% or 12.5
4. Average value per sale: e.g. \$10,000
5. Expected sales volume: e.g. \$125,000
6. Total investment at this trade show marketing event: e.g. \$16,250
7. ROI = 7.69:1 or for every \$1, \$7.69 generated
8. Value of a new client over 5 / 10 / 15 / 20 years?

In this example, \$1,625 was spent per lead to generate a \$10,000 sale. It is important to identify all expenses incurred, including space rental, shipping, drayage, travel, services, exhibit costs, graphics, pre-show promotion and post-show follow-up campaigns. You can then identify whether or not you're spending an acceptable amount based on your average sale & projected sales volume. This amount will vary by industry and individual company.





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