

TRADE SHOW TIPS FOR INLINE EXHIBITORS



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Introduction

The inline booth is the workhorse of the show. Get the most from it.

As an exhibitor in an inline exhibit space, you have a lot of company. Almost all exhibitors exhibit in 10 or 20 foot inline spaces. For many exhibitors, a 10 x 10 backwall is the only space they take, and they want to get as much out of this square box as they can. Some exhibitors use 10 x 20 spaces when they want to stand out at their largest shows. And for the largest companies in our economy, the inline booth space is what they use at their smaller shows, where they exhibit in regional shows or key vertical market shows.

But just because you exhibit in an inline exhibit doesn't mean you can't stand out, and it also doesn't mean that you get a free pass, either. You have to do your part to succeed, and if you do, success is within your grasp.

This book provides articles to give you, the small booth exhibitors, the necessary knowledge and skills to execute key trade show functions, such as exhibit design, booth staffing, trade show promotions, lead management, and measurement.

This book contains 25 articles previously published in the Skyline Trade Show Tips blog, plus one worksheet from Marc Goldberg of Marketech. This book 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**. If you want to get the other two, contact Skyline to ask.

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

18 Hidden Rules Of Trade Shows

Mike Thimmesch

Hidden rules govern almost every area of our lives. They guide our behavior and expectations, yet are rarely written down for us in neat little books.

For example, there's the 5 Second Rule: When a piece of food falls on the floor, you can eat it if you pick it up within five seconds. There's the High Heel Rule: if a woman is taller than her date, she is less likely to wear high heels. And there's the Full Moon Rule: On days with a full moon, there are more crimes committed and babies born.

Uncover the 18 Hidden Rules of Trade Shows

Trade shows also are governed by similarly hidden, yet immutable rules. You may have already run up against them without realizing it, or discovered them through arduous experience. Since forewarned is forearmed, here are 18 hidden rules of trade shows:

1. The more words you put on your trade show display, the fewer times they will be read.
2. The larger the crowd of people already in your booth, the more other people will want to visit your booth.
3. The person who complains the most about the value of trade shows is usually the one who knows (and tries) the least.
4. The more fun trade show attendees have in your booth during the show, the more serious business you will do after the show.
5. The effort each booth staffer puts forth increases as the distance between them and their boss decreases.
6. Your best booth staffers are usually the ones who talk the least and listen the most.
7. The longer a booth staffer stretches out their break, the fewer leads they will take when they are actually staffing the booth.
8. The colors of your trade show display will likely be determined by: 1. your brand colors, or 2. the latest design trends or 3. your company president's spouse.
9. The length of time to design your exhibit expands exponentially with the number of decision makers involved.
10. The greater the distance a visitor has traveled to attend a trade show, the higher the level of hospitality you should provide.
11. Carpet belongs on the floor of your trade show booth, not on the display backwall.
12. The better-looking the booth staffer's shoes, the more likely the staffer will complain about sore feet.
13. The more years you exhibit at the same show, the more you will have repeat customers visit you in your booth.
14. The more the trade show leads holder looks like a trash can, the more likely your booth captain will end up screaming.
15. The bigger the main visual image on your trade show exhibit, the clearer people will understand your message.

16. The older your trade show display, the less innovative your booth visitors will perceive your company.
17. The more aisle space bordering your booth, the more opportunities your staffers have to engage with attendees.
18. The faster you follow up your trade show leads, the greater the sales you will generate from that show.

Now that these hidden rules have been revealed to you, may you enter your next show hall with the open eyes of a seasoned exhibitor.

Trade Show Marketing In 9 Steps

Mike Thimmesch

The Value Of Trade Shows Increases With A Plan

Business-to-business marketers actually invest more money on trade shows than any other marketing medium. That's because trade shows give greater access and influence on buyers that cannot be replicated anywhere else.

The Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) revealed the following about trade shows:

- 88% of attendees have not been seen by a member of your company's sales staff in the preceding 12 months
- Seven out of ten attendees plan to buy one or more products
- 76% asked for quotes and 26% signed purchase orders (average all shows)
- 72% of show visitors say the show influenced their buying decision
- 87% of attendees will share some of the information obtained at an exhibition

- 64% of attendees tell at least 6 other people about the event
- 58% attend only the show in which you are exhibiting
- 40% are first-time attendees
- It costs 22% less to contact a potential buyer at a show than it does through traditional field sales calls

However, while trade shows are worthwhile, they are not easy. To get the most out of trade shows, exhibit marketers set measurable objectives, pick good shows, design effective exhibits, and more. Read on to discover the main elements of a successful trade show marketing program.

1. Setting Objectives and Measurable Results

The first step in planning your trade show success is to set effective and realistic trade show objectives and measurements for them. Effectively planning your show's objectives allows the rest of your show to fall into place. Choosing the right measurement tools enables you to draw the correct conclusions following your trade show performance.

The first question to ask is the most basic: Why are you exhibiting? While most go to generate leads and build awareness of their brand or products, many also exhibit to build relationships or introduce new products.

Once you know the reason you are exhibiting, set objectives based on those reasons that you can measure – and then measure and report those reasons. Measurable objectives range from simple lead counts (200 leads at the XYZ Show) to Return On Investment goals (Generate \$10 in sales for every \$1 spent exhibiting at the XYZ Show).

2. Budgeting: Planning Saves You Time and Money

Exhibiting can be complex. A large part of that challenge is identifying how much to budget for related services. The easiest way to estimate your overall budget for exhibiting at a show is to take the cost to rent the exhibit space, and

multiply it by three. So if renting a 10 foot by 10 foot exhibit at a show costs \$2,000, then the overall show costs are usually about \$6,000.

The biggest expenditures after booth space is staffer's travel, hotel, and meal costs, show services such as installation and dismantle, the cost to build or rent your exhibit, and shipping.

A large portion of show services costs is called drayage, which is the cost to bring your exhibit and crates from outside the show hall to your exhibit space. Sometimes it can even be as expensive as the cost to ship your exhibit from your city to the show. The trend for exhibitors is towards lighter weight, more custom modular exhibits that lower costs like shipping and drayage.

Planning avoids rush charges and lets you figure out how to do the most shows with the fewest exhibit properties.

3. Select The Right Trade Shows

With over 13,000 trade shows, conferences, expositions, private and business-to-business events in North America, featuring 1.5 million exhibiting companies vying for the attention of over 80 million attendees, it can be daunting to select where your efforts are best spent.

However, there is a method to help you find the best opportunities to market your organization at trade shows.

To start, select the shows you want to exhibit at only after you have set your trade show objectives. Then dig in to do some serious background research. The best bet is to look at the trade shows in your industry and carefully weigh the options. Talk to your fellow employees — what shows have worked in the past? Where do sales people see the customer's needs leaning? Look at who is going to be there. Talk to your current and prospective customers — is this a show they will be attending? While you may exhibit well at your large industry show, also

consider smaller shows that have a higher proportion of people likely to be interested in your products or services. You can find shows online to pick from at www.tsnn.com. Also consider exhibiting internationally.

4. Space Selection: Where and How Big?

The average trade show has over 400 exhibitors, so how do you choose the best booth space for you? Most shows give space-picking priority to the exhibitors who have been with them the longest. Yet some studies have found that where you are in the show hall has no effect on the amount of audience you receive to your booth. For every veteran exhibitor that requires a space in the center of the action, or at the front entrance to the hall, or near their biggest competitor, there are veteran exhibitors who flee from the same locations. All the same, the size of your booth space is a very important decision, where you must weigh the need to stand out from your competitors with a large booth, and yet having enough budget to exhibit at all the worthwhile shows for your company.

5. Trade Show Exhibit Design: Make Your Exhibit a Marketing Tool

Why does exhibit design matter? Because well-designed trade show booths are so effective at cutting through the trade show clutter and getting your message to your target audience. The average trade show attendee will spend 7 to 8 hours on the floor over a period of 2 to 3 days visiting an average of 25-31 exhibits. This leaves 5 to 15 minutes per visit — just 5 to 15 minutes to make a lasting impression that will give you an edge over the competition.

Create an exhibit that works as a true marketing tool. Make sure your exhibit graphics say who you are, what you do, and what is your benefit to prospects. When you state those clearly, and with bold inviting graphics, you'll bring in more visitors — and more qualified visitors.

Your exhibit is more than a three-dimensional ad. It's actually a temporary workspace, filled with booth staffers there for hours or days, and visitors there for just a few minutes. Increase productivity by giving them enough space to work in, and by designing around their needs, be it for gathering leads, demonstrating products, meeting with key people, or storing their personal items.

6. Get More Traffic With Trade Show Promotions

Trade show promotions are the secret weapon of the veteran trade show manager. That's because, when done right, trade show promotions work so well.

Consider these two items:

1. The average trade show has over 400 exhibitors, where the average attendee will visit about 25-31 exhibits, and that average attendee walks into the show with a list of 75% of the exhibits he/she wants to see. That means you have to get on their dance card before the show.
2. You can boost your trade show lead counts by 33% with trade show promotions – even though they require a much smaller percentage of your budget.

So, trade show promotions are money well spent. Pre-show promotions are the things you do before the show to make attendees want to visit your booth. At-show promotions are the activities and trade show giveaway items you do during the show to bring in more attendees into your exhibit.

Just be sure to pick promotions that bring in your desired target audience, not just anyone at the show. And don't just give things away – get information about prospects in exchange that will help you qualify and prioritize your leads.

7. Train Your Booth Staff So They're Comfortable At Shows

85% of the positive feelings visitors have are due to the staff. Your booth staff is responsible for drawing in your customers, effectively engaging them and creating leads. Because of this, it is important that you select the most effective staffers that your company has to offer. If they are sales people, you have to train them to adapt their selling style to the trade show floor. If they are not salespeople, guess what – they can still do extremely well, given the proper preparation.

Trade show staffing is uncomfortable for almost everyone at first. Give your booth staffer greater comfort and confidence by training them to understand and follow a 4-step booth staffing process:

1. Engage: 30 seconds

Start the process by stopping attendees. Prepare and practice questions that won't get a yes or no answer.

2. Qualify: 2 minutes

Determine if the prospect is worth presenting to ... and what to present.

3. Present: 5 to 8 minutes

Demo on just the prospect's needs, not everything you know. Prepare for common objections and questions.

4. Close: 1 minute

Lead card complete? Agree on the next step and go on to the next lead!

8. Lead Management, Not Lead Neglect

Astoundingly, almost 80% of leads generated are never followed up, according to CEIR. Rather than sending your hard-fought trade show leads into the abyss, strive to be part of the elite 20% that actually follow up on their leads! We've heard horror stories of exhibits pulled out of storage to prepare for a show – only to find the leads from the previous show still packed with their trade show booth. What a tragedy!

Rather than just sending a business card from the prospect on to your field sales reps, provide and train your staffers to use a lead card. It's a half sheet of paper that has check boxes to the most common qualifying questions, and room for notes about what the attendee said in your booth. Your sales reps will be much more likely to follow up on a lead when they know what to say, and that it's worth the call.

Also, think of your first day back from the show as the last day of the show. Have your lead fulfillment packages prepared ahead of time, so you can send your responses right away.

9. Measuring Results Improves Future Performance

Once you return from a trade show it is important to measure its success. Why? Because while trade shows are a great marketing medium, you still have to prove the value of your individual program. This information can be used to report to management the effectiveness of the show and to improve exhibit performance for future shows. Success can be measured by simple lead counts, or better yet, by the return on investment, or whatever objectives you set when you started your trade show program.

By tracking your results from show to show, you can make informed decisions about which shows to continue, expand, contract, or cut. And when you are armed with data proving the value of your overall trade show program, you can maintain – and even expand – your trade show marketing efforts.

That's a lot of ground to cover in just one article. But it's a good plan to strengthen your trade show marketing, all in one place. I hope it helps you boost your results out of trade shows, whether you are looking for more leads, better relationships, a stronger brand, or simply sales, sales, sales.

3 Ways To Stand Out In A 10-Foot Trade Show Booth

Mike Thimmesch

As the entry-level booth size, 10-foot trade show displays are an essential part of exhibitions. But how do you win attendees' attention away from larger exhibits, or even your plentiful 10-foot neighbors, when you only have a 10-foot space?

Here are 3 proven areas to help turn your tiny ten-footer into the Belle of the Ball, and tips for each:

1. Exhibit Design

When you've only got a 10-foot trade show display, make the most of it. Load it up with bright colors, bold images, dynamic graphics, and photos or illustrations that will appeal to your buyer. Distill your marketing message to its bare minimum, and then shout it out with a clear, bold, highly visible benefit statement. As your small exhibit may be at a vertical market show with a very specific audience, consider graphic messaging that appeals more directly to that audience. Consider going beyond a cookie-cutter shape, to a more intriguing new shape; possible with the latest portable and modular exhibit systems. (Even banner stands can have cool shapes now). And make your booth more inviting by not filling it with stuff, be it too much display, too much product, or too big a table blocking the aisle.

2. Booth Staffers

When you have an island exhibit, your staff can be large enough to survive with a poor performer or two. But in a 10-foot space, you can't afford to have any duds. One bad booth staffer can ruin your entire show. So be sure to pick your very best staffers that will relentlessly attract, engage, and convert traffic to your booth. Your small booth space may be at a regional or vertical market industry show, so choose staffers who are local or know the industry, too.



Also, your company may be tempted to send only one staffer since “it’s just a 10-foot display.” But if the booth staffing hours are more than a few hours per day, that solitary staffer will start to look like they’ve been in solitary confinement. They’ll project a bad image for your company, and simply take fewer leads. Instead, send a wingman so two staffers can rotate short shifts and stay fresh.

3. Pre-Show and At-Show Promotions

Just because you have the smallest booth doesn’t mean you have to have the smallest voice. Get more booth traffic by bumping up the volume on your pre-show and at-show promotions. Before the show even starts, offer attendees (via email, mail, phone, ads, and social media) a compelling reason to visit your booth.

Once you’re at the show, pull out all the stops. Putting giveaways within reach of the aisle?

Offer more valuable and eye-catching premiums (but pay attention to the trick-or-treaters, and be ready to start conversations with visitors). Giving away a prize? Offer a more valuable prize than other exhibitors. Enticing visitors with a show special or discount? Knock another 5 or 10 percent off your usual offer. Demonstrating your product? Demo it in a more visually-arresting fashion to get people to stop, look, and enter your booth.

A long line of ten foot exhibits creates a gauntlet-like effect for attendees, dulling their senses as they walk down the aisle. Because 10-foot exhibits are by far the most common at trade shows (our data says about 6 in 10 spaces), virtually every exhibitors use them at one time or another. But you can still stand out from the pack. Focus on your exhibit design, booth staffers, and trade show promotions, and your 10-foot display will be the David to your neighboring Goliaths.

25 Of The Most Common Trade Show Mistakes

Michal Flavin

The past 7 years, working with clients in the trade show industry has allowed me to work with many different companies, industries, marketing teams and personalities. I've had the benefit of seeing some really great success and trade show strategy. And, I've also seen companies who have stumbled, because of mistakes that have been made in several different areas of the trade show strategy.

So, I'd like to share with you the 25 most common trade show exhibiting mistakes. You'll see that they can all be filed into several different categories, like pre-show, at-show, post-show, logistics, strategy, exhibits, etc.

1. **Not Planning Ahead.** Yes, we're all really busy at the office with a lot of other things, but if you're not planning for your trade show 12-9-6-3 months ahead, you're setting yourself & company up for failure.
2. **Going Cheap.** If you're looking to save \$5, \$20, \$200 here and there, you're focusing on the price of things, rather than the investment. Those extra bucks for the nicer carpet, the extra plants or the better looking display will add to the experience of your attendees and set your company apart from others.
3. **No Pre-Show Marketing.** If you don't tell anyone that you'll be at the show, how can you expect to have a lot of people stop by your booth space? No one has time to wander around these days. They're coming prepared to see who they want to see. Give people a good reason to stop by your trade show booth space and invest in those e-mails, post cards & promos to intrigue their interest ahead of time.
4. **Bad Graphics.** Have you ever seen a billboard on the highway with a bunch of copy? It's hard to read, right? Same with trade show displays. Make sure your graphics quickly tell who you are, what you do and how you can help them.
5. **Failure to Follow-Up on Leads.** I know you've heard (from CEIR.org) that 79% of leads are not follow-up after a show. Shocking. Don't be one of those companies. Create a closed-loop system, before you go to the show, to make sure no leads fall through the cracks.
6. **No Post-Show Marketing.** Just like not following up on leads, a lot of people fail to continue marketing after the show. Those B & C leads should still receive contact from you to be nurtured into A, sales-ready leads, at some point.
7. **Old Display.** Ever had an old car? It's a pain, right? Things break down and just don't work right anymore. Same thing with a trade show display. At some point, it's not telling the same story as it used to and you're probably losing out on opportunities. Time to get a new one.
8. **Missing Deadlines.** Remember all those trade show forms? You know they have deadlines. Submit them early and you've found an easy way to save some money. Also, you'll have deadlines from your exhibit company for building your display. Plan ahead and make them — you'll avoid additional expenses, like the need for expedited shipping.
9. **Filling Out Forms Incorrectly.** Was it 10 watts, volts or amps you needed for your electrical drops? Small detail, but if you get it wrong, it's a big expense to change on the trade show floor. Even more if it's on a Saturday or Sunday.



Never take a chance on amateur Photoshop “artists”.

10. **Not Partnering with Professionals.** Yeah, everyone knows a nephew or friend who has Photoshop. That doesn't mean they know how to design, though! Don't waste time on logistics and pinching pennies; work together with a professional to have your best show ever!
11. **Failure to Measure Results.** In a court of law, you need evidence to win a case. So when you get back from the show, how can you show others and yourself whether or not it was a success? You need to measure results.
12. **Exhibiting in the Wrong Booth Size.** When you have Thanksgiving dinner with 12 people at a table for 6, it's crowded and uncomfortable. You've probably noticed this in a booth that was too small. At other shows, perhaps a regional show, you might find that traffic isn't too busy, so perhaps you can downsize the next year.
13. **No Staff Training.** If we all didn't need constant & consistent training in our lives, baseball players wouldn't take batting practice before their games. You need to train booth staffers before each show. Yes, even the veterans.
14. **Sending the Wrong Staffers.** “Send the new guy to the trade show,” I hear it all the time. And, let me tell you, it's a bad idea. The clock is against us at trade shows. So we need people who are experienced in the process and are focused on success.
15. **Failure to Research Your Target Market.** Do you know what percentage of CEOs, directors and managers will be at the show? You might communicate to each of them in a different way and you need to be prepared & flexible.
16. **Going to the Wrong Show.** How do you know they'll be at the show? Because you went last year? Look how quickly technology changes. The trends in industries can change as quickly, so you need to be sure you're at the right shows. That might mean exhibiting at different shows than you did in the past.
17. **No Teamwork.** Have you seen the movie *Glengarry Glen Ross*? Your sales team might complain about the lack of or quality of leads. Your marketing team is probably complaining about the sales team being lazy and not following up on leads. Stop fighting and work together. It takes a leader and a plan, but a well-oiled trade show team, with the gap bridged between sales & marketing, will be very successful at trade shows.
18. **Not Leveraging Technology.** Technology is pretty cheap these days. You can buy an LCD monitor for nearly the same price as renting from the show. Everything is free on the internet, like social media. Everyone has a camera. Embrace some form of technology and use it to connect with prospects at trade shows & enhance your booth space.
19. **Forgetting About Social Media.** How many people are on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc.? Who knows these days, but it's a lot. Everyone has at least one of these



accounts and they'll be at the show. Take pictures around the show & in your booth and tweet them. Take a short video and post it on YouTube. Your trade show experience will live long after the show and continue to promote your company.

20. **Underestimating Your Prospective Customers.** They're coming to the show prepared, with knowledge. They've done research, online, before the show and they know who they want to see at the show. You better be one of them and you better be prepared. Get on their dance card!
21. **Not Having a Plan "B".** What are you going to do if your display doesn't show up? What if one of our booth staffers gets the flu? Your exhibit is out of regulation, so what's next? You'd better have a back-up plan for all of these situations and more!
22. **Getting Hung Up on Failures.** So that giveaway didn't work out. You didn't have a chance to connect with that huge prospect. Let's get over it, plan for the next show, and do better next time.

23. **Not Listening.** Stop talking! Starting asking good questions and let your prospective customer do the talking. Then listen!
24. **Not Taking Notes.** Don't rely on badge scanners. Typically you're just receiving contact information, not much more. Record notes either by writing them down or using a better technology. This is an important step to help you quickly qualify prospects and follow-up quickly afterwards.
25. **Forgetting to Celebrate Success!** Yes, you put a lot of work into your trade show. Once you've measured results after the show, you can see all the objectives that you achieved for your company. Now, go celebrate with a lunch or a special purchase for yourself. You deserve it!

Trade Show Planning Timeline: Manage Your Logistics AND Marketing

Mike Thimmesch

To master the deadline-driven world of trade shows depends on great planning.

Yet all too often, important marketing planning gets overshadowed by urgent logistics planning. Because of the flood of deadlines, we get more distracted by the “what to do” rather than the “why to do” it.

Yet it's just as essential to plan marketing things. Things such as your goals for the show, your marketing messages for your graphics and staffers, and creating a promotional campaign that will get more of the right people to your booth.

Here are some ideas for your plan, either for a single show or for your entire program. Marketing and logistics steps are mixed together, as you need to do both to truly succeed.

6 months out:

- **Review Past Objectives:** Evaluate previous year's shows to see how many leads converted to sales, and your marketing return on investment. If you set different objectives, measure return on those objectives.
- **Set New Objectives:** Set your top 2 or 3 objectives for your next year's trade show program.

5 months out:

- **Set Budget:** Adjust your budget based on what worked last year, your current financial state, objectives, and opportunities.
- **Select Shows and Booth Spaces:** Evaluate your show schedule to determine which shows have the best match with your target market for

the best value, and pick the spaces you will take in those shows (if you have not already reserved space).

- **Evaluate Exhibit:** Review your current tradeshow display: If it still will help you achieve your new marketing objectives, keep it. If not, start researching new exhibit builders. For a larger exhibit, start 6 or more months out. For a small display or banner stands, start 2 months before the show.

4 months out:

- **Pick Booth Staffers:** Review last year's qualified lead counts by booth staffer to identify the staffers you want at your upcoming shows. Contact their managers to ask if they can attend. Ask your best booth staffers who else they would recommend.
- **Research Technology:** Consider how you can integrate technology into your exhibit to help get more attention, tell your story, and facilitate better conversations between attendees and booth staffers.
- **Invite Exhibit Builders:** If building a new trade show booth, set appointments to meet with 3 exhibit builders, and give them access to your key marketing decision-makers.

3 months out:

- **Review the “Show Book”** – the book or webpage from the show with all the forms for ordering services. Find the forms for services you need, and create a master list of all the deadlines to order and still get the discount rates. Start earlier if the show provides it earlier.
- **Create Promotions:** Brainstorm ideas for pre-show and at-show promotions that will help bring in a greater number of qualified leads into your booth, plus help your booth staffers to engage attendees.

Two months out:

- **Choose Staffers:** Finalize your booth staff choices.

- **Arrange Travel:** Book hotels and flights for booth staffers before rates go up.
- **Order Services:** Order any show services you need according to your list from the show book.
- **Choose Your Exhibit Builder:** Award the new build, and then continue to quickly and thoughtfully respond to their questions and requests for graphics art to ensure timely completion of your new exhibit.
- **Order Promotions:** Select and order any promotional items you will be mailing pre-show. Some can take only a few days, some can take over a month, depending where they are made and imprinted.
- **Order Uniforms:** If you are providing shirts, pants, and more for your booth staffers to wear, order them now.

One month out:

- **Send Promos:** Send the first wave of your pre-show promotion campaign.
- **Train staffers, Part 1:** Set up first booth staffing meeting, to train them on your main client profiles and your products.
- **Order More Services:** Order any final show services you need from the show book.
- **Order At-Show Promos:** Select and order any promotional items you will be giving away at the show, and have them shipped to the show (with a sample overnighted to you).
- **Ship Exhibit:** Ship your new exhibit to advanced warehouse, getting it out the door soon enough to save on shipping.

Two weeks out:

- **Train Staffers, Part 2:** Hold your second booth staffing meeting, to review the booth staffing process and info about your new exhibit, your promotions, technology in the booth, the convention city, and the show hall.
- **Send More Promos:** Send the second wave of your pre-show promotion campaign (if by snail mail, mail first class rather than by standard/bulk rate, or they may arrive after the show!)

- **Ship Staffer Supplies:** Ship a tub with all the supplies you'll need in your booth for staffers, such as pens, clipboards, staplers, staples, water bottles, snacks, mints and wipes.

One week out:

- **Prepare Lead Fulfillment:** Create and gather your post-show lead fulfillment packets, and assign the team that will process the leads.
- **Verify Exhibit Arrival:** Ensure your exhibit has arrived at the show.
- **Collect Documents and Backup:** Prepare and pack a master book or data file with all your at-show contacts including your booth staffers, exhibit house, and local show city vendors such as I&D to carry with you to the show. Include art files for your graphics.
- **Verify Staffers:** Check in with all booth staffers that they are still all set to attend the show; get a substitute if needed.
- **Love Your Loved Ones:** Be extra nice to your family and friends because you won't be there soon.

At the show:

- **Be Your Best:** Be brilliant, calm, hard-working, lighthearted, and creative.
- **Make It Happen:** Execute your plans for booth staffing, at-show promotions, lead management, and booth logistics.

After the show:

- **Come Home:** Give your family and friends souvenirs from the trip, preferably chocolate.
- **Say Thank You:** Thank your booth staffers and vendors.
- **Fulfill Your Leads:** Get promised packets out, and the leads into the hands of your sales force. Then keep checking on lead follow up.
- **Check Costs:** Review your actual expenditures against your planned costs to see if you are still on-budget, and the reasons if not on budget.
- **Measure and Analyze:** Measure if you met your objectives, then figure out what went right

and what can be improved.

- **Report Results:** Let management know how well you met your show objectives, what worked, and what could be improved upon.

Give yourself the opportunity to succeed. Take the time to create a solid plan, then work the plan you created, covering both logistics and marketing activities.

16 Fun Things To Do At A Trade Show

Mike Thimmesch

Trade shows are a serious marketing medium in which we invest billions of dollars. In our quest to achieve business results, we often talk about getting the highest ROI (Return on Investment) or ROO (Return on Objectives). But what about the greatest ROF (Return on Fun)?

Trade shows are about meeting people, those unpredictable, emotional beings. To be engaging, you need to be having some fun, because if you are bored or too serious, that puts up an invisible barrier. After a few days per show, and many shows per year, how can you keep yourself entertained (without going overboard at the clubs and the casinos)? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Look up on the show city's Visitors and Convention Bureau website all the fun activities you can do outside of show hours (try indoor skydiving in Las Vegas, it's a blast).
2. Go to dinner with the funniest sales person who is staffing the booth. Repeat nightly.
3. Count how many exhibit booths you can walk by before a booth staffer tries to engage you.
4. Visit your competitors at the show and ask them what they don't do well. Watch 'em squirm.
5. When you meet attendees in your booth, stop treating them like numbers on the sales chart, and treat them instead as if they are going to be your new best friend.
6. Drinking game: Walk down the trade show aisle carrying a bottle of water (unless you are at a European show). Whenever a booth staffer says, "Hi! How are you?" you reply, "Fine," take a swig, and keep walking.
7. Pick up giveaways from your fellow exhibitors, and then give them back ... to different exhibitors.
8. Go to lunch with the second-funniest sales person who is staffing the booth. Repeat daily.
9. Look up old friends you haven't seen in ages that live in the show city, via Facebook, LinkedIn or other social media, and relive the glory days.
10. Create a fun activity in your booth that helps get your message across to visitors.
11. Walk into an island trade show exhibit and play with their products. Count how many seconds (minutes?) it takes for a booth staffer to engage you.
12. Smile at your booth visitors, even if they aren't. Pretty soon you'll both be smiling.
13. Have a contest with fellow staffers to see who can work specific obscure words into conversation when talking with booth visitors, such as "corollary," "obtuse," and "Sandra Day O'Connor."
14. Walk the show with a colleague. Have a bet on who can count the most: booth staffers sitting down or booth staffers on the phone. A third friend can count booth staffers eating or drinking. (This is like counting states on license plates when on a long drive.) Loser buys lunch.

15. Have another bet: Before you hit the show floor, bet which trendy new color will be on the trade show displays. Then count the exhibits with that color. Loser buys drinks ... that are the color they picked.
16. Thank everyone who has helped you with the show – your booth staffers, your exhibit house, your manager, the show owner, the show labor, and especially your booth visitors. You'd be surprised how much fun that can be.

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!"

Trade Show Planning Flowchart: Your Prescription For Pain-Free Exhibiting

Judy Fairbanks

How do you prevent deadlines from sneaking up on you? With life moving at internet speed, it's nearly impossible. Over the years, I've found a sure-fire prescription to prevent the rampant spread of the much feared disease, "Deadline Eruption Syndrome."

In fact, the preventive measure prescribed here is a time-tested remedy. It can help you avoid that sick-to-your-stomach feeling brought on by the avalanche of missed deadlines, missed opportunities and missed sales from trade shows. I am betting this prescription, when consumed regularly, will keep you healthy, wealthy and wise when it comes to trade shows.

So, what's the big Rx?

Simple. Build a standardized, calendar-driven, cyclical process to anticipate and manage those activities that are sure to recur (as trade shows always do). The entire Trade Show Planning Rx is a spread on the two pages following this article.

It's no revelation that you should begin by identifying goals and objectives, a fundamental yet often overlooked step by super busy managers. It's best to kick-off this cycle in 4th Quarter, looking forward across the entire next year. Build out a spreadsheet itemizing your annual show schedule, trade show exhibit budgets, and goals (both overall goals and show-by-show). In addition to establishing the essential sales and lead collection goals, challenge your team to develop a new set of social metrics to watch: Facebook Fans, Foursquare Check-Ins, Twitter Followers, Pinterest Repins. Once identified, you'll be best served to track them obsessively.

In late 4th Quarter, pull out your trade show booth and evaluate its condition. Take the time to know exactly what you're working with so that when the

time comes to develop more detailed strategies, you can clearly envision design opportunities and limitations. Knowing your exhibit properties intimately lets you work from a position of know-how when developing the outreach plan – which will result in exciting, unique and compelling experiences to engage, educate and motivate your audiences.

Next, develop a single, replicable strategic plan that includes these sections:

- Logistics
- On-Site Experience
- Lead Handling & Sales
- Three Distinct Outreach Plans
 1. Social Media & Marketing
 2. Press & Industry
 3. Strategic Partners

Your strategic plan will serve as a road map, guiding you to execute each show effectively and predictably — all year, one by one.

The prescription will kick in every week during your regular status meetings – when your team discusses and reports on all the pre-show, on-site and post-show activities that are occurring for each show on the schedule, driven by the strategic plans firmly in place.

True, it's easier said than done. Creating and maintaining an effective trade show program takes a lot of work. And, it all starts with a plan that incorporates a defined measurement approach that allows you to watch your program perform and grow. And with the Trade Show Planning Flowchart as your spoon full of sugar, you're sure to grow in the most delightful way.

Trade Show Planning Flowchart

Set Goals - Annually (November)

Annual Planning Summit

- Budgets
- Show schedule
- Objectives
(For example: Number of booth attendees, sales impacted, Facebook fans added, Twitter followers added)

Design Your Booth - Annually (December)

Exhibit

- First build?
- Consult exhibit house
- Existing inventory
- Map out usage

Design & Messaging

- Key messages
- Consistent across all
- Unique by audience?

Adjust Future Goals

Measure Results - 1 week after

- Budget Reconciliation
- Gather metrics (against goals)
- Insert details into Show Report
- Review results with your team
- What worked? What didn't?
- Recommendations for the next
- Review results with Exhibit House
- What worked? What didn't?
- Recommendations for the next

Note: Because sales cycles can be very long, sales metrics should be formally measured end-of-year.

Execute the Show

Pre-Show (start 3 mos. prior, per show)

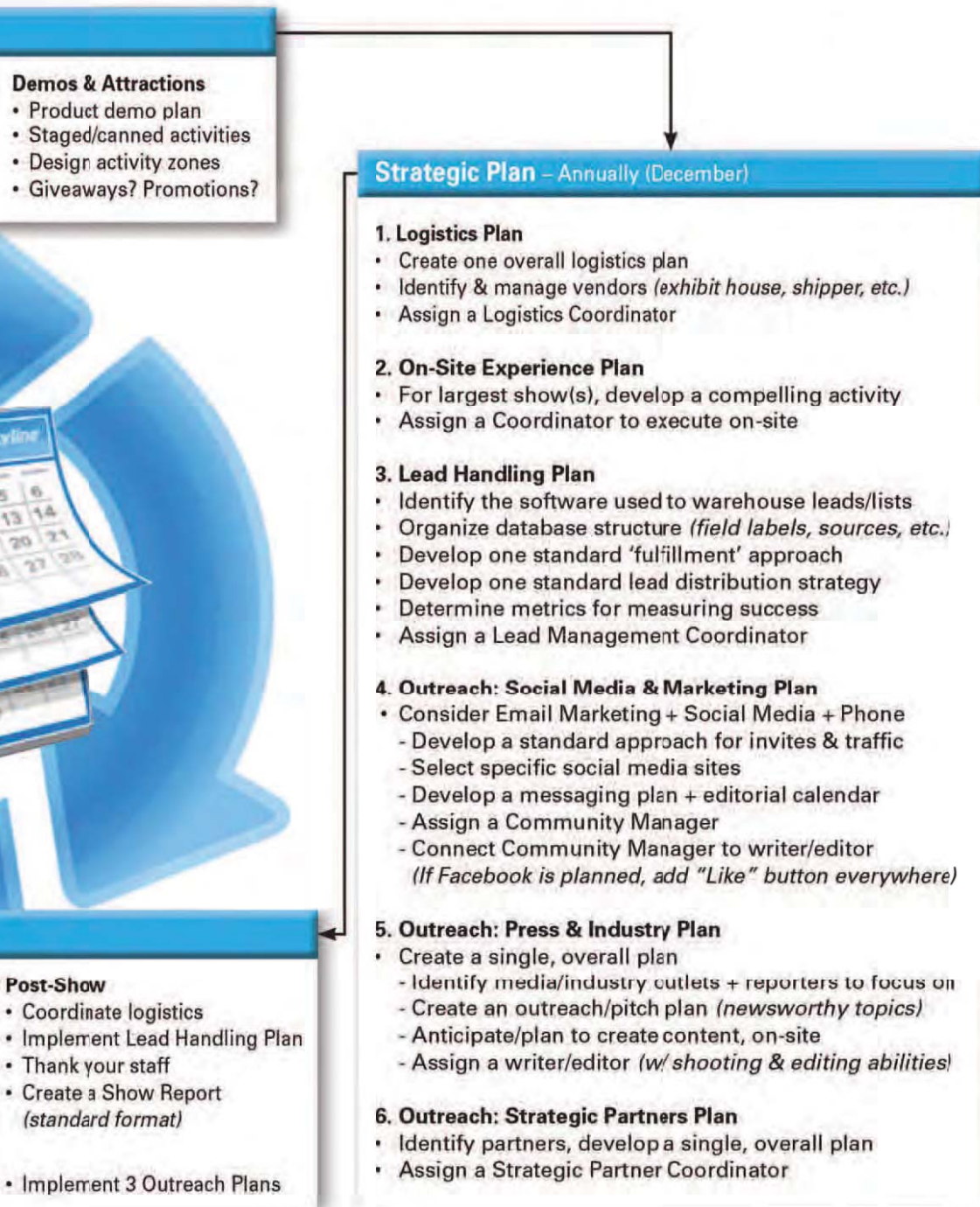
- Fine tune floorplan, graphics, products
- Staff list + badges + attire
- Order show services
- Instruct staffers w/ necessary info
- Travel & hotel arrangements
- Arrange shipments
- Implement 3 Outreach Plans

On-Site (usually a total of one week)

- Exhibit installation + product setup
- Staff huddle (before & after hours)
- Engagement throughout
- Execute 'experience' (party, dinner, etc.)
- Capture the show - video & photos
- Competitive review & mystery shopping
- Implement 3 Outreach Plans



Key to Success: Standardize Processes



Marketing

100 Trade Show Lead Generation Ideas

Mike Thimmesch

For most exhibitors, lead generation is their #1 reason for exhibiting at trade shows. Exhibit marketers want leads to replenish their sales pipeline, bring in new and repeat customers, and generate sales revenue.

So to help stoke the lead generation fires, here are 100 ideas to get you more leads at your upcoming trade shows, divvied up among 5 main areas:

Get more trade show leads by how you select shows

1. Go to more trade shows outside your local region
2. Go to more trade shows, in your best vertical markets
3. Go to more trade shows, in foreign countries
4. Go to fewer trade shows, but put more effort into booth staff preparation and promotions for each remaining show
5. Exhibit at trade shows where your buyers are
6. Track leads to determine and expand in the shows with the best ROI
7. Evolve show selection to match changes in company's best vertical markets

Get more trade show leads with your exhibit design

8. Get a bigger booth
9. Get a booth space closer to the hub of traffic, or by a bigger competitor
10. Get a corner booth space



11. Backlight your trade show display graphics
12. Design your exhibit to boldly and clearly say why attendees will benefit from working with you
13. Put fewer elements on your exhibit, but make the remaining images and messages bigger and more concise
14. Use graphics with images and benefits that appeal more directly to attendees at your vertical market shows
15. Put benefit statements on your trade show exhibit graphics
16. Replace your tired old display with a new trade show exhibit
17. Make your exhibit architecture more inviting to enter
18. Pick more exciting colors on your exhibit
19. Bring fewer products, such as only your most popular products, to minimize clutter
20. Get a taller exhibit
21. Add more lighting
22. Put messages on your flooring
23. Avoid an exhibit that looks like everyone else
24. Keep your booth neat and clean throughout the show
25. Move interesting equipment and technology to the outside of the booth

26. Use a theme that gets attention and memorably ties into your competitive advantage or offering
27. Match your exhibit message to your other marketing materials

Get more trade show leads with pre-show promotions

28. Send an inexpensive postcard offering a free gift in your trade show booth
29. Run a banner ad on the show website
30. Send a pre-show email blast to your clients and top prospects located close to the show location
31. Put stickers with booth location and show info on all outgoing mail
32. Email invitation to a pre-show microsite with targeted messages and offers
33. Have your sales people invite their prospects to visit your booth and set up meetings in advance
34. Send an email invitation to the show's pre-registered attendee list for this year, and the registered attendee list from last year
35. Use social media to reach more attendees
36. Send half of something of value to attendees before the show, and promise to give the other half in your booth
37. Contact your industry press and tell them about the innovative new product you will be introducing at the show
38. Put your booth number on all your pre-show promotions: email, mail, ads, website
39. Design more creative and compelling pre-show promotions to cut through the mailbox clutter
40. Invite top prospects to lunch/dinner at the show
41. Send a pre-show promotion offering a more valuable gift in the booth, but not to the entire list, but only to the subset of show attendees that match your target audience
42. Send free tickets to the trade show to clients and best prospects
43. Post your trade show schedule on your website with a link to sign up for appointments
44. Ask the show for additional promotional opportunities

Get more trade show leads with at-show promotions and activities

45. Introduce a new product at the trade show
46. Add motion to your exhibit
47. Offer food, especially if it smells good, like baking cookies
48. Offer drinks to your booth visitors
49. Give your attendees something entertaining and fun to do
50. Do an engaging demo in your booth
51. Get your client to hold your product
52. Go beyond sight to appeal to attendees' sense of smell, sound, taste, and touch
53. Add interactivity
54. Run presentations or video loops on large video monitors
55. Offer healthy food, not just candy
56. Put out a candy or chocolate dish to slow down attendees long enough to engage them
57. Offer in-booth massages
58. Give a free sample of your product
59. Give a free sample of a product made with your product
60. Hire a *celebrity* for your booth, where the celebrity is popular with your target audience at the show
61. Hire a *celebrity lookalike* for your booth, where the celebrity is popular with your target audience at the show
62. Giveaway something useful to your target audience
63. Hire a performer, such as a magician, to attract attention to your booth
64. Have a raffle, sweepstakes, money machine or a game
65. Hold a press conference if you have newsworthy news
66. Sponsor something highly visible at the show
67. Have a contest for attendees in your booth
68. Get signage in the show hall promoting your booth presence
69. Offer a show special or discount
70. Get someone from your company to be a

- speaker at the show
71. Give presentations or educational sessions in your booth
 72. Do door drops that target only show attendees at their hotel rooms
 73. Pay to include an invite or a gift in the official show bag each attendee gets
 74. Put an ad in the show book
 75. Brand your staffers with outfits or similar attire
 76. Offer one really big prize (worth thousands of dollars) to get more attention

Get more trade show leads with better booth staffing

77. Bring more booth staffers
78. Bring booth staffers who actually want to be there
79. Hold a contest to reward the staffers who take the highest quantity of qualified leads
80. Leave your wallflowers at home
81. Train your booth staff how to work a trade show booth
82. Communicate to your staff the company's goals and your expectations of them in the booth
83. Don't use booth staffing as a training ground for brand-new employees
84. Ask visitors open-ended questions and listen to their answers
85. Get faster at recording each lead by not writing down every visitor's name and address, but instead using a badge scanner
86. Have enough badge scanners to avoid lines with your booth staffers in busy times
87. Bring crowd gatherers (not booth babes)
88. Smile
89. Keep your booth staffers fresh by giving them regular breaks
90. Learn to more quickly disengage with unqualified attendees
91. Thoroughly train your booth staffers on the new products you are introducing at the show or just introduced recently

92. Make friends with your neighboring exhibitors, and refer attendees back and forth
93. Bring your top management to booth staff, and tell attendees they will be there
94. Get staffers out of the bowels of your booth and out to the edge of the aisle
95. Don't sit down in your booth, unless you are talking with visitors
96. Don't hide behind tables
97. Instead of giving away literature, offer to mail it to attendees, and get their contact info
98. Prepare your booth staffers with several good engaging questions
99. Arm your booth staffers with answers to common objections
100. Train your booth staffers to know your products and how they solve your clients' problems

Which of these 100 ideas will you choose?

Perhaps you are already doing several yourselves. Some can be combined to be used simultaneously. It's a long list, and there's no way anyone can do all 100. Some of them even contradict each other.

Yet as Bob Milam advises, while knowing a lot of tactics is useful, knowing **which** tactics to use and **when** to use them is even more useful. Determine your strategy first, then choose among these trade show tactics the most appropriate ones to support your strategy and generate more leads.

Also, while I've listed many tactics to get more leads, of course you need to also strive for getting higher quality leads. And if you can do both, go to the head of the class.

To Be A Better Exhibitor, Be A Better Marketer

Mike Thimmesch

Are you a trade show exhibitor? Or a trade show marketer?

It's understandable that as an exhibitor you get caught up in logistics, because no matter what, you have to get your booth from point A to point B (and to point C, D, E, and so on). But those required logistics can sometimes crowd out the even more important marketing aspect of trade shows.

So let's take a few minutes to set logistics aside (don't worry, they'll still be there when you get back) and focus on how you can be a better marketer who just happens to use trade shows.

Target Your Best Personas

Personas are portraits you create to better understand your best clients as prospects. A good persona includes age, gender, income, ethnicity, and even emotional aspects such as personality, likes & dislikes, their mentality, and key motivators. A persona gives your team a more tangible, living target to aim for when you create your marketing materials. You can create and target several personas. For example, a car company may have car buyer personas that are driven by status, or economy, or hauling family,



or sustainability. When you understand your buyer personas, you can tailor all marketing aspects to better appeal to them.

Write A Creative Brief

A creative brief is like a mini-marketing plan for your trade show. It takes some time to pull together, but it saves you time in the end. Include in your creative brief your goals for the show, your positioning, your strengths and weaknesses compared to competitors, what you want to have happen in the booth and after the show, how you plan to promote your presence at the show, and even your show budget. Once you have it, you can share it with your booth staffers and the vendors you are hiring for the show, such as your exhibit house or your promotions vendor.

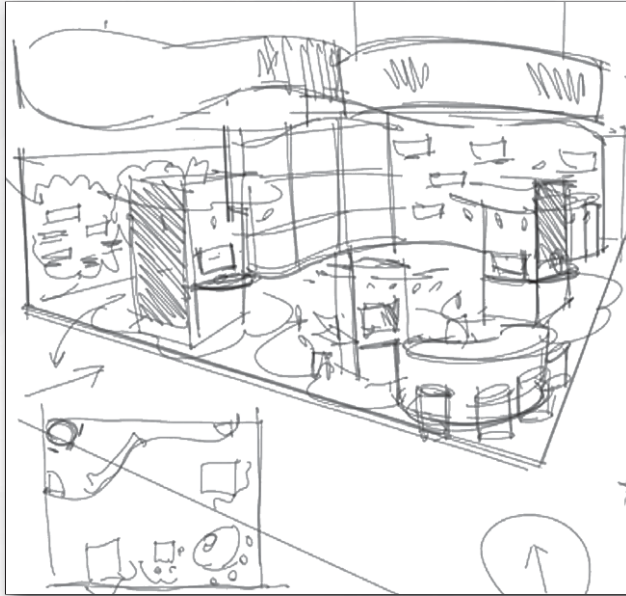
Select The Right Shows

Rather than choose which shows to exhibit at based on cost per square foot or number of total attendees, your marketing mind should instead hone in on the number of attendees that fit your target market, or the return on investment you've received at previous years' shows. You look at which vertical market shows exist where you have the greatest potential, even if the overall

show attendance pales compared to your main industry shows. And you regularly reexamine your show schedule based on marketing potential and performance.

Design Your Exhibit As A Marketing Tool

Your trade show displays are not just pieces of furniture – they are marketing tools that both communicate a message and support your booth



staff. Make sure your trade show exhibit lives up to its full marketing potential. Does it clearly communicate a compelling reason for your buyers to stop and visit you? Does it boldly say (with both images and text) what products and services you offer, and how you are better? And if you are exhibiting at a variety of shows (based on personas in different job titles or industries), can you change your graphics to more directly appeal to your various personas?

Create Promotions That Appeal To Your Personas

Trade show promotions can get more people into your booth. Be sure to pick your promotions with a critical and inspired marketing eye, to ensure you excite your best buyer personas, and avoid attracting non-buyers to your trade show booth.

This is the fun part of trade show marketing – when your promotions are so on-target that you build stronger relationships with your buyers because they recognize that you truly understand them. You do that with compelling offers they crave, and with a look and feel that matches your buyer's personality.

Follow Up Leads More Than Just Fast

The logistical part of trade show lead follow up means getting the leads into the computer and out to the sales force quickly, and getting your packets in the mail within a few days. That's awesome, and essential. But with a marketing perspective you can go much further. Make sure you and your booth staff qualified the leads before you send them on their way, so your sales force knows which leads to pursue first. And don't just send out a generic follow up packet – tailor your marketing materials specifically to what each attendee asked for. You'll create more sales with your trade show leads that way.

So by all means, be an expert at getting your show paperwork in on time to get the early discount. Know how to set up your banner stands in under a minute flat. Just remember that you are at trade shows to build your company image, generate sales leads, and build stronger client relationships. Achieving those admirable marketing objectives requires you to sharpen your marketing skills.

Value of Trade Shows

6 Things To Say When Your Boss Asks “Why Are We Spending So Much On Trade Shows?”

Steve Hoffman

1. We spend money on ads, money on direct mail, money sending our reps into the field...all in the hope that we can get face time with the people who matter. At a trade show, all of our best prospects are in one place at one time.

2. At a trade show, we get to see all of our existing clients in one place, at one time. We can use the opportunity to ascertain their future needs and their current satisfaction with our products and services.

3. At a trade show, the industry press comes to us. They are actively seeking what's new. We can easily make you and the rest of the senior management team available for quotes. And we can add to your stature by having you present a paper, participate in a panel, or play golf with our three biggest customers all in one foursome.

4. Whether it's the trade press, a current customer, a future prospect or even some company that may be interested in a strategic partnership, we get to control the environment in which they evaluate us. We get to position our messages in their minds.

5. Also, Mr. Boss, you are always concerned the staff doesn't keep abreast of the latest developments in our industry and is too self-focused. At a trade show we can spy on the

competition, we can attend seminars by thought leaders and industry titans, we can get a pulse of what is on our customers minds just by hanging out at the hotel bar.

6. Mr. Boss, do you remember that great idea you thought you had a few years back? We spent low-six figures pitching the thing in half the country only to find out our 'whatchamacallit' was being offered when the industry was clamoring for a 'thingamajig.' Had we only used the time at the annual trade show to survey the marketplace we'd have saved face, saved six figures and saved a season's worth of product development time!

And when the boss says, “But all these expenses add up...” That's when you agree they add up — to a very efficient use of valuable company resources.



Read This If You Think Trade Shows Don't Work

Mike Thimmesch

If you are reading this article, chances are you actually *don't* think trade shows don't work.

Why? Because, as two show producers recently told me, it's exhibitors who *most* need trade show training that *avoid* it, while good exhibitors seek training to keep sharpening their skills.

Don't get me wrong – I know trade shows take a lot of work, and the costs are high. But trade shows get you face-to-face with qualified buyers for much less than the cost of direct selling — value you can't get anywhere else.

Those same two trade show producers also know trade shows work, because they witness the difference between unmotivated and successful exhibitors at their shows.

But if you really do think trade shows don't work, let me ask you six brutally tough questions. And please listen to the questions, with the thought, those who truly listen are open to change.

1. How do you select the trade shows you exhibit at?

- A) Even though you grumble that they aren't as good as they used to be, you still have the same trade shows on your schedule, because that's where your competitors are, and your absence would make you look bad.
- B) You choose shows based on where your target market will be, and willingly readjust your show schedule and booth size based on the ROI from each show's leads.

2. How do you choose your trade show booth staffers?

- A) You bring your drinking buddies with you, so after standing around all day waiting for the show to end, you at least can go bar-hopping together.
- B) You pick staffers that actually want to staff the booth, who are approachable, client-focused, with good product knowledge and a great attitude.

3. How proactive are you at getting traffic into your booth?

- A) You shouldn't have to do anything special to get attendees to cross over from the aisle into your booth, because you already paid the show to deliver those interested buyers to you.
- B) To transform trade show attendees into booth visitors, you sent intriguing pre-show promotions with valuable offers, designed your trade show display with bold, compelling graphics, and trained your booth staffers to engage visitors in the aisle.



4. How do you spend your time in the booth?

- A) Because you already are so sure that trade shows are a waste of time, you spend your booth staffing shift on your laptop, smart phone, talking with your fellow booth staffers, or wandering away from your booth space.
- B) You know trade shows deliver a quality audience, so to welcome them you stand smiling attentively on the edge of the aisle, ready to engage attendees who show some interest.



5. When you return from the show, where do your trade show leads go?

- A) On a corner of your desk, because you've got to catch up on all that real work that was left waiting while you were at the show.
- B) Into the hands of an eager, pre-assigned team member, who already has the follow-up letter and fulfillment packets ready, and who will quickly enter the leads into your database and forward them to the appropriate sales people, who know they are accountable for following up and reporting the results.

6. What are the most valuable things you get out of trade shows?

- A) The few leads that were in your territory, the time spent with your best customer, and dinners on the expense account.
- B) Besides the big pile of sales leads for the team, you get to take the pulse of the industry, learn about new competitive products, and gain a better understanding of your customers.

If you selected mostly the **B** answers that describe proactive trade show marketing practices, and still think trade shows don't work, then trade shows may actually be a poor marketing medium for your company.

But if you answered mostly **A**'s, then perhaps you've realized that trade shows aren't the problem. Maybe you will begin to consider that there are proven trade show methods that you've overlooked, and that it's finally time to re-tool your trade show program. And make trade shows work for you.

Logistics

Be Ready When The Trade Show Opens: 6 Pitfalls To Avoid

Mike Thimmesch

Ever have the trade show open *before* you were ready for it? "Just give me one more hour!" you begged the Trade Show Gods, as the first tantalizing rush of attendees swept past your unprepared booth. It makes me break out in a cold sweat just thinking about it.

No one should have to endure that, especially if it can be prevented. Here are the 6 perennial speedbumps I've seen over the years, and what the best way is to overcome these obstacles and be ready at the opening bell.

1. You get pulled in multiple directions

You cannot simultaneously set up the lead machines, unwrap the giveaways, check in the booth staffers, put staples in the staplers, get the computers hooked up, and make sure the booth is set up and clean. So don't even try. Delegate. Ask the staffers who arrived before the show to unwrap the giveaway pens for you. When a small crisis comes up before the show, you don't have to rush off to solve it. You can call upon your booth staff teammates to fix a minor problem, so that you can still be there to orchestrate the rest of the preparations. Designate a lieutenant to be responsible for the minor stuff (staples, etc.) – let them delegate the menial tasks – freeing you up to handle larger crises.

2. The booth is not set up yet

This is the biggie. Without your trade show exhibit finished, it's like you've shown up at a party with no clothes on. Often the cause of not having your booth set up is that something was

missing or broken, or else you misjudged the time it would take to complete. The best way to avoid this is to have your booth installation started on the first day of set-up, so if there are issues that arise, you have time to solve them.



And to have a better chance of getting your exhibit crates or cases delivered to your booth on the first day of set up, ship them to the show's advance warehouse. If you're bringing a portable trade show display that you're setting up yourself, be sure to practice before the show. And just in case, have a list of emergency contacts for when things do go missing or get broken – know who to call and when.

3. Booth staffers are late

Most trade shows are held in cities with alluring distractions to pull in more attendees. Unfortunately those distractions can also work on your booth staff, keeping them out until late at night, or even early in the morning (that never EVER happens at a show...well...except the shows in Las Vegas, maybe...).

How do you keep them focused on the job at hand? Give them an earlier deadline to show up than the

opening of the show. Tell them you need them there an hour before the show opens for a pre-show meeting — and on the first day, better make it two hours before the show. Then, really have that meeting to go over objectives, promotions, lead machines, lead slot locations, and more. You can even have a breakfast meeting before the pre-show meeting. Then you can call the no-shows on their cell phone two or three hours before it's critical. Even better is to ensure their boss is also on the booth staffing team, so they feel more responsible for getting there on time.

4. Booth staffers not yet trained

What if your staffers arrive on time, but don't know what to do? You can spend the next hour trying to coach them, but then another one arrives and you have to start over again. This is a time to rely on your veteran booth staffers who can step in and coach for you, covering booth staffing basics, as well as what is specific to that show. You can also minimize that disruption by doing a teleconference or webinar with all staffers a week before the show. That way you have many trained before the crucial hour before the show, and you also have more people ready to train their buddies who arrive later.

5. Audio/visual/computers not ready

If you've got multiple computers being used around your exhibit, you have exponentially more chances that all will not be ready by show opening. Minimize your risk by testing all computers in their at-show set up (wireless mouse and keyboards? Longer cables between computers and monitors?) before you leave home (unless you are renting from the show). Have any presentations pre-loaded onto the computers, and bring (or have someone else bring – in case your bag gets lost) presentations on a thumb drive as backup. Also, if you are depending on 4 laptops from booth staffers (see point #3), ask 5 or 6 people to bring theirs.

For day two and three at the show when staffers may show up even later, be sure to have their computer login and password so you can get things going without them (if you locked their computers in the booth). And if you can't bring an excellent booth staffer who also is an IT whiz (thank you, Barb!), then get trained by your I.S. department on how to connect computers to the internet, and what Control Key/Function 8 does.

If using wireless internet, get your access codes from show management early on day one, and make sure that whoever is responsible for those codes a) gets there early enough every day to get the wireless up and running, and b) doesn't leave the show a day early – with the codes in their pocket!

6. Something is broken or missing

It could be that you don't have staples or waters for the booth staff, or light bulbs or pens or clipboards or whatever. When that last frantic hour is ticking away, these things can happen. There are two ways to overcome this final obstacle. The first is to have a well-stocked plastic tub shipped to the show that has all the things you need, and to restock it back at your office before it ships.

The second is to know the lay of the land before your crisis hits. Find out where the closest Home Depot, BestBuy and Walmart/Target stores are the day before the show starts, and have a rental car at your disposal to get you or someone else there in a hurry if needed. There may also be a store in or very near the convention center that specializes in all this kind of stuff — even Velcro!

Trade shows are complex. Even with great planning there's no way to avoid all the potential problems that can come up. Hopefully you're now better prepared for these 6 potential pitfalls, and will start your future shows ready to greet the opening-bell throng. When you do run into problems, most of all keep calm and stay flexible.

Promotions

10 Top Tips For Trade Show Promotions

Mike Thimmesch

Trade show promotions drive more traffic to your booth. Yet, there are nearly an infinite number of promos and giveaways, and almost as many ideas about how to do promotions better, too. So what should you do first?

These 10 tips are the hidden gems, secrets, and guideposts that I've uncovered in the 20-plus years I've been doing, reading, and researching trade show promotions. Follow these best practices to ensure your trade show booth a hub of meaningful activity:

1. Invent a great product demo to do in your booth, to pull in attendees, get them involved, and start valuable conversations.
2. Giveaways are worthwhile because they get more people to enter your trade show exhibit and help you be remembered after the show, but can attract the wrong people if their appeal is too broad and beyond your target market.
3. Set client and top prospect meetings in advance if at all possible, by offering them something of value such as a gift, access to decision makers, or exclusive information.
4. Promotions are great conversation starters — but your booth staffers have to keep the conversation going, rather than let the prospect walk off.
5. Discounts and show specials help you close the deal when you get rare face-to-face time with hard-to-reach prospects.
6. It's a guy thing: Choose giveaways and promotions that appeal to the demographics of your target audience.
7. Assertive, friendly, and persistent crowd gatherers are worth their weight in gold-dipped foam stress balls.
8. Before the show, reach out to attendees at minimum with email that offers something of value, potentially with direct mail, and for top prospects, by personal telephone calls.
9. Put more effort into social media for trade show promotions — but only when you are already maximizing traditional pre-show and at-show promotions. Your social media efforts should be proportionate to the social-media adaption rate of your target audience.
10. Giveaways that tie into your marketing message are much more memorable after the show.

Exhibit Design

37 Things A Trade Show Booth Does

Mike Thimmesch

Recently I wrote a surprisingly popular blog post called “44 Things A Booth Staffer Does.” (See it at <http://bit.ly/WWFuvh>) Some readers were amazed at the wide range of skills and tasks booth staffers require, while other readers wanted to share with their naïve peers just how much staffers actually do.

That led me to think about the job of your biggest booth staffer. And I’m not talking about that body builder from sales, or the big cheese CEO. I’m talking about your trade show booth.

Trade show displays are multitasking marvels made of metal, wood, fabric and more. Just like your booth staffers, they’ve got a very long to-do list. Imagine what it takes to build one thing that has to do all 37 of these things well:

1. Build, enhance, reposition and maintain your brand
2. Support your booth staff
3. Generates leads
4. Be seen from a distance
5. Communicate quickly
6. Stop attendees
7. Help attract qualified attendees
8. Promote your benefits
9. Announce your product markets
10. Break your company into new markets
11. Tell your story
12. Host a presentation
13. Provide meeting space
14. Display your products
15. Introduce your new products
16. Recruit new employees
17. Advances the buying cycle
18. Host a press conference
19. Make a statement
20. Reinforce a themed message
21. Answers questions
22. Store your staffer’s stuff, plus promotions, supplies and electronic gear
23. Facilitate dialog
24. Scare your competitors
25. Reinforce business partnerships
26. Welcome customers
27. Change booth sizes
28. Change messages to fit different markets
29. Instill pride in your team
30. Impress investors
31. Minimize operating costs
32. Pass show regulations
33. Pack down efficiently
34. Set up as easily as possible
35. Travel without getting damaged
36. Last for years
37. More than pay for itself

Your trade show booth must be a marketing powerhouse, a great host, a workplace, and a versatile team player. May you find the right booth for you.

10-Foot Trade Show Displays: Which Kind Is Best For You?

Mike Thimmesch

10-foot trade show displays come in two big categories. Which is right for you?

What's the first thing you should decide about your 10-foot trade show display? Is it the message? The images? The colors? Nope. While worthwhile questions, it's not time for them yet.

The first thing to decide is whether you should get a portable trade show display, or a modular inline exhibit. (You could also get a traditional custom exhibit, but for a 10-foot display that's like getting a sledgehammer to put in a carpet tack).

Portable 10-foot trade show displays Most exhibitors favor portable 10-foot trade show displays. They like how it helps them get in and out of the show hall easier, sets up fast, packs small, and keeps their costs down. And especially when you have different staffers setting up your display (without training!) at shows all around the country, it really helps to

make it as fool-proof to set up as possible. These are all good benefits and help explain the success of portable 10-foot trade show displays.

Modular 10-foot trade show displays Yet there are some exhibitors willing to pay double or even triple the cost of a portable to purchase their display, even though it will still be used in the same basic 10 foot by 10 foot space. They also will be paying more for their exhibit at every show, because it costs more to transport and set up. Why?

In a word, marketing. They want an exhibit that will propel their brand to the top. They value their brand image and the opportunity of their trade show audience even more than the benefits of portability offered by a banner stand or a pop-up display. They want a more upscale, elegant design for hosting their valuable prospects. They are willing to let someone else set up the exhibit, because they're at the show to generate big business.



This is a new idea to some exhibitors who hadn't yet considered getting a modular 10-foot trade show display. They only saw the value of getting in and out of the show fast, and saving lots of money on shipping, drayage, and set up. But once they see the marketing advantages of modular 10-foot trade show displays, they open up to the possibilities. Perhaps they could look better than the average exhibitor? Wouldn't it be better to look like the leader?

Portable 10' trade show displays offer easier, cheaper transport and set up.



Modular 10' trade show displays offer greater sophistication and branding power for marketing-driven exhibitors.

For the person first considering modular 10-foot trade show displays, it's worth reiterating that the modular exhibit they are infatuated with does come with greater operating costs. If you plan to do 20 shows a year, are you willing to pay that greater shipping and drayage bill? Are you willing to either set it up yourself, or even pay someone else to set it up for you? If the answer is still yes, then make the leap up to a more sophisticated marketing image, greater booth functionality, and the opportunity to generate more leads.

Both portable and modular are good choices, you decide which is best for you Once you make that decision to go with a portable 10-foot trade show display or a modular exhibit, you can then go on to determining your message, your look, and your overall trade show exhibit design. And whatever messages, images, and colors you pick, you'll be adapting them to the structure of the exhibit system you've already chosen.

Focus Your Exhibit Design On Your Target Audience

Mario Huggler

Trade show exhibits are best when their design and message directly focuses on the exhibitor's target audience. A successful exhibit design depends largely on meeting the following 4 criteria:

1. The exhibit instantly communicates to visitors that the exhibitor offers products visitors are looking for
2. The exhibit quickly engages visitors with a compelling, relevant message
3. The brand impression created by the exhibit matches the exhibitor's own corporate identity
4. The unique advantages of the exhibitor's products and solutions are easily understood

But what happens in reality 80 percent of the time? You walk the show floor and see the opposite of the four points outlined above (except for exhibits designed with great restraint, usually for big companies and major brands).

Unfortunately, many companies make it their primary exhibit design strategy to point out every product they offer, and then describe it with big blocks of small text on the exhibit wall. That's a far cry from a concise and compelling message, and prevents visitors from finding what they are looking for. Most of all, trade show attendees want information on products and services, and especially innovative new solutions. What trade show attendee gives up his valuable time just to look at products he's known about for years?

The only question is how to design the exhibit to appeal directly to your best prospects. The following has been proven in practice:

1. First, one should first think about what the audience expects from the exhibitors. What are



their motivations, and why do visitors attend shows in general? The answer, according to research, is almost always to find innovative products and solutions!

2. Then the following question moves into the center: What is the emotional profile of the target groups? Various professional groups are attracted by different messages and communication styles. A marketer can inspire with innovative technology, such as, at the moment, by the innovation of an iPad or a multi-touch table for presentations. CEOs are intrigued more by dominant, high-status designs while nurses or teachers more on natural messages, materials and shapes. You can learn more on the blending of brain research and communication theory in the book, **Think Limbic**, by Hans-Georg Häusel.

3. Third, integrate the previous two points into your exhibit design, by considering the following elements:

- Reduce your offering to the essentials (show just your innovative products, rather than lots and lots of products.)

- Reduce your graphics text to only one main message and a maximum of three customer benefits.

- Consider using questions in your messaging. Questions that your target show attendees are looking to answer, which will help you start a conversation with them.

- Thoughtful use of materials, colors and shapes, which fit your company brand and reflect your corporate personality and values.

- Use of emotional imagery. Pictures convey messages more convincingly than words.

Aligning your trade show exhibit design to the needs of your target audience is a well proven principle: Less is actually more! In addition, a simplified exhibit costs less, which is also attractive.

Exhibit Marketing Planning Worksheet

Marc Goldberg

What is your exhibit marketing mission?

This can be answered by thinking about the following two questions:

1. What function do trade shows play in your marketing mix?
2. Why do you exhibit?

It all begins with:

- Why are you exhibiting? _____
- Who is your target audience? _____
- What do you want to communicate? _____
- What do you want to bring home with you (measurable results)? _____

Competitive Analysis:

- What is your position in the marketplace? _____
- Who is your competition? _____
- What is your competitive advantage? _____
- What is your unique selling position? _____

Strengths and Weaknesses of Your Exhibit Program:

Strengths

Weaknesses

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Describe your Target Audience:

Define the characteristics that profile your audience (role of visitor, decision maker or influencer, size of company, price sensitivity, quality conscious, domestic or international or both, timing of needs and budget).

What attracts your audience to your exhibit? What do they want to see when they visit you?

What is your offer? What do you want to occur in your exhibit?

What vehicle do you want to use before the show and post-show to communicate your messages?

- Pre-show promotion – direct mail, telemarketing, email, social media
- At-show promotion
- Multimedia presentations
- Videowall, flatscreens, A/V
- Live presentations
- Giveaways as stand-alone or part of a contest or demonstration viewed
- Demonstrations
- Other: _____

Objectives:

What are your exhibiting objectives?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Messages:

What messages do you want to deliver? – What are the 1, 2, or 3 most important thoughts that you want your visitors to remember after they leave your exhibit?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What is the BIG IDEA or positioning statement you are trying to communicate?

Measurement:

When the show is over, what do you want to have as a result?

- Qualified leads
- Sales from leads or sales at show
- Position the company or products
- Market penetration
- Introduced new products
- Met with existing clients
- Obtained press coverage
- Increased name awareness

What issues are concerning you regarding your trade show program? What actions are necessary to address the issues?

Inline Exhibit Design For Service Companies

Mike Thimmesch



During our trade show training webinars over the last two years, perhaps no question has been asked more than this: “How do we design our trade show display to get attention when we sell a service, instead of a tangible product?”

You can understand how frustrating it could be to not have a product to physically point to and demonstrate. And yet, there are several ways exhibitors have created more than enough visual splash to promote their service. Here are 9 ways your service company can attract plenty of the right people into your trade show booth:

1. Clearly define your service
2. Emphasize your benefits
3. Show photos of your clients – the people and their workplace
4. Show photos of your employees doing their job
5. Use bold graphic design and great typography
6. Show the industries you serve
7. Give proof of your benefits, client acceptance, or market success
8. Represent your upscale brand with exhibit architecture

9. Demonstrate your software product in your trade show booth

To bring these ideas to life, we’re going to look at 12 examples, which use one or more of these 9 exhibit marketing & design tactics. We’ll start with eight 10-foot displays, then look at four 10 X 20 foot inline displays. No matter what size exhibit you use, these tactics can work for you. And even if you do sell a physical product, these ideas can make your trade show exhibit design even stronger.

10’ Trade Show Booths That Sell a Service



Doody Mechanical does a great job combining relevant photos and text to sell their service. Their display’s center panel clearly leads with a strong benefit, “Know where your building stands on energy costs” plus the action steps, “Identify. Implement. Manage.” over the image of a typical client’s building. The two outside panels both have a photo of their target audience in their work environment plus a benefit statement headline.



Alliant Consulting combines several methods to sell their service: They very concisely say what they do: “Labor Compliance Monitoring.” They show friendly, professional people in hardhats that could be either their clients or their employees. They show photos that convey construction and government, which is their focus, and have some graphic flourishes to pull it all together in an eye-catching manner. This booth says exactly what it



needs to say very quickly in a 10-foot space.

Meyers’s Teleservices clearly defines their service, shows photos of their employees smiling with headsets (they do teleservices, after all), and

they use bold graphics. They also say they offer “A World Of Experience” as a benefit, but that may get lost at ankle-height. They fully leverage their 10’



space by using similar graphics on their table.

LinkShare features a large dynamic red swirling arrow on both its backwall display and its table – the same art that is in its logo. They also state their service and its benefits in large text, saying “Online Performance Marketing Solutions that Drive Results.” They list the services they offer, and for extra credibility, show logos of their most well-



known clients.

vandover shows their benefits statement, “Solid Relationships Solid Results” larger than any

other text except for their logo. They also show 4 photos of the kinds of clients they serve, and on the rest of the display list 9 services they offer. They use a more architecturally structural exhibit



system to convey a more sophisticated brand.

Intertech uses bold colors and an enlarged version of their intriguing logo to add visual spice to their graphics. They clearly state their offering, “Medical Device Development and Validation” and then add “Outsourced Engineering Solutions



Since 1982,” and list 5 services they offer.

Allimax Software combines many tactics to promote their service in a single 10-foot display: Their positioning statement (“Data management and reporting. It’s what we do.”), a tagline (“Setting Data in Motion”), and a benefit statement (“We’ll help you work ... Easier. Faster. Smarter.”) They also add visual appeal with an exaggerated photo showing a typical (overwhelmed!) client, bright



colors, and swooping graphic flourishes.

Dynamics Direct exemplifies the strong use of a benefits statement: “Technology & Expertise to Double & Triple Your Response” is shown in larger text than the words telling what they do: “The Leaders in E-Mail Marketing.” The red, white and blue is also more colorful than most exhibits.

20-foot Trade Show Booths That Sell



A Service

MCH is brave enough to do what few exhibitors attempt: They emphasize their marketing message over their company name and logo. Half their exhibit is dedicated to a creative, billboard-style graphic that challenges their target audience to consider their offering (“Can You See Beyond B2B? Discover B2i”). The other half details the reasons supporting their offer.



Silversea, a luxury cruise line, combines stunning lifestyle photos with the powerfully worded headline, “inspire. indulge. intrigue.” They do have a physical product – the ship – but sell the service of vacation travel with elegance and sophistication, appealing to their upscale buyers.



lotusworks catches the eye with very bold colors, the large “Experience The Power Of LOTUS” positioning statement overlaid over a brilliant photo, plus other photos and drawings relevant to the industries they serve. They make the list of 18 services they offer easier to absorb by grouping 6 each under 3 major service categories. It’s a lot of information to convey, so the balanced use of color, images, and order of information make it stand out



instead of getting lost.

compellent uses the visual allegory of water – both graphically and even with real water in the blue, curvy tubes – to represent the flow of data, complementing their differentiating positioning statement: “Data isn’t something to be ‘stored.’ It’s something to be actively, intelligently managed. Introducing Fluid Data Storage.” This booth also uses rich wood flooring and elegant architectural shapes to convey the sophistication of the compellent brand.

So there you have it. Even if your product can’t be held in the hand of your booth visitors, you can still design an exhibit with the right graphic elements that helps captures visitors’ attention and makes a strong impression about why they should choose your service business.

16 Embarrassing Signs You Need A New Trade Show Display

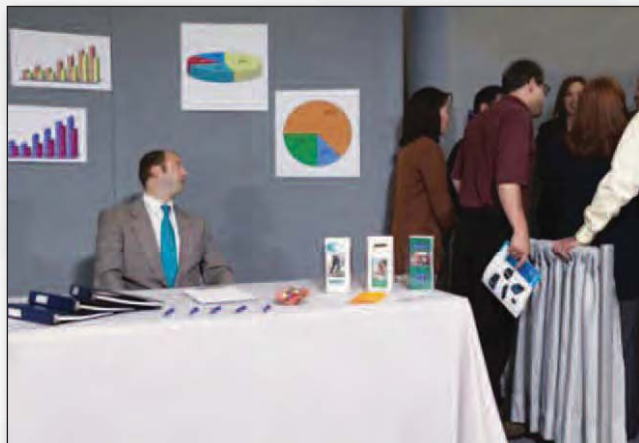
Mike Thimmesch

You can tell when you really need to buy a new car: Small rust holes merging into bigger rust holes; the billows of smoke from burning oil; the engine that is so loud you have to shout to be heard.



But what about your trade show displays? What similar clues hint that it's time to send your display to the junk yard and start over? You'll know it's time if you've experienced any of these:

1. The colors on your trade show booth are out of fashion – again.
2. All the people in your exhibit photos have big 80's hair.
3. Your booth staffers wear bags over their heads.
4. Your booth staffers keep their backs to the aisles.
5. Your booth staffers try to stay in the aisle the entire show.
6. Your booth staffers arrange for all their at-show meetings to take place in the coffee shop.
7. Visitors to your booth say, "Wow, what a cool retro look!" when that actually wasn't your design intention.
8. There is a bird nest in the tower of your trade show booth.
9. The lights on your trade show display use technology that is no longer available.
10. Your trade show exhibit uses more duct tape than MacGyver.
11. Some countries that no longer exist are included in your bulleted list of countries where you have distribution.
12. The words "keen" and "neato" appear in your exhibit graphics.
13. You have multiple layers of white-out used to change text on your graphics.
14. There is more carpet-like fabric than graphic images on your backwall displays.
15. Your exhibit architecture has a Soviet-era feel.
16. Attendees to your booth only compliment you on your rented carpet.



If you've had to endure any of these embarrassing moments, or experience other similar awkward episodes, perhaps it's time to investigate purchasing or renting a new trade show exhibit.

Booth Staffing

Going Beyond The Tip of The Iceberg of Booth Staff Training

Mike Thimmesch

In the rush to prepare for trade shows, exhibitors often schedule only one measly hour to training their booth staff. That's woefully inadequate for what the staff really needs – and what the opportunity demands.

Your company invests thousands upon thousands of dollars to gain the rare opportunity of getting face-to-face with hundreds, if not thousands of buyers. Yet without thorough training, your staff lacks the deep understanding to fully take advantage of your valuable at-show time.

10 Things To Fully Train Your Trade Show Booth Staff

Separate yourself from the pack, and give your staff the training they need to excel. Here are the 10 areas to fully train your booth staffers:

1. **Goals:**

Share your overall objectives the company has for exhibiting at the show, and what show-specific goals have you set for achieving those objectives. And then, tell them what are the individual goals of each booth staffer, such as take 2 qualified leads per hour staffing, or 5 new product demos per shift. If they don't know why you're exhibiting, they won't be able to help you achieve it.

2. **Customers:**

Drill your booth staffers until they can answer key questions about your customers. What are the

needs and pain points of your main customer market segments? What size companies do they come from, and what matters most depending on their varying job titles? What industries tend to buy from you, and do different industries have varying priorities? It's essential that booth staffers understand what clients care about, so they can better connect with them. Also, if your show provides different badge colors to categorize attendees, let your booth staff know what color badges are most likely to be potential customers — and competitors.

3. **Products:**

People come to trade shows to see what's new and to get their hands on products, so make sure your staff is prepared to answer visitors' questions: What are the features and benefits of your main products? Your most popular products? And especially for a trade show, your newest products? How do your products compare to your main competitors? What do they cost? What is the next step in buying them? Your booth staffers should be fluent in these discussions, to better serve and give confidence to visitors.

4. **Booth Staffing Process:**

Go beyond just talking about not sitting, eating, or phone calls in the booth. Train your staffers how to engage attendees in the aisle with good opening lines, how to qualify them to discover what matters to them and if they matter to you, how to present just the part of your story that is relevant to what they said about themselves, and how to close the conversation with an agreement on the next steps. Include role playing to let staffers practice before the show so they feel more comfortable and capable when the heat is on.

5. **Lead Management:**

Tell your staffers how you handle leads, be it dumping business cards in a fishbowl, writing notes on lead cards, scanning badges with rented lead retrievers, or entering leads into a database right on the show floor. Emphasize how to properly record a lead to include lead quality, comments about what their main problems are and how your products solve them, and what the staffer promised the booth visitor they'd do next. And on the show floor, demonstrate how your lead systems work, and where to store your leads.

6. **Demonstrations:**

Great trade show demos attract a crowd and help attendees remember you, so train your staffers to make engaging, smooth, and convincing demonstrations. It can take a lot of work to make a demo look easy, but it pays off in greater credibility on the show floor.

7. **Promotions:**

Show your staff all the promotions you plan to do before the show and at the show. Did you invite key prospects for meetings with your top brass? Did you send an email promising visitors a prize? Did you tweet a message on Twitter that the first 25 visitors who mentioned the tweet would get a free t-shirt? Are you having a contest? Offering show-special discounts? Whatever the promotion, alert your staff so they don't create a disconnect with potential clients.

8. **Your Booth Layout:**

If your trade show exhibit is larger than a 10 x 20 backwall, it's not so obvious where everything is. Show your booth staffers where your storage is (for promotional items, staplers, brochures, and their personal effects), where product demo areas are, and which computers have live internet access. Most of all, if you have your booth segmented by product or division, give your booth staff the tour so they know which areas they can use depending on who they are talking to.

9. **Schedule:**

Not only tell your booth staff what hours on what days you expect them in the booth and when their breaks are, but give them the full show schedule outside the booth. Let them know when and where there are good networking events held by the show or major sponsors. Give them access to the show's educational session schedule, especially keynotes about industry trends. And alert them if your company is planning any group meals.

10. **Convention Center and City:**

Share the best way to get from the airport to your hotel and from the hotel to the show floor. If you're in a really big convention center, tell them which hall and provide a map to your booth. Let staffers know where are the nearest good restaurants, coffee shops, and convenience store, and especially where the closest bathrooms are from the booth.

Think that's too much to train at once? You're right. So break it down into chunks, and spread it out over two or three sessions. Consider first training about your customers, products and demonstrations first, and then at a later session build on that core knowledge with areas such as the booth staffing process, booth layout, and lead management, and more.

Sure it's hard work. But the prize is more leads, more sales, and a higher return on investment. That's better than the alternative, which is confused and unprepared booth staffers, dissatisfied visitors, and fewer sales and profits.



Top 10 Tips For Trade Show Booth Staffing

Mike Thimmesch

The difference between a good booth staffer and a bad one can make the difference between a trade show that profitably boosts your brand and sales, and a tragic waste of your company's time and money. What can you do to ensure that you assemble a team of booth staffers that will get the job done right?

To help you find and prepare a winning booth staffer team, here are the 10 best ideas on booth staffing that I've collected over the years, and now share with you:

1. Choose staffers who actually want to staff your trade show booth and have the right attitude. Then, train chosen staffers for product, company, and customer knowledge as needed.
2. Your booth staffers will be more motivated when they understand clearly just how much you are investing at each show, what are the company's goals and your goals for them at the show.
3. A staffer that is able to stay focused on aisle traffic, watch attendees walking down the aisle for the right moment, and engage with them can get double, triple, or more leads than a booth staffer who is distracted or too shy.
4. Your booth staffers don't have time to tell your entire company history. So train staffers to ask what matters most to your booth visitors, and then share only the relevant part of your story.
5. Tell your booth staffers it's essential they take a minute after each visitor conversation to write down a few sentences about what that lead said and wants, before going on to the next lead.
6. Spend enough time training your booth staffers to give them the chance to succeed. A half hour just before the show starts is not nearly enough. For example, can staffers all smoothly demonstrate your newest products?
7. New booth staffers benefit enormously by doing practice booth staff role playing before the trade show. It gets them over their fears and engrains the training much more memorably.
8. Invest in bringing enough staffers so they can maximize the investment you've already spent in booth space, trade show exhibits, show expenses and services, and promotions.
9. Surprisingly, introverted booth staffers can outperform extroverted booth staffers, because they can be more focused on engaging attendees and may listen more to your booth visitors' needs.
10. Offer prizes and/or recognition for the staffers who gather the highest quantity of qualified leads.



Your booth staffers are the ambassadors of your brand. What they say and do matters. A lot. Use these 10 tips to ensure that your staff performs at a higher level and gets more from your trade show

Lead Management

Overcoming 5 Common Obstacles To Trade Show Lead Follow Up

Mike Thimmesch

You've probably heard from us and others the need to quickly follow up, follow up, follow up on the valuable leads you invested so much to generate at trade shows.

But while it's easy to say again and again, there are some real obstacles that can slow you down and get in the way:

1. Wrong information recorded

The booth staffers were not trained to ask for the information needed to qualify leads, as determined by sales. So the when the sales people get the leads and don't see the information they need, they don't feel the leads are qualified.

2. No information recorded

If the booth staffers do know what questions to ask, they still don't write down the qualifying information they discover on a lead card or in an electronic lead system. They fail to record what the attendee was interested in, and how interested they were. So even if the prospect said they wanted to meet with a sales person about a new product, the sales person won't find out from the lead card.

3. Lack of familiarity with lead recording

Trade show leads present a challenge unlike most B2B leads. Nearly all exhibitors use the lead systems from the show, which can change from event to event. Plus, the booth

staffer recording the lead may only do that for one show, unlike a career telemarketer who knows how to record a lead, or a website landing page with mandatory fields.

4. Busy people after the show

Lead follow up gets pushed aside because people are "behind" at work because of the show they just attended. The sales people who were booth staffer now have to follow up on the leads — but they are digging out from being gone at the show. So the reps don't want to take the time to wade through all the



leads, hoping to find the good ones. Or just as bad, the leads sit on the trade show manager's desk because they are too busy to get them entered into the company database.

5. Fulfillment unplanned

Lead follow up packets (brochures, cover letter) were not prepared before the show started to allow for follow up right after the show (or even during it).

Fortunately, these are not insurmountable issues, but issues that can be resolved with training, teamwork, and planning.

For obstacles #1 and #2, and #3, remember the words of Stephen Covey, “Begin with the end in mind.” Work with your sales people to determine what makes for a qualified lead, and be sure that’s the information your booth staffers are seeking to get from booth visitors. Those data points should already be data fields in your company’s customer relationship management database, and also be questions that you set up to be recorded on a lead card or on the show’s electronic lead retrieval system.

Before the show, coach your booth staffers to write down the information from the conversation that your sales person will need to make a good follow up call. Set expectations with your booth staffers that, if they haven’t done so during their conversations, to always take a minute right afterwards to record the prospect’s buyer profile, product interest, and what they promised as the next step (such as set an appointment or send specific product literature).

Go so far as to role play before the show, and have your staffers practice writing down those

qualifying answers. Do the role play again at the show just before it opens, letting each booth staffer get familiar with that show’s particular lead retrieval system.

To ensure qualifying info is recorded at the show, monitor the leads for completeness as the show goes on, and go back to the booth staffers that are not fully recording their leads. Sure, they may say they are so busy they can’t get it all down, but without that qualifying info, all the leads will be less likely to be followed up, so they will all be less valuable. Let them know it’s okay to take that extra minute; there will be more leads to get when they are done. They should write at least a sentence or two about interest level and promised follow up, even if it’s a C quality lead.

To overcome obstacles #4 and #5 requires a higher level of planning. Just as you don’t order and ship your exhibit the day of the show, you shouldn’t attempt to figure out your lead follow-up starting the day after the show. Long before you step on the plane for the trade show, take some quality time to assign who will enter the leads into your database, and determine, order, and prepare what follow up literature will be sent. Even have the cover letter for the show written before the show starts. Just be sure you only send your “Thanks for visiting us at the show” letter to the people you did meet, rather than to all the show attendees as a post-show follow up.

With more qualified leads and a plan to get them faster into the sales people’s hands, you increase your odds that your leads will be followed up better. And with better follow up, you will generate more meetings, sales, and higher R.O.I. from your trade show marketing. And that’s worth overcoming a few obstacles to get.



The Sprint and The Marathon of Trade Show Lead Follow-Up

Mike Thimmesch

Congratulations! You've just finished your latest trade show and now have a big pile of leads. But there's no time to rest – you still have two more races to win:

1. The **sprint** to get your leads fulfilled in the minutes, hours, and days after the show, and
2. The **marathon** to keep following up your leads for the weeks, months, and even years after the show.

Let's look what you need to do to win both the sprint and the marathon.

1. The Sprint of Trade Show Lead Fulfillment

To win the sprint, quickly send out your fulfillment packets, and get the lead information into the hands of the right sales person. Here's how:

Get Lead Fulfillment Packets Out Fast (But Not Too Fast)

You can speed up the delivery of your lead fulfillment packets in these 6 ways:

1. **Have your fulfillment packet planned and ready before the show starts.** That includes a written cover letter, and enough printed brochures (especially for new products launched at the show), envelopes and postage on hand for the anticipated lead count.
2. **Pre-assign one or more people to transfer the lead information quickly into a computerized contact management system.** How you do this depends on how you record leads at the show. If you just gather business cards, you need to either type or scan them into your database.

Same thing if you use lead cards, although you should then have more qualifying data that takes more time to type.

3. If you use an electronic lead retrieval from the show, after the show you should **get a data file that you can import into your CRM database** to speed up data entry.
4. **Hire a temp** if it's just you and you won't have time to type all the leads yourself – it's so worth it!
5. If you are using lead cards or gathering business cards (most exhibitors don't data-enter their leads at the show), **bring pre-addressed overnight packages** (one for each show day) and send back the day's leads to the person who will type them in.
6. Really want to go faster? **Email your fulfillment letter right from your trade show display**, and attach pdf files of the product literature with it. But that may be too fast, as your prospect is likely letting emails pile up while at the show, and will be going back to a big pile of snail mail right after the show. You may be better off timing your fulfillment packet to arrive about half a week after the show has ended. But you can still send thank you emails right from the show, to demonstrate your speed of service.

Motivate Your Field Sales With Complete Leads

However, fast lead fulfillment will be wasted if you just toss the leads over the transom. You're not just providing a name and address; you're sharing a story. Give the details that help sales people to be motivated and equipped to follow up.

Let your sales people know which show you took the lead at, when and where the show was, and what your company was showing. Also, provide the lead quality level, which products they showed interest in, and how interested they were. Include any comments attendees made,

about their pains, their needs, their preferences, and their buying plans. Let your sales people know what promises the booth staffer made (literature to send, discounts offered, a meeting request) – and if you’ve already fulfilled the promises, or if it’s up to the sales person.

Why the extra effort? To show respect to the trade show lead – you’ll honor your promises to them, and they won’t have to repeat themselves again. Plus, after meeting around 20 other exhibitors at the show, they may not even remember what they said to you. Most of all, the complete story will entice your field sales to make repeated follow up calls – much more than just a name and phone number will.

2. The Marathon of Trade Show Lead Follow-Up

Now that your prospect has received their fulfillment packets, and the sales people have the leads, it’s time to pace yourself for the ensuing marathon.

Keep In Touch With Prospects...And Their Assigned Sales People

Lead follow-up depends on organization and a good team. Try these 3 ideas:

1. **Schedule sales follow up based on lead quality.** At the show, rank your leads according to A/B/C quality, and then after the show you can stagger your personal follow up by the level of lead quality. Your sales people should first follow up on “A” leads right after the show, and keep trying to reach them until they’ve been able to set a date for a follow-up meeting, presentation, or price quote. When the initial blitz of “A” leads is done, then follow up on “B” leads, although not as frequently. And when you’ve called all the “B” leads and set them in motion, then it’s time to call on the “C” leads.

2. But not all follow up happens with a sales person on the phone. **Integrate your trade show leads into your ongoing marketing communications campaigns**, be it newsletters, seminars, open houses, direct mail drops, and more. Better yet, add them to a drip campaign that sends customized messages based on what you learned about them at the show, such as their industry, company size, or specific needs.
3. Schedule dates on your calendar to **regularly check in with field sales on the progress of leads.** Have they been developing deeper relationships with the prospects you met at the show? Ask them which leads they had meetings with, sent proposals and price quotes, or made sales to. And if they bought, what did they buy, and how much did they spend? With complete data like this, you can then calculate your trade show ROI (Return on Investment). Want those meetings to mean more? Invite the highest-level person you can to attend these meetings, someone who understands the potential value of trade shows – if the leads are followed up. If you are really fortunate, you’ll have a sales manager who is tracking this every day, ensuring that the sales force is in regular personal contact with your trade show leads.

Trade show lead follow-up is more difficult than preparing for a trade show, because there is no deadline like the show date to keep everyone focused. But if you approach follow-up with the mindset that it’s both a short and long-distance race, you’ll have a better chance of winning more business from your trade show leads.

Measurement

The Foolproof Way To Measure Your Trade Show ROI

Mike Thimmesch

You've been asked the same question time and time again: "What's the ROI from our trade show program?" You grit your teeth, take a deep breath, force a smile on your face, and answer, "I don't know."

Why not? It might be because you can't get your sales team to share which leads turned into sales with you. Or because you don't have a unified database that tracks it automatically. Or because you simply don't have time to chase it all down.

But it's not rocket science to figure out your trade show ROI, just a lot of busy work (that you don't have to do all by yourself).

Here's the foolproof steps on measuring your trade show ROI:

1. Get Your Leads: Gather up your list of trade show leads from each show. If that's too much to take a bite on, do the shows you really want to track first, like your expensive or largest shows. Put the list in Excel. You'll need the spreadsheet for extra columns and calculations.

2. Get Your Customer List: Somewhere in your company is a list of all your customers and what they bought. It may be in a nice neat database, it may be the invoices in your accounting software, it may be in your warranty files. But it's out there. Don't have access to it? Ask for it. Get turned down? Ask your boss to



get you access. Your boss will be pleased you are being proactive about both revenues and costs, and will help you get by the gatekeepers, or at least get the gatekeepers to work with you.

3. Compare Leads To Customers: Look up every company listed as a lead that visited your trade show booth to see if they are also in your customer database. Are they there? If yes, add in your leads Excel file a column that says "Bought" and mark them as Yes. Then add a column and type in how much they spent. Match them by eye, not by exact match, so if Company XYZ was the lead, but Company XYZ Inc. is the sale, you can match (using geography as your guide). Does this sound like a lot of work? Yes. So if you don't have the time, ask your boss for a temp. You'll either get the temp, or your boss will help you find someone on your staff that does have the time.

4. Calculate ROI: When you total up the sales you can attribute to the show, compare that to the cost to exhibit at the show. So if your sales were \$100,000 and your costs were \$10,000, then you've got an ROI of $\$100,000/\$10,000 = 10$ to 1. Now you have a yardstick to compare which shows to exhibit at and which ones to drop. And you have a metric to compare trade shows to other marketing media.

5. Bonus #1: Tracking New / Repeat Business: Keep track of the date of all sales from leads from the trade show. Were they already a client before the show? So you helped influence a repeat client. Did they buy repeatedly after the show? Then total up all those sales, not just the first one. Did they buy for the first time after the show? Then your trade show lead became a new client.

6. Bonus #2: Tracking Product/Segments: If your client database has the info readily available, you can also check out and record on your handy-dandy spreadsheet what products and services they bought. Did they buy the new product you introduced at the show, or your popular existing products? Do the products and clients fall into more than one market segment for you? If so, see if the biggest segments were the ones you targeted at the show. You may be surprised, and you may want to change your exhibit messaging and promotions.

So don't despair if your sales team doesn't report back to you what happens to each lead, or you don't have a unified sales and marketing database that automatically calculates ROI for you. I have used this method to find out the ROI from our own shows, with a lot of help and some time. It gave us the insights we needed to not only eliminate poor performing shows, but also justify expanding our remaining shows and even alter our overall strategy.

It takes some work, but it's so satisfying to finally really know. Especially the next time you get asked, "What's our trade show ROI?"

5 Quick Measurements To Improve Your Trade Show Results

Mike Thimmesch

Your boss, and especially your boss's boss, want you to measure your trade show ROI. But with your longer B2B sales cycle, you won't know the sales generated from each show for months, maybe years. And that's assuming you can get access to the sales data in the first place.



So here are 5 things you can measure during and right after your show. Things that matter. Things that will help you not only justify your program, but drastically improve it. So if and when you finally do get actual sales numbers, they'll be worth measuring.

1. Qualified Leads Per Show

Chances are you are already counting the number of leads you get at each show. For

example, at the XYZ show you got 100 leads, at the ZYX show you got 200 leads, and so on. Raw lead counts are a starting point, but you can go one step beyond. Train your trade show booth staff to consistently rate each lead for **quality**.

While there are varying methods to qualified leads, here's one you can use, or adapt to your own needs:

- “A” Quality Leads: Have budget, authority, need, and a short time frame to purchase.
- “B” Quality Leads: Have authority and a future need, but no approved budget. Or, have a need, but no authority or budget.
- “C” Quality Leads: Have authority, but no need or budget.

You can choose to compare only “A” quality lead counts from show to show, or “A” and “B” quality lead counts from show to show. This one step alone will enable you to better judge the value of each show on your schedule. And you'll have a better metric to judge a show right immediately after it's over. You can even go the next step and compare the number of qualified leads per dollar spent per show.

With this metric in hand, you can decide which shows to expand in and which to cut back on. And of course, this only matters if your main goal is lead generation.

2. Number of Leads Per Staffer

You may think you know who your best booth staffers are just by looking at them. They're your friendliest people, who can chat with anybody, right? But during the show you'll be too busy running around your trade show display to notice they're actually just chatting up their fellow booth staffers, or ingratiating themselves to the top company brass. Or worse, they are not able to convert visitors into leads, because they simply don't know enough about your clients' needs or your products. So what do you do?



To determine which staffers are your real stars, count how many leads they took each day. That means you have to include a spot on your lead cards for staffers to put their name or initials. (And be careful about two staffers with the same initials!) If you don't use a lead card, you still need to find a method to identify who took each lead. Want to measure even closer? Calculate how many leads each staffer takes per hour they staffed.

I've seen staffers who looked like wallflowers, yet took 400% more leads than other, more sociable staffers. If you count every staffer's total leads, you will then know which highly productive staffers to bring back for future shows. And make a huge difference in your results.

It's good to check written leads very early in the show to ensure each staffer is at least writing their name or initials on them. Otherwise, after the show you have to become a handwriting expert!

3. Completeness of Leads

You want more than just quantity, you want quality. So check your leads during the show to see if each booth staffer is writing complete leads. Find a booth staffer who is just writing their name on the lead card? Take them aside and show them what's missing: Lead quality level, comments about what the visitor's main problems are and how your products solve them, and what the staffer promised the booth visitor they'd do next.



Help your staffer see that if they invest an extra couple of minutes recording what the client said and what they promised the attendee, your field sales person will know which leads are truly worth following up right away, and which to nurture over time.

You can measure the completeness of your leads starting an hour or two into the show. And it will boost your results so they are worth measuring.

4. Qualified Leads Per Booth Staffer Per Hour Worked

If you have done #1, #2 and #3, now you can also readily calculate this. It's the number of "A" or "A" and "B" leads a staffer takes on average per hour they staff your booth. This is like the slugging percentage in baseball that combines batting average and number of extra base hits into one statistic. When you find staffers that take an above-average number of qualified leads per hour, show after show, make sure they're on your varsity traveling booth staff team!

5. Ratio of Leads Generated By A Promotion Compared To That Promotion's Percent of Your Show Budget

Trade show attendees only visit about 5% of the exhibits at a show. Promotions are your secret weapon in the battle against limited time and

other exhibitors. You need promotions that incent attendees to leave the aisle, enter your booth, and engage with you. But there are nearly infinite choices, some good and some bad.

At one show we gave away a free trip to Hawaii – quite an investment – but while the mailer and trip cost 10% of our show budget, 60% of our leads either brought the pre-show mailer about the trip into the booth, or were stopped by the offer in the aisle. Spend 10% more to get 60% more leads? Any day. Calculate this ratio with all your promotions, and you'll figure out which promos to repeat, and which to leave in your desk drawer. All you need to do is identify which leads were initiated by the promotion.

Your efforts to measure your trade show results don't have to be held hostage to your long sales cycle or an inaccessible sales database. These 5 measurements will help you make immediate improvements in your trade show performance.

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