Info Sheet – Effective Trade Show Marketing

Most business owner’s view trade shows as either a necessary evil or a well deserved break and not to be taken too seriously. But you as a business owner may have overlooked the marketing potential available at a trade show.

How do you determine the “right” shows for you to attend? There are many things you need to consider when selecting where to exhibit.

Your business’s trade show exhibit is a marketing opportunity. You have the opportunity to make a quick impression on buyers and convince them to come to the booth. But since the chance to grab a potential customer’s attention passes quickly for an exhibitor (I have calculated that three seconds is all you get), the right booth design is critical. Exhibits can be utilized to introduce new products, introduce or reinforce a brand, or generate market recognition of an established product or service. How can you get the most out of an exhibit? Here are some tips for achieving the perfect blend of design and effective marketing message.

Picking the Show

Whilst it is true that exhibitions are the most effective direct marketing medium, caution should still be exercised over the choice of event. Not all exhibitions work or will work for you.

There are around 360 exhibitions taking place throughout Australia each year involving an estimated 10,700 exhibiting companies. The challenge is to ensure the right companies exhibit in the right exhibitions.

Ask yourself these questions when deciding on a show.

1. What do you want to achieve by exhibiting?
* Generate sales
* Gather business contacts for post show follow-up
* Identify agents, distributors etc
* Launch a new product
* Enhance existing customer relationships
* Develop product awareness
* Reach a new market
* Demonstrate a complex product
* Conduct market research
* Generate media coverage
1. Who is your target audience?
2. Which industries cater to your target audience?
3. At which shows do your major competitors exhibit?
4. Which shows do your customers need?
5. Which shows do your suppliers attend?
6. Which are your major industry shows?
7. What is your budget?

Questions to Ask About General Information

1. What are the official name, date and location of the event?
2. What is the name and address of the show organizer?
3. What is the nearest airport?
4. What transportation is available to the show site?
5. Which hotels are within easy access to the show site?

Questions to Ask Show Management About the Show

1. How long has the show been running?
2. What trends exist for the last three to five shows?
3. What is special/unique about the show that differentiates it from competing industry shows?
4. How do the attendance and exhibitor figures compare for the last three to five shows?
5. Has the show been growing or shrinking?
6. Is this a local, regional, national or international show?
7. How narrow-broad are the markets served?
8. What are the show hours?
9. What educational programs offered?
10. When are the programs held?
11. Do they conflict with show hours?
12. What is show management’s marketing program for each show?
13. How far in advance of the show does the marketing program begin?
14. Where is the upcoming show located? (Approximately 57% of the attendees come from a 400-mile radius of the show site.)
15. Will the show attract visitors from areas of the country you do, or want to do, business with?
16. How convenient are the show dates?
17. Do they coincide with another major event, locally, regionally, or nationally?
18. Do they have a copy of show catalogue?
19. How will visitors find your display in the exhibition ?

Questions to Ask Show Management About Attendees

1. What are the show attendance figures for the last three to five shows?
2. Are the figures independently verified?
3. Are exhibit personnel, press, spouses, and other non-buyers included in the figures?
4. If so, what percentage do they represent?
5. What percentage of attendance is pre-registered?
6. What percentage of pre-registered attendees are “no-shows”?
7. What visitor profile information is available?
8. What industry segments do visitors represent?
9. What is the geographic visitor breakdown?
10. What percentage of visitors is from overseas?
11. What accommodations exist for overseas visitors?
12. What is the average amount of time visitors spend on the show floor?
13. Which other shows do attendees visit?
14. Are there any attendee admission restrictions?
15. Is there computerised registration ?
16. Is the visitor database available after the show ?
17. Is the show open to the public?
18. Is there an on-site pressroom and how is it run?
19. Are there any other media relations activities?

Questions to Ask Show Management About Exhibitors.

1. What types of companies currently exhibit at the show?
2. How many of these companies are industry leaders?
3. How many of these companies are your competitors?
4. What size booth space do your major competitors take?
5. Are exhibiting companies divided into product/service categories?
6. What after-hour events are organized so that exhibitors can meet attendees?
7. What on-site facilities are there for exhibitors?
8. What opportunities exist for exhibitors to be included in the educational programming?
9. What exhibitor sponsorship opportunities exist?

Next, develop a realistic show budget that allocates money where it is needed. Use the Action International Break Even Calculator for Marketing Projects to determine if the sales and life time value will make your attendance to the trade show profitable. May business owners attend trade shows that do nothing but cost money! You would be better off closing the store, skipping the trade show and going to the beach for three days! When calculating the costs of the booth, remember to include lodging, transportation and incidentals along with the registration fee.

Pre Show Planning

Okay, sure you are busy. We know that you have many competing pressures. There is never enough time to do everything you want to do. But if you do just one thing, read the Exhibitor Manual. Why ?

* You will save money
* You will get what you need, when you need it
* Your show experience will be productive
* You will reach your show objectives

If you don't take the time to read the manual now ...........

* You may encounter higher costs
* You may not be able to obtain the services and supplies that you will need
* You may encounter frustrating delays and inconvenience.
* Have a clear goal, and make it specific. Don’t try to accomplish too much. Make your goals measurable in order to gauge the exhibit’s effectiveness after the show. Use signs and graphics to focus visitors’ attention on your message.
* Address the needs of the target audience.
* Design the booth so visitors can navigate easily without feeling crowded. Keep the atmosphere intimate, and remove any barriers between yourself and your audience.
* Keep the message simple so as not to overload visitors with information. Keep the appearance neat and clean. If you tend to overdue it, try this tactic: put everything out you want, and then remove 1 item.
* Practice in advance setting up your booth. Have existing customers (your target market) give you aggressive feedback.
* Note where people’s eyes go during this trial run. In my experience people will look at the lower front of the booth, then the back wall, then the right corner.
* Ensure that what is most important (your new product, your highest margin item, your most popular item) are in these strategic locations.
* Use the space out of the initial eye contact line for non important items (i.e., keeping your supplies under the table, your extra stock near the bottom of the display, etc)
* Systemize this set up making “blue prints” for the booth. These simple blue prints should be written so that someone unfamiliar with your business can follow this system and set the booth up perfectly every time. Identify tasks for each person going with you to the show to complete during set up.
* Come up with a valuable (in the mind of your target market) give away. Obtain a fish bowl for attendees to enter to win this valuable prize. Consider how much you would pay for a list of prospects, and then make your prize commensurate with the value of the leads you will receive.
* Have small entry forms made in advance that will ask all the information a business card would.
* Use product demonstrations for visitor memorability. Be sure they tie in with your product message.
* Consider offering a giveaway or promotional product that conveys your message in a way that ties in with the exhibit’s theme. Ask your business coach for suggestions on novelties.
* Think integrated marketing; brand your exhibit through your promotional activities, via the Internet, etc.

It really pays to begin selling prior to the show. You not only promote higher attendance at the event, but more importantly, you are letting your customers and prospects know where to find you at the show. Here are some proven techniques to try.

* Let your customers know you will be at the show and note the location, dates and times of the event
* Mail special invitations or show admission tickets to your customers
* Use email to remind your clients to meet you at the exhibition
* Schedule advertising to coincide with the show dates. Find out when and where advertisements promoting the show will appear and buy adjoining advertising space

At the Show

* Offer price discounts or value-added promotions.
* Target customers / prospects on-site and schedule specific appointment times during the show.
* Develop easy ways to qualify new prospects such as collecting business cards or conducting a prize drawing.
* Hand out unusual giveaway items with your name and phone, fax numbers and website address imprinted on them.
* Distribute discount coupons valid for a specified time period after the show.
* By having a system for setting up your booth, you will be able to complete it quickly thus allowing you to focus on a few other important opportunities.
* During Set up, introduce yourself to your neighbors. Make it a point to learn what they are marketing so that you may refer your booth attendees to them (and hopefully vice versa)
* Find a booth of a complimentary exhibitor. Someone who sells to your target market. If you make outdoor play sets, find a toy manufacturer as you are booth marketing to families. Introduce yourself and build rapport. Discuss cooperative marketing opportunities such as lead list exchange, sharing direct mail, or Accounts Receivable stuffing. Set a goal for how many complimentary exhibitors you will meet
* Find a booth of a competitor. Introduce yourself and find out how her business is going. What’s working? What’s not? What frustrations do they face? How can you help? Offer her suggestions. Set a goal for how many competition exhibitors you will meet.
* During the show, stay out of other companies’ booths. Not only is your presence in your company’s booth absolutely vital to serving your customers and potential customers, but you help set an example for others. Wandering into other booths disrupts exhibitors who are with clients. If you do this, you can expect others to do the same to you.
* During the show stay out of your competitors’ booths. Even worse than wandering into “friendly territory” is going into competitors’ booths to take information or to crowd out legitimate clients. This is unprofessional and reflects badly on your company and on you personally.
* Do not solicit in the aisles (known as “suitcasing”). Exhibitions are designed to encourage a free flow of traffic through the aisles. And, they are designed to enable exhibitors to do business in their booths. Show management usually has rules against solicitation in the aisles, with good reason. Companies that choose not to pay for exhibit booths sometimes attempt to solicit in the aisles. They are taking advantage of the money your company spends to make the exhibition happen! They are, in effect, letting legitimate exhibitors pick up their show costs. Be sure to inform show management if you see this happening. Your company deserves to get what it pays for.
* Do not disrupt other exhibitors or visitors. Disruptions such as loud music or announcements, shining lights at other booths, using laser pointers across aisles and the like are annoying to others. Visitors to exhibits are there for business purposes, just like you. But if you engage in disruptive behaviors, visitors will perceive you and your company not as professionals in business, but as people to avoid. So you lose business and the respect of your peers and your customers.
* Don’t Sit. You give attendees the impression you don’t care or you’re lazy. Attendees won’t interrupt your private time, as they see it
* Don’t Read. You aren’t able to make eye contact with attendees as they walk by your booth.
* Don’t Eat or Drink. It is just plain rude and messy. Potential customers are too polite to bother you when you’re eating.
* Don’t Ignore Attendees. If you’re busy when someone approaches, either acknowledge him/her or try to include him/her in your conversation. If you’re talking with a booth mate, break it off immediately.
* Don’t Talk on the Telephone. Why do you need a phone in your booth? Time on the phone is time away from potential prospects and tells everyone you have better things to do.
* Don’t Be a Border Guard. Don’t stand where you become a barricade or block the attendees’ view. Stand near the aisle and off to the side.
* Don’t Hand Out Literature Freely. Your catalogs and brochures end up in a bag with everyone else’s literature. Be discriminating in who gets literature. Better yet, mail them to qualified prospects after the show.
* Don’t Underestimate Prospects. Get out of the habit of sizing up somebody simply by the way they look. Qualify them, don’t classify them.
* Don’t Cluster With Friends and Other Booth Personnel.
* Don’t be a “street gang.” Nobody will approach a group of strangers, it’s too intimidating. Be more approachable.
* Encourage visitors to your booth to drop their card in your bowl for your prize. Use your pre printed entry forms for those without business cards.
* Take the business card from the entrant and do not let them drop it in the bowl. This way, you can special notes on the back of their card for your follow up (example “Red Haired man interested in setting up an account”)
* Stay to the bitter end. One of the biggest complaints trade show organizers receive is booths not being available to the end of the show. Go the extra mile and stay! You may have your best sale or meet your best prospect in the last 5 minutes of the show.

After the Show

* Plan time within the first week of your return for SHOW FOLLOW UP
* Review all the leads you received.
* Enter all leads into your customer database
* Identify any hot leads you received during the show
* Work with your coach on an effective Phone/Mail/Phone scripted system to contact these HOT leads.
* Write “nice to have met you” notes to your new complimentary business and competing business friends.
* Follow up any on cooperative marketing ideas you agreed upon with our new complimentary business friends.
* Calculate the immediate results and the long term values you received from the show. Re do your Marketing Break Even Analysis to see if this was worth it.
* Add this show to your “How did you hear about us” form to track future leads.
* Re do the Marketing Break Even Analysis to see if the return on this investment is increasing.
* If the Show was profitable, schedule the show in your marketing plan for next year.
* Sign up for the show next year: you may receive an early bird discount and get preferential booth assignment.
* When registering for next year, ask the show organizer who their biggest competitors are. If your previous show was successful, you should evaluate attending this newly discovered show.

**Sub Heading**

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