

WHITE PAPER

Trade Show Marketing

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Exhibitions deliver highly qualified prospects with buying influence – many of whom target one exhibition and event exclusively. According to industry research, an overwhelming percentage (79%) of all qualified attendees represent a potential new customer for exhibiting companies.

Go the Distance

Simply having a booth at a trade show is not enough. What are you doing *before, during* and *after* the show to achieve your show objectives (you do have a trade show marketing plan, right?)? How are you getting traffic to the booth? What do you have planned for the media? How compelling is the booth design and your booth activities? Are you capturing data along the way? Are you creating brand experiences? How will you follow up and track results? How will you measure the return on your trade show investment?

Trade shows, like any other marketing strategy, will only be as successful as you make them. The key is to thoroughly plan, professionally execute and accurately measure.

Step 1: Determine what you want/need to accomplish at the show. Do you want to increase awareness? Build customer relationships? Schedule presentations? Demonstrate products? Initiate sales? Committing to specific objectives is the first step toward success. And the more specific and measurable the objectives are, the easier it will be to determine if you have achieved your objectives. How many presentations do you want to make? How many sales do you want to initiate? How many media interviews do you want to arrange?

Set specific objectives. For example, if a key show objective is to generate leads and increase sales, determine the overall show investment and the number of leads and volume of sales required to deliver an acceptable ROI. Ask yourself how many leads will you need to generate and convert (total sales) in order to justify the trade show investment?

Step 2: Identify target audiences and determine key messages. Document all target audiences you can and want to meet with at the show – prospects, customers, vendor-partners, media, distributors, sales reps, industry analysts, etc. Likewise, determine key messages to each of these audiences as it relates specifically to the show. This will ensure everyone (as well as the booth itself, presentations and videos, show literature and promotional handouts) is communicating the right messages to the right people.

Step 3: Strategize the most effective ways to achieve your objectives and communicate key messages. There is virtually no limit to the number of trade show marketing strategies you can plan and execute. The key is to ensure that any proposed strategy – if successful – will contribute to one or more of the objectives you documented in your plan.

TRADE SHOW STRATEGIES

Booth design: Tailor your booth design and messages (text and graphics) to the show audience; and accommodate the type of traffic environment that is most conducive to your objectives.

Speaking engagement: Speak at an industry seminars to help position your company as the experts on relevant, timely topics.

Booth invitation: Attendee lists typically are available for shows. Use this – as well as your own databases – to invite target audiences to your booth. If you are launching a product, speaking, conducting a demonstration or hosting an event at your booth, promote it in your invitation (email, letter, post card, mailer, etc.).

Publicity & media relations: Most trade shows invite the media to attend and cover the expos and conferences. And most shows provide exhibitors with the media RSVP list and a designated media room. It is up to you to schedule interviews and prepare news materials for the media.

Literature: Ensure you have company and/or product/service literature to distribute. Depending on the show theme, you might consider developing materials specifically for the show.

Giveaways: If you are investing in giveaways, make it something with a high-perceived value that ties into your show messaging and your corporate/product brand.

Booth demonstrations: Demonstrations attract and engage booth attendees. Ensure they complement your messaging and your corporate/product brand.

Hospitality suites: Hospitality suites are not an excuse for a party. Rather they are an opportunity to extend the hours of the show and present new products, conduct presentations and/or demonstrations to a very select group.

Step 4: Measure and assess the show's ROI. Once the show is over, your work is not complete. Besides scheduling meetings with leads generated at the show, you need to remain in front of prospects (email, mail, phone, etc.) and begin assessing the show's ROI.

The return on investment will be realized days, weeks and months following the show.

- How many booth attendees did you have?
- Did your Web site traffic increase before, during and after the show?
- How many meetings occurred as a result of the show?
- Was there an increase in sales calls and/or emails?
- Did sales increase as a result of the show? If so, how much?
- If you conducted media relations, how much coverage appeared and did it effectively communicate your key messages? Did it increase Web site traffic or increase leads and sales?
- And most importantly, did you achieve the trade show objectives?

Once you have assessed the results, determine if the cost of the show was worth the investment. If so, consider how you can improve the results at your next show. If not, determine why the results didn't meet your expectations. Were booth invitations utilized? Was the booth messaging effective? Did you effectively engage booth attendees? Were the show employees properly prepared? Did the show fall short of attracting your target audience?

Consider ways to improve the show results or determine if your marketing dollars would be better spent at another industry show or on another marketing strategy.

A trade show can be an effective marketing strategy if utilized properly. If you are investing marketing dollars in shows, ensure you go the distance to achieve the ROI you expect.

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