

How to exhibit successfully

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Why exhibit?

There are many reasons to exhibit but it is essential to focus on your own particular situation. Some to consider may include the following:

- Generating sales leads
- Sale of products from your stand
- Increase brand awareness in the marketplace
- Reach a specific targeted audience
- Meet your customers, competitors and suppliers
- Launch new products and services
- Live product demonstrations
- Recruiting distributors or dealers
- Educating your target audience
- Prospecting for new business
- Support your other marketing efforts



Benefits of exhibitions

Exhibiting should be part of a marketing strategy rather than used in isolation. Exhibitions can provide a powerful marketing tool if they are planned correctly. They may only last a few days in one location, but can bring exhibitors together with thousands of potential customers. Exhibiting can have a number of unique benefits.

They can attract highly targeted buyers and decision makers.
Your Company can create a bigger impression than using other forms of marketing.
Level the playing field with your big competitors.

When you compare Exhibiting to other forms of marketing it can actually be very cost effective.

Customers Visit You

Invite your customers and prospects to the show, perhaps offering some incentive or reason to attend. The saving comes from the fact that you don't have the cost of reps visiting them in the near future. Think of the time and transport savings!

Cost of show – (Number of stand visitors x Rep costs per visit) = Potential Saving

Product launch

If you launch a new product at the show you could again be saving money. What would the costs have been to launch another way and how long would it have taken to get into the market

Cost of show - Cost of product launch (mail shots, PR, Advertising etc) = Potential Savings

Building Relationships

One of the most common objectives for trade shows is to strengthen relationships with current customers. However, it is very difficult to measure. Consider it as good.

Choosing the right show

Things to consider before booking a show.

- Check Out The Show History – have a look at their web site.
- What attendance does the show attract?
- Call up trade magazines that attend. What do they think of the show?
- Will the show be adequately promoted to your potential customers?
- Are your competitors attending?
- Have vendors who have participated in the show in the past done well?
- What has past attendance been?
- Are the same companies coming back from last year?
- What is included in the cost?
- What's your breakeven point?
- Book late – If the show is undersold, maybe you will get a better price. See below!
- Book early – otherwise best positions may go.
- Speak to your suppliers. How do they rate the show?

Once you have decide to exhibit and worked out the best show to attend, plan careful for success. Spending time and thought planning before an exhibition is essential to show success.

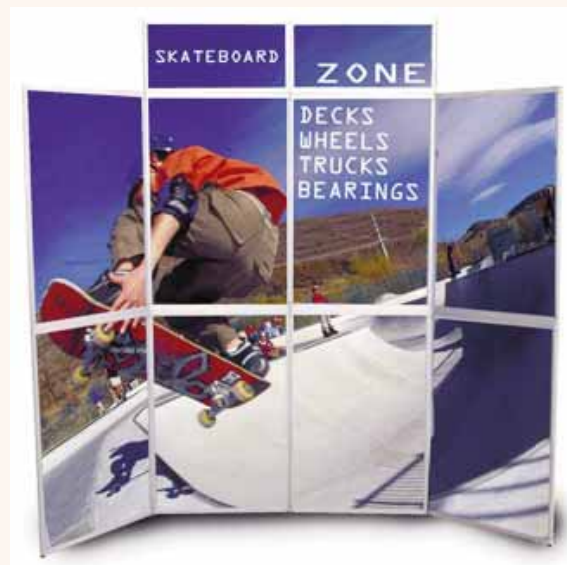
PRE SHOW PLANNING

Set clearly measurable goals and focus on them

Why are you exhibiting? Set specific goals. If you set measurable goals prior to the show it will be easier to establish if the show was worthwhile at the end. Measurable goals could include:

- Launching a new product
- Generating a set number of sales leads
- Recruit a set number of new dealers
- Undertake a set number of live product demonstrations
- Sell a number of subscriptions.

Once you have established your goals, set yourself a budget.



Cost of exhibiting

The cost of exhibiting can escalate well beyond the cost of the stand space. Items to consider are:

- Exhibition and display equipment
- Graphics
- Space cost
- Flooring costs
- Perimeter walls or dividers
- Electrical costs
- Lighting costs
- Office space
- Seating
- Hospitality for customers. I.e. Coffee, biscuits, sandwiches.
- Stand cleaning
- Multimedia presentations
- Guest show tickets
- Car parking tickets
- Security
- Stand Photography
- Off site storage charges
- Set up and freight charges
- Printing and promotional items
- Staff costs (time away from you office)
- Travel costs
- Hotel and expenses.



What sort of income do you estimate that the show will generate? If you have not exhibited before it's a hard one. But as with most form of new marketing you will need to make an educated guess based on the number of people who attend the show, how many may visit your stand, what they spend, etc. Does your estimated income cover the costs of attending the show? Try halving your estimated income. Are you still covered?

Plan your stand

How much space are you going to need or can you afford? Where's the best spot in the hall? What staffing levels will you require? When deciding all these issues it is very important to remain focused on your goals. The look of your stand may vary according to whether you are selling products direct from the stand or undertaking demonstrations. Once you have decided on the look and feel of the stand, you will need to decide on how to fit the stand out and where money is best spent.

SAPCE ONLY – If you book a space only stand, you will need to start from scratch. It is important to consider how to make best use of the available area. Remember, with space only, that is exactly what you get. You will need to look at all aspects of the stand including lighting, flooring and supply of electrics.

SCHELL SCHEME - The organizer provides you with walls to your booth. This is often the cheapest route. For a very basic stand you can simply hang graphics to the walls and you're in business. More often than not, additional equipment will make all the difference. Portable display equipment is ideal

for customising a shell scheme space. Pop up stands make great backwalls, Roll up banner stands are lightweight, cheap and easy to use. Make sure you consider where you can sit, fill out forms or do demonstrations. Why not mark out the stand in your office with tape and get a feel for how your stand space could work?

What type of exhibition equipment should you buy?

A lot depends on budget. First choice is whether you go for a fully custom designed and built exhibition stand or a portable exhibition display. Much of what you could only previously achieve with a custom-built exhibition stand can now be achieved for a fraction of the price using portable display systems.

The advantages of portable display systems over custom-built solutions are:

- Reduce capital cost – Portable exhibition display systems are a fraction of the cost of custom built stand.
- Your exhibition stand can be ready in days rather than weeks.
- Try before you buy – You can see and test the exhibition display equipment before you buy.
- Ease of transport – Portable display systems, by definition, are designed to pack up quickly and be easy to transport.
- Smaller and lighter products means lower shipping costs. Lightweight banners stands can be sent to a show by courier or even taken on aircraft. Most systems will fit in the boot of a car.
- Installation – all systems are chosen for their ease of use. Even the most complex systems are simple to use after the first time and assembly instructions are included.
- Flexibility – Choosing the right combinations of stands means you can use the same equipment time and time again regardless of the exhibition space you have available.

Spread the word

You will need to decide who your target audience are prior to deciding on which show to attend and which goals to set. Don't just sit back and let the exhibition organiser do all the work. A little bit of work at this stage can make a big impact. Firstly mail your existing clients. Don't just send them a ticket if you want them to visit your stand. Entice them, motivate them or bribe them with something as simple as a comfy chair and a cup of coffee. Focus on the benefits you can offer. Retailers know that promotions, such as sales, in-store promotions, or new offers could double traffic. The same holds true for exhibitions.

Tools you can use to spread the word:

- Direct mail – Existing client list. Also ask the organiser for a list of pre registrants.
- Email – use your opt in client list
- Telephone calls to key prospects
- Web site- create a page just for the show and any special offer that may be available
- Use the promotional support that the organiser offers. Show guide listings, catalogues, etc.
- Put a footnote on all you invoices "visit us at abc on 12 March 2006"
- PR in trade magazines. Create some press releases relating to your show activities for the trade press.

Passing trade - Your stand

You only have seconds to attract passers by at your trade show or exhibition. Exhibition graphics are the icing on the cake that can entice show visitors onto your stand rather than a competitors'. Think of a theme that fits in with the goals you have set for the show and for the audience you are trying to attract. Professional exhibition graphics needn't cost a fortune and can make all the difference.

Choose an experienced exhibition graphics provider and they should be able to use their experience to advise you on how to get the most impact for your budget.

Think of you stand a bit like an advert. First off you need a headline. Since you only have a few seconds to get noticed and get your message across, your headline exhibition graphics need to be compelling and concise (no more than 5 words as a rule of thumb). Combine this with a stunning image and you maximize the impact.

Your literature

Make sure you design and get it printed in plenty of time Have your literature ready. You may decide to hand out your corporate brochure. This can be costly and you might want to save it as a follow up to the hottest prospects. This method also gives you an excuse to record their contact details so you can contact them at a later date. Consider preparing special brochures or fliers that speak directly to attendees, perhaps offering special terms or discounts.

Train your show staff

Now you have done the hard work to get visitors on to your stand, the battle is half won. Make sure you have chosen the best staff you have for the job and then brief them fully on the goals for the show and their specific role. Consider sales incentives for the most leads, sales or subscriptions. Make sure you have enough staff to cope with the demand. Prospects won't wait around for someone to break free from a conversation.

Questionnaires can be useful. Rather than just collecting business cards, a carefully thought out simple questionnaire could give you valuable information after a show. What is the visitor interested in and how would they like to be followed up? After the show you can focus you main effort on the hottest prospects.

Showtime

The stand and everything else is ready now: it's down to you and your staff. Great staff can make an average stand a success but poor staff can ruin the most expensive stand in the show.

A highly motivated, well informed team can do more than any other factor to make you stand out from the crowd. Assuming your staff have been fully trained prior to the show, why not have morning briefings before the show opens? Make sure you cover what's expected of each member of staff, and work towards a common goal. Quantifiable goals make rewarding success much easier and give your staff a target to strive towards. Why not have a daily award (for lead generation perhaps)? Think of ways of motivating the staff through out the day.

Qualify your visitors.

At a busy show your time is limited. The key to success is making sure you spend the right amount of time with the best prospects. Having clear goals will help you work out what time to spend where? Are you selling products or just lead gathering?

Speak fluent body language

Smiles, eye contact and open questions work but often go by the way side after a long day at a show. Every minute at a show is costing money. It pays to make sure you maximize your return.

Collect lead information

You can simply collect business cards. Clip each card to a pre printed sheet where you can grade the quality of buyer. This way you will know which "hot" prospects to follow up first after the show. Asking the right questions will help you decide if a prospect is hot and ready to order now or is a good prospect for the future. Alternatively, you can buy tailor made units to scan cards once back in the office, or at some shows, the organisers will offer a bar code system to record your customers details. All you do is scan the customers badge with a rented bar reader, and within a few days of the show, a report will arrive on your PC with all the contact information you could wish for. Quality information means a more successful focused post exhibition follow up and conversation ratio.

AFTER THE SHOW

Team debrief

Try to get feed back on what worked and what didn't. What changes can you make for the next show? Do this as soon as possible while it is fresh in everyone's minds, then record it for use when you next attend that particular show.

Did you achieve your goals

Did you achieve or exceed your goals set prior to the show. Is there a way of improving your performance next time?

Track the leads

Use your database cleverly so that even if you convert a show contact in a year you know that the initial contact was made at the show. Only then can you decide if the show was a success.

Follow up all contacts

You classified how hot the prospect was at the show. Now you can divide the leads into categories to determine the level of follow up. Make sure you follow every lead up even if it is with a simple thank you letter. Follow up quickly. Follow up calls or letter weeks later show your company in a bad light and leave the door open to your competitor.

Send a mailing to all show visitors

Perhaps a show visitor didn't have time to visit you. The organiser will have a list so why not use it for a mailing. If your show targets a specific sector, the majority of people attending the show could be prospects.

Was it worth exhibiting?

Do you just rely on gut feeling or can you measure results? If you are selling products from your stand at the "Ideal Home Exhibition" or the "Motor show" it may be very easy to work out if it was worthwhile. In most circumstances it is most likely harder.

Sales Generated / Leads generated

A tricky one because the leads generated at the show may not come to fruition until months later having been followed up by your sales department.

By then, there may be no way to track it back to the original trade show lead.

You can however track the number of hot leads depending on the feedback you got from the visitor at the show. By asking the right question you should get a feel (gut feeling again!) if they are hot or not.

Sales leads x Number you normally convert x Average order value = Estimated show revenue

Tip 1: -To help track show leads you can input them into a section of your database then even if they order in a year you should be able to see that first contact was at the show.

Tip: 2 -Also consider special offer show vouchers that people have to use in the future to get the discount.

Tip: 3 -Have you thought of selling a product on your stand?

Was it worth exhibiting?

If you make sales at the show it's easy. Revenue - Cost of show = ROI

Lead generation. Cost of show / Number of leads = cost per lead

Use forms to get contact details of all stand visitors – give them an incentive!

Tracking leads using your database can give you a pretty good idea even if the order comes much later.

Use special show offers

A last thought. If the money saved from not having to visit clients plus the savings in launching a new product at the show covers the cost of show then everything else is a bonus.

De-brief the team

When you get back to the office on Monday, sit down with the stand staff and key managers.

Do an honest assessment of what worked and what didn't. Elicit suggestions for improving performance at future events. Your staff's insights are a valuable asset, especially while their impressions are still fresh.

Measure your results

Remember your specific, measurable goals? Now is the time to measure your success against them. If you exceeded your goals, try to determine why, so you can replicate that success at the next show. If you fell short, figure out what you could do better.

Track the leads

Don't just evaluate your results immediately after the event. Many companies do written lead-tracking reports three, six and even nine months after a major exhibition to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line. Only then can you truly determine the value of the exhibition for your company.

Follow up all contacts

Every visitor to your stand should receive a timely follow-up. The degree of follow-up will depend on the classification of the contact, ranging from a simple thank-you letter to a sales visit, phone call or information pack.

To your prospects, the days and weeks following the exhibition make it clear who most wants their business and who may not be ready to handle it. Don't blow it now!

Send a mailing to all show visitors

You may not be able to meet every visitor, but you can contact them. Most organisers make the visitor lists available in their entirety (often free, sometimes for a one-time rental fee).

A quick 'Sorry we missed you but did you know...' can mop up quite a few new leads.

Follow through on all press releases

Call all the editors you mailed your press releases to or who visited you on your stand. Ask if there's any more information they might need. Tell them of your successes at the show. A timely phone call now could mean a solid mention in a post-show review read by thousands.

Reserve a place for next year!

If you've met or exceeded your goals, now is the time to lock in a prime location at the next event. Visit the Show Sales Office, or make sure you see a floor plan so you can reserve your stand early.

