



EFFECTIVE TRADE SHOW PLANNING

Effective Trade Show Planning

Introduction

Exhibiting at a trade show is probably the most expensive and resource rich activity any company will undertake through the year. In fact, there are some companies whose management just do not believe that they would ever get a return on their investment and the events are a total waste of time. Marketers find themselves in this position after previous events show few quality leads and no apparent benefit from attendance. The main reasons for this are due to the following:

- Poor planning
- Poorly defined purpose
- Poor communication
- Poor follow-up
- Poor use of resources

You do not need the biggest booth nearest the entrance to be effective, but you do need to do some pre-show planning to ensure the money invested has the most chance for the best ROI (return on investment) and biggest bang for your buck.

The main purpose a company should consider a presence at their industry signature trade fair is to:

- Gain visibility and presence in their target market
- Promote new products and services
- Meet clients, gain new customers and orders

A trade show is never a stand-alone event; it is more of a contiguous set of initiatives designed to generate leads and move them down the sales funnel until the deal is closed.

The purpose of this article is to review the key plans that businesses should make to ensure an effective and successful trade show.

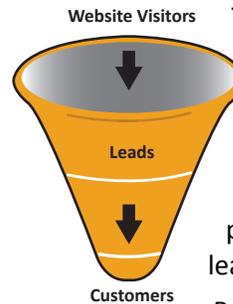
5 Tips on Trade Show Planning

1. Pick the show that best aligns with your marketing strategy
2. Plan marketing strategies for pre-show, show, and post-show
3. Reach out to every visitor to your booth post-show via email or phone

4. Analyze which strategies worked and which didn't
5. Calculate your ROI on the event once the sale cycle has closed.

Essential Planning Prior to the Show

The most important activity leading up to the show is to communicate your intention to be an exhibitor to your customers and to provide compelling reasons for visitors to visit your booth. This takes months of planning, and the most critical part of the communication cycle are the weeks ahead of the show.



To create a buzz ahead of the event, you should be active with social media and inbound marketing. These tools will maximize the traffic to your booth, and maintain a relationship after the event as your prospects move down the funnel from leads to closed sales.

But to have an effective trade show social media connection, there must be an established presence long before the show, and an understanding of what content will be posted.

Choosing the right social media

You should consider using all the main types of social media available during the various stages of your campaign. Each has their own merits but they will probably communicate to a different audience and the media mix may depend on your type of business.

LinkedIn – provides more of a business environment and offer “groups” to be set up that can communicate specific types of interests in common with each other.

Twitter – provides an immediate communication channel, so it provides an excellent tool during the show to promote special promotions and upcoming events, and to drive traffic to your booth on offers for a limited time.

Facebook – offers more information than Twitter, with ability for pictures and a better channel for feedback and comments. More followers see others’ posts and this creates more of a community with like-minded people, and potential clients and advocates.

YouTube – more of a dynamic interface where customers can view information in more detail and offer more value as visitors review again and again long after the show.

Blogs – can reach out to industry bloggers; those seeking information to solve their problems ahead of the show, and provides a solid information link as you connect your other social media outlets directly back to

your blog hosted on the website, which when keyword rich, will improve SEO too.

Set Goals for your trade show event

The biggest mistake companies make is not to set quantifiable goals for the show. The fundamental business goal to establish is usually to generate qualified leads that close in new sales. Just showing up and hoping your presence will do the job is a recipe for disaster. Quantify your major objective and set a strategy in place ahead of time that is achievable, for both pre-show planning and at the booth. For example, a quantifiable goal might be to pick up 200 leads, which generate 20 sales presentations, leading to 10 sales with a combined value of \$500,000 within 6 months of the show from an initial investment of \$50,000.

Importance of Measuring and Tracking ROI

The greatest benefit of using social media to help drive customers to your booth are the results, in terms of traffic and leads from all the activities, can be captured and measured on your website analysis tools.



These tools, such as Google Analytics, are invaluable to run an effective campaign. Not only does it provide specific data for tweaking your online activities, but it also records how many conversions and the cost per conversion. When managed in the right way, graphing the results will show a positive trend to your company's Management group with continued return on your online and trade show planning investment.

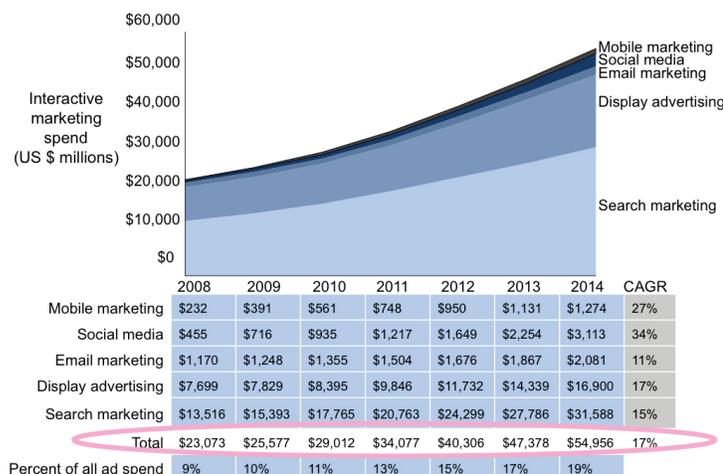
If you look at the reasons visitors go to the trade shows from their own eyes, then making it easier for them to find you is critical in the promotion stage of planning. Visitors will usually research which companies are attending the show in advance, and they will have a number of goals to achieve while they are there. Remember, for the visitor to travel, then spend an overnight stay in a hotel, and to take a day or more out of their work schedule is an investment too. Customers may be looking for specific products to meet their project requirements. They may want to see how products work physically, or to get and meet your management team and other staff that they would otherwise not get access to. They can visit your competitors at the show and conduct due diligence when choosing new vendors. So competing for their time while at the show is critical for success. This may be stating the obvious, but unless your company has an effective marketing strategy that is implemented perfectly, you will fail to gain and achieve your show results.

A trade show is the perfect venue for customers to make decisions on which products they will buy and therefore, a perfect opportunity for vendors to exhibit and improve their market presence.

Promotional Ideas Ahead of the Show

Marketing your presence for the show up to 6 months in advance is advised. Prospects will pay attention to your business if it is seen as an authority in your market; thus creating credibility and driving traffic. Here are some ideas on how to build a buzz and communicate information about what your company will be promoting:

1. Create a show landing page on your website specifically for the show or event. Flagging the page with the show name and year not only provides a convenient place for your customers to visit for information, it will also help with your Google rankings and improve SEO.
2. Prepare QR codes (Quick Response) and print them in your advertisements, flyers, business cards, envelopes, vehicle wraps, product packaging, and any place you are promoting your show presence. The QR code connects a



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3. link to your on-line marketing activities via prospects' smartphones. Immediate information and gratification. Either promote new products due to be launched or engage in promotional marketing, such as a free iPad2 or other "must have" give-aways. If planning a demo video, record and link it to a QR tag. Getting your prospects to your on-line presence is the essence of good marketing. From there, they will quickly learn about your company and share it with those in their network.
4. Create a special group on LinkedIn well ahead of the trade show. A group posting provides relevant information to your customers and prospects about the show, remembering at this time they are researching the show and deciding whether or not to attend. Providing key reasons for them to attend through LinkedIn can also provide a conduit to ask questions and provide thoughts about your products. This not only provides feedback to your planning process, but being on-line, adds to your SEO too. By including keywords for your show allows them to be searchable within LinkedIn, and hence, helps people to find you at the show.
5. Step up your Blog activity. Post blogs that draw attention to the show such as a new product launch, a seminar, or a unique offer. You can gather important feedback via comments that may help drive your show strategy and may lead to setting appointments to meet with customers.
6. Produce a flyer. You may have a mailing list of customers that you mail out two to three months ahead of the show. A glossy, colorful designed flyer may be kept as a reminder for certain types of social media challenged customers. The flyer may contain key points about your presence at the show, such as booth number, a coupon like a free entry pass, new product information, or a promo give-away contest at the booth like a free iPad2. The flyer can be used as a selling tool by your sales force to hand out a personal invitation, or by key employees as they attend networking groups and mixers.
5. Wrap a vehicle. Advertising your business on one or more vehicles ahead of the show is still one of the most effective forms of advertising today. At just \$0.35 per thousand impressions compared to \$3.56 for other forms of outdoor advertising. Consider designing a stand-out

graphic with your logo and message prominently displayed to promote your presence at a trade show. Remember to add your social media icons and a QR Code since keeping visible with a vehicle wrap is as important for strategic parking as it is driving on roads and freeways.

7. Budget for free give-aways. A T-Shirt, the latest i-Pad or i-Phone, a vacation, maybe a low priced gimmicky toy; anything that can drive interest to your booth and create visibility to your business during the time of the show. It does not have to be expensive. For example, a plastic bag is probably the most visible product you could print your logo onto. It is also probably the most useful since they help to carry all the collateral given away for free. So why not consider offering a large oversized branded tote bag that is big enough to carry all other bags inside. Voila, you have out-smarted the competition.

Colors that Sell

Red - connotes love, warmth, excitement, passion

Blue - Relates to power, professionalism, trustworthiness, and calm

Green - means money, life, and nature

Orange - suggests creativity, fun, youth, and affordability

Purple - stands for luxury, royalty, fantasy, and dreams

Selecting and Building the Booth



Your booth design will be chosen depending on your overall show budget, your chosen floor location, and its size. A smaller floor

space on the outer edges may warrant a back drop display such as a pop-up, as shown in the picture above. These displays are the most cost effective types

available and create a fantastic display and presence for your company in a limited space.

If your booth location has three or four open sides, then consider the truss system design. As you can see from the next picture below, the booth layout offers an impressive feature in many different configuration designs to suit your specific needs. These booths are designed for easy set-up, minimal tools, and a modular design that may be configured in several layout options to provide real economy if used at different shows with differing configurations.



All booths may be enhanced with halogen style lamps and retractable banners that can be positioned at the front of the booth to provide additional graphics instead of expensive product displays.

Trade Show Booth Design Basics

- Have good presentation - use vibrant colors, arrange products logically, have comfortable flooring, ensure your brand is very visible, possibly with the use of a tag line
- Have something to say, such as a unique new product or a live demo featured several times a day. Put your products where people can touch it, add QR codes beside all pieces on display
- Have staff uniforms, ensure all are briefed on the show goals, that they have product knowledge and are genuinely welcoming and friendly
- Offer give-away products with your company name on it or free food snacks
- Book the booth space as early as possible to ensure your booth location is where you need it to be in terms of foot traffic and visibility
- Add a scent that may draw visitors in, something subtle but attracting, such as essence of vanilla.

Did you know?!

The average cost to contact a prospect in the field is \$308;
The average cost to contact a prospect who visited your trade show booth is \$212, about 45% less.

- Add some soft background sounds or music that fits with your brand message to provide some life to the booth space.

Effective Activities at the Show

First ensure that your booth is built correctly, that everything that should work does work, and all the graphics are mounted firmly. On the first morning of the show, ensure that staff will arrive one hour early for a de-briefing. Assign a booth leader responsible for ensuring that everything runs smoothly and manages the leads. The de-briefing provides one last opportunity to communicate the event goals, the lead generating process, any special promotions and demos through the show, and to go over the staffing schedule. They should be aware of the social media activities leading up to the show. Have someone assigned to follow through on the Twitter posts such as the giveaway you set up before the show. Anyone that becomes a Twitter follower gets entered into a prize drawing. Do a series of small daily giveaways, Tweeting the winners at the end of each day and one grand prize.

Launching new products is a key reason for people to attend the show. But cater also for those that could not attend in person. Actively solicit comments from these people so you can leverage the social network for leads and product enhancements. Also Blogging subscribers

that could not attend may be updated during the show by posting special reports a few times a day on various activities or promotions. Making use of video during this time is invaluable so make sure to upload it to Facebook, YouTube and your website.

After the Show – Follow up

It is really important to process the sales leads as quickly as possible after the show. This means processing the types of leads, dividing them up by sales territory and distributing them out to the local salesperson for follow-up. Meantime, any literature that was requested is mailed out too, all this within 2 weeks or sooner from the last date of the event.

Social media once again is an invaluable tool. It allows you to extend the relationship with those visitors and prospects that you made contact with during the show time. It helps to develop the relationship long after the show has finished and before the prospect has a chance to forget all the good things that they saw and spoke with the show staff at the show. Prompt and professional follow-up will ensure the dollars invested

in the show do not go to waste and increases the likelihood to gain new customers.

Continuing with posting Blogs about the technical aspects of the products launched at the event will ensure traction as knowledge and familiarity about the products develop and helps to gather new visibility outside of the early adopters that appeared at the show. Remember that customers are looking to companies to solve their problems, be the first to address and answer those questions.

Conclusion

Meet with the key team members from your sales and marketing team to determine the key successes and failures at the show. Measure the goal hit rates and the closed sales ratio up to 6 months after the show. Use an on-line analytics tool to measure the relative success of your social media and inbound marketing campaign. Ensure that your Management team receives a report that includes key statistics and metrics that show ROI and the value of the event to the business. And finally, strategize on how to improve in time for the planning of the next show.

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