
Effective Trade Show Management

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by Kathleen Gage

Many companies have added tradeshows to their marketing mix without considering the investment of time, money and other resources involved in the decision. It is important to understand the concept of what a tradeshow is. Tradeshows bring together a concentration of buyers and sellers under one roof. You must decide if that particular group of buyers and sellers is worth the investment of your time and money. For many companies this can be an overwhelming task.

Some issues to consider before your company commits to a show are:

What is the budget?

How big will the booth be (if there is a choice)?

Who will design the booth?

How much time do we have to complete the project?

Do we have the people power?

How will we let our customers know we are going to be at the show?

In addition:

What are the primary reason(s) we will be attending?

- Increase sales
- Have a presence in the market place
- Introduce new products

- Enhance/solidify our corporate image
- Educate
- Make sales
- Get qualified leads
- Recruit dealers and distributors
- Conduct market research
- Because a consultant said we should be there
- It's a great way to get out of the office for a few days (If this is the reason your company will ultimately suffer)

It is important to think about the reasons why your company will be attending as you lay out your plan for the show. The time to decide why you are at a show is not when you are at the show. Unfortunately, many companies do this and then management feels like they have wasted their investment, which they have.

The best way to have a successful experience is to have clearly defined goals. Be specific and limit the number of reasons why you will be there. Your goals must be aligned with your overall company objectives. It is often a good idea to have a team work on the goals and then make sure everyone who is involved in the show knows what the goals are. This includes everyone from the people at the exhibit to the support staff at the office.

Make sure the show you are planning on attending will accommodate your goals. Some of the information you will need is to know how big the show is. Who will be in attendance at the show? Will decision makers be there? Who else will be

exhibiting? The answers to these questions can usually be obtained from the show organizers.

If the answers to any of the above questions are going to make it difficult to reach your objectives, and you determine that there are probably only a handful of members from your target audience attending, you may want to reconsider participation. It could be a complete waste of your time, money and other resources. You may actually want to go as an attendee rather than an exhibitor.

Develop a good working relationship with show organizers. Most organizers I have had experience with are more than willing to help you be successful in any way they can. Ask them for past and present exhibitors list, attendance figures and profiles on attendees. You will also want to find out about pre-show promotion and advertising. How this is done will tell you a lot about who will be attending the show.

Another area many companies put little, if any, effort into is preparing the people who will be in the booth. 80% of the way an exhibit is remembered is based upon the behavior of the people in the booth. Many companies fail to realize how important it is to have the demonstrators and sales staff trained for the show. With many organizations it will be necessary to bring in a training specialist to assist them in bringing their team up to speed.

Let's assume you have prepared for the tradeshow very thoroughly and your demonstrators and sales people are completely prepared. Is everyone fully trained and prepared in post-show follow-up? This is yet another area many companies never consider when investing in a tradeshow.

Tradeshows can be one of the most effective marketing tools available. They offer a great opportunity. However, they do require planning, thought, time, effort and capital to be successful.

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