

# Tradeshow Tips

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**Boothmanship** describes the common courtesy and basic skills required for a show of any size, and is for anyone who participates in a trade show.

Exhibiting in a trade show can involve a major investment of money and time. But the financial returns for your business can be excellent if you learn some of the secrets of trade show booth success before signing up for a show and investing in your displays.

If you're considering setting up at a trade show for the first time, here are eight tips for a successful trade show booth display:

1) Rent the smallest possible booth space for your **first** trade show. The first time you exhibit, you'll learn a lot about what works for you and your products and what doesn't, and what you'd like to change for your next show. Also, seeing other exhibitors' booths and ideas will inspire you to evolve various aspects of your own display. So it's a good idea to keep your trade show expenses lower as you learn, by renting a smaller space and starting with a simple display.

2) Create an open trade show exhibit. Make it a space people can enter comfortably without feeling trapped. If you set a table across the front of your booth and stand behind it, it's harder to draw customers in and involve them - so they tend to walk on by.

3) Keep your booth uncluttered so customers can focus on what's important - your product. When approaching your display, anyone should be able to discern immediately what your booth is promoting. No one is going to take the time to study it and guess, when there are hundreds of other booths to visit.

4) Before planning your trade show booth display, find out everything you can about your allotted space. Know its dimensions, where it will be located in the building, what companies or organizations will be in your neighboring booths, whether it's in a high or low traffic area, whether you have access to lighting and electricity, and anything else that will affect your exhibit display setup.

5) For your first trade show, consider renting booth display components. Rental displays can relieve you of the issues of transportation and storage, and allow you to be a little more daring in your exhibit design than you might be if you were

purchasing them. Also, studies show that many first-time exhibitors never do a second trade show. If you only exhibit once or twice, purchasing your own exhibit components doesn't make economic sense.

6) Design your booth with an eye to keeping shipping costs low. Oversized or heavy displays can be very expensive to ship to the trade show, and may also require that you hire expo personnel to bring them into the exhibit hall and help you set them up. Opt for smaller, collapsible, lighter weight displays as much as possible.

7) Plan to secure your expensive items so that they can't be stolen at a trade show. If you use a laptop computer for a multimedia presentation at your booth, be sure to have it securely locked to your display, and take it with you at night if it's a multiple-day event. Display the samples of your more expensive products either well inside your booth where they can't "walk off"; as attendees stroll by, or inside a locked display case.

8) For the most professional image, create a unified appearance for your displays. Choose no more than three colors for your display elements and table coverings - such as gray, white, and blue. Each exhibit component should be one of your three colors. Also, choose no more than three textures - such as brushed metal, matte vinyl, and clear acrylic; each display element should be one of these textures. This creates a professionally pulled-together booth that lets your products stand out in the display.

## **TIPS TO TRADE SHOW SUCCESS:**

Select the right Trade Show:

Obviously you can't go to all of them so find out who usually attends, how much it costs attendees, how much it costs you, how much time lost from the office, quality of the show, number of years the show has run and then, talk to other exhibitors.

Your Job begins way before the show starts.

- Send invitations to all prospects
- Can you offer free samples... or a contest
- Can you participate in a seminar etc
- Can you get a mailing list of other exhibitors

Go to the show with a definite goal in mind.

- Are you creating awareness
- Are you penetrating a new market
- Are you looking for leads

Concentrate on the design of your display.

- Roses are red, profits are blue people don't respond well to red booth colors

- Are your handouts something you will be proud of
- Put some motion into your booth

Select the right staff.

- If you are having others at your booth, they must be personable and knowledgeable

Although it's tempting to go all out when designing your first trade show booth display, it makes more sense to keep your first booth small and simple, and focus your energy on marketing your products and networking at your first show.

During the event, learn as much as possible about how you'd like to alter your exhibit for show next show, and write down all your ideas either during or immediately after the show.

Once you have your first trade show under your belt, you'll have a much sharper idea of what you do - and don't - need in a trade show display to make each successive show your most profitable one to date.

### ***Tradeshow Etiquette:***

- **Stand up Straight.** Stand - don't sit - and always look attentive.
- **Smile.** People want to approach and deal with pleasant people
- **Don't Gossip.** What goes around, comes around. It's better to listen than to speak.
- **Don't Drink, Smoke or Eat in the Exhibit.** Booth duty is a sales call, not a social call.
- **Don't Chew Gum.** Even if you sell gum, any distraction that breaks the brief concentration of the visitor on your face and the conversation can mean a lost sale.
- **Don't Offend.** Don't curse, tell off-color jokes, offend people by race, gender or do anything else which may be culturally offensive. As business becomes more global, you can no longer assume everyone has your cultural sensitivities (or lack thereof). Jokes often don't travel well. Language and dialect have their own nuances. As the Englishman told the American - "Just because we both speak English, doesn't matter. We're foreign."
- **Know What You're Talking About.** Your company's credibility is on the line, so it behooves you to know what you know, know what you don't know and find out where the answers are in between.
- **If You Don't Know?** Say so - and then find out the right answer. Get it to the visitor in the most expeditious way.
- **Look at Me When I'm Talking to You.** Don't look over my shoulder for a better prospect. Pay attention to me.
- **Don't use the Cell Phone in the Booth.** The simple matter is you look busy and I won't bother you.

**Training** is about understanding trade shows. There are basic courses - online and seminars - which review the basics of Boothmanship, but if tradeshow are a big part of your marketing, perhaps it may be useful to take specialized training for Tradeshow. Training provides more than common sense and basic sales skills. Training builds on the basics of Boothmanship and involves:

- **Process of a Trade Show.** Determining the interrelationships of people, departments, all of the contracts and time frames before, during and after the show.
- **Psychology of the Environment.** Trade shows are different from any other selling environment. Understanding your personality preferences, your sales style and the personal dynamics at a show will put you at ease.
- **Determine the ROI.** There are many types of return-on-investment of a show. The most important is the financial return, but departments such as sales, marketing and R & D may have guidelines to determine whether a show is a good investment.
- **Purpose of Participating.** Each participant, division head and the corporation as a whole has a rationale for show selection, expectations and returns. Why are you going is a critical question up and down the corporate line.
- **Strengths and Weaknesses of your Staff.** The expectations your firm and the attendees have of the experience changes from show to show. Being able to select and train your staff for each individual show gives your firm an advantage. You should select the employees with the strongest skills to match the anticipated attendance and their level of need.
- **Training is for Any Person with Responsibility.** Particularly at the managerial level and above, and for those who want to be better educated about this important marketing effort, training gives an overview of the entire process.