

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, and seasoned trade show people may find these useful:

1) Forgive yourself. 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. If you make a mistake, learn from it and forgive yourself.

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) If this is 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 future trade shows not in your area, 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. Plus, remember after the trade everyone working there will be tired and heavy displays establishes negativity in participation of future shows.

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.

9) Create a profile of the "ideal" customer for those working the booth. This gives staff an idea of who to look for and who your company can help. If your staff are new to tradeshow or are shy, create a objections script. This allows the staff to practice what to say when someone objects to considering your company/product. For seasoned or outgoing people this may seem silly but for shy people this is very helpful and appreciated.

10) Don't forget to network. That means always wearing your name tag and talking to the other booth owners. You don't have to get aggressive with selling to them - that is tacky and can be tiresome - but just be aware and approachable. Encourage staff to come ½ hour early to when their shift starts and walk around and see the other booths. If appropriate introduce themselves and invite other exhibitors to drop by your booth.

11) Know when to say goodbye. Some people will just want to talk to you and will never buy. Prepare some scenerios for staff in how to "send someone on their way". Those scenerios should include closing type statements that will demonstrate the level of interest the person has regarding purchasing from your company. It

can be very difficult and uncomfortable if you are the only person attending the booth and you have a “long talker” taking you away from someone who may be interested. It could be as simple as saying “Shall we book an appointment for you now?” “ It’s been nice talking to you is this a product you would be interesting in purchasing?” If long talker is not interested they will move along.

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 of 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:

- **Be consistent.** What comes out of you and your staff's mouths when people walk up to your booth should match and compliment your company's Brand. Inconsistent messages confuse people and confused people don't buy or spread your message.
- **Dress appropriately.** Your clothing, hair style and makeup should match your company's Brand, it should match the trade show theme, it should be comfortable and wrinkle free, and it should not intimidate people from coming to your booth. Phew! That's asking a lot. But let's look at a banker for example. A banker would normally wear a suit, but if he/she is at a home show to talk to people about mortgages, a suit may be too formal for people to approach him/her. For women, high heels may look good in the office but standing on them all day will hurt. Flats are better because taking off high heels because your feet hurt is not an inviting look. Really think through what you will wear, image is everything in inviting people to talk to you.
- **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 (outdoor exhibits) 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.
- **Don't push yourself on people.** If they are interested, ask for contact information or schedule appointments for after the trade show. If they aren't interested, let them go with a positive and knowledgeable understanding of what your company does. You want people to spread your message.

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 Trade shows. 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.
- **Contact your existing customers** (by direct mail, fax, e-mail and telephone) with a personalized message asking if they will be attending the show and requesting a formal appointment time. A call to action needs repetition from several methods to be most effective.
- **Contact the trade show association or organization** and request a pre-registered buyer's list for the upcoming show. Then, repeat the first suggestion about contacting customers with an introduction to your key product or service and how it can help run or grow their company. Request a formal appointment time.
- **Offer a free gift** as a reward for showing up on time for a pre-booked appointment.
- **Overcome objections** like; "I'm not booking appointments but I'll stop by" with simple logic: "With all of our key staff on site and best products on display, we don't want to run the chance of not being able to speak to you when you drop by. An appointment will guarantee you get our undivided attention." Or, "Book your appointment now and we will phone/email you to confirm. There is no obligation if you decide afterwards that you are not interested."
- **Can you use an online calendar** to make sure no one gets double-booked with other staff making appointments.

- **Advertise in a daily show magazine** if there is one published on site. This is as captive an audience as you are going to get and the most likely chance that a print ad will translate into immediate action.
- **Offer show only specials** or if booking appointments at the show provide an incentive different than regular bookings.
- **Offer a daily prize** in exchange for business cards dropped at your booth.
- **Get a QR code** and put it on a large poster so that “shy” people can at least go to your website. When they go to that section of your website offer an incentive to book an appointment within the next week.
- **Capitalize on celebrity endorsers**, if you have them. Quotes are good but quotes with pictures are better. Have them framed and displayed in your booth. Testimonials are the best at helping people make decisions.