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7.5 Secrets to Successful Trade Show Exhibiting

by Susan Friedmann, Category: [Event Marketing for Exhibitors](#)

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Successfully exhibiting at a trade show may seem like a mysterious process. What makes one booth exciting and engaging, while another is boring and ineffective? Why do attendees flock to one exhibit and ignore its neighbors? In the fast-paced, often chaotic environment, it may seem as if there's no rhyme or reason to the proceedings.

Yet the opposite is true. The most successful exhibitors – those that consistently draw in large numbers of their target audience and begin or reinforce profitable business relationships – approach exhibiting in a systematic, methodical way. They also know these six essential secrets:

Secret # One:

Have Clearly Defined Goals and Objectives for the Show: Before you set one foot on the trade show floor, every member of your team must understand exactly what the desired results are. Do you want to gather X number of profitable leads, reinforce existing business relationships, introduce a new product to the widest number of people possible, or generate buzz about a new product set to debut next fall? Each requires a different strategy. Set group goals and individual goals for maximum effect.

Secret # Two:

Select the Right Exhibit Staff: The single most important component of any trade show exhibit is the people manning the booth. These people act as your ambassadors, representing your company to both industry peers and your buyers. Select staffers who are knowledgeable, personable, and who can think on their feet. Genuine enthusiasm for your products and services is invaluable, as is the ability to listen more than talk and a desire to help your buyers find solutions to their problems.

Secret # Three:

Know Your Marketing Message: Trade shows work best when they are a wholly integrated portion of a larger marketing plan. Every element of your display, from graphics and signage down to the text on your brochures, should reflect your corporation's marketing message. Consistent branding helps reinforce your organization's identity.

Remember, the average person needs to hear or see a new bit of information a minimum of three times before it becomes lodged in their memory. View trade shows as one of those ways to convey your message!

Secret # Four:

Listen More than You Talk: Savvy exhibitors know that they're there to listen to the attendees. People come to shows seeking answers to specific business problems. If you're too busy spouting off your sales spiel, to listen, you'll never even hear the problem, much less understand it and offer viable solutions. Rest assured, the attendee will move on to someone who's willing to help them fix their problem. Avoid this by focusing on qualifying questions, and actually listening to the responses.

Secret # Five:

Showcase the New: Research shows that 76% of all trade show attendees come seeking the new, the novel, and the innovative. This is an ideal time to focus on new products and services or spotlight existing products from a creative new angle. If you don't have a new product to showcase this year, focus on the features, service, and people behind your product. Another strategy to consider: Use this opportunity to generate buzz about your new innovations that aren't quite ready for market yet.

Secret # Six:

Offer Something Extra: Trade show 'goodies' – mugs, pens, t-shirts – are one of the most misunderstood components of the trade show experience. Rather than load attendees down with a bunch of useless stuff, illustrate your value to the buyer by offering items of real value. The most precious commodity we have is information. Capitalize on this by offering mini-seminars, product demonstrations, or booklets full of industry advice.

Secret # Seven:

Prepare a Follow-up Plan Before the Show:

The key to your tradeshow success is wrapped up in the lead-management process. The best time to plan for follow-up is before the show. Show leads often take second place to other management activities that happen after being out of the office for several days. The longer leads are left unattended, the colder and more mediocre they become. It is to your advantage to develop an organized, systematic approach to follow-up. Establish a lead handling system, set time lines for follow-up, use a computerized database for tracking, make sales representatives accountable for leads given to them, and then measure your results.

Secret #7.5:

Failing to differentiate:

Too many exhibitors are happy to use the "me too" marketing approach. Examine their marketing plans and you'll notice an underlying sameness about them. With shows that attract hundreds of exhibitors, there are very few exhibitors that "stand out from the crowd." Since memorability is an integral part of a visitors' show experience, you need to be looking at what makes you different and why a prospect should buy from you. This is particularly important with generic products in an industry.

Every aspect of your exhibit marketing plan, including your promotions, your booth and your people should be aimed at making an impact and creating curiosity – and positive memorability.