



Trade Show Dos and Don'ts

by Jason Mallin

Planning to exhibit at a trade show soon? If so, you're not alone. Many businesses find that trade shows can be one of their best sources of new business as well as a good way to attract media attention.

But exhibiting at trade shows doesn't come cheap. The cost of booth space, drayage, product literature, airfare, shipping and hotel costs, and meals can take a significant toll on a small business' bottom line if they don't get the hoped for sales from the show. No single thing you do can guarantee you will have a profitable show. However, there are a number of things you can do to increase ROI.

Here are several to consider:

1. Check Out The Show History

Is it a show that regularly attracts large crowds? Will the show be held in a place that's easy for attendees to find and reach by car and by public transportation? Will the show be adequately promoted to your potential customers? Have vendors who have participated in the show in the past done well? What has past attendance been?

2. Prepare A Professional-Looking Display

You don't have to have the biggest, flashiest booth on the trade show floor to attract attendees. But you do need to have some type of display that lets passersby know what it is you are selling. Signs, photographs of products or other elements used in the display should look professionally prepared. Unless you're working a crowd that's attracted by the possibilities of bargain basement prices, vinyl banners propped up against a backdrop will make you look unprofessional and make prospects question the commitment to the success of your product.

3. Have Sufficient Literature Ready To Hand Out

Have professionally prepared brochures or other handouts made in quantity to distribute at the show, and have them prepared well in advance of the show. If you wait until the last minute to prepare your literature you'll wind up paying unnecessary rush charges. If you try to prepare it yourself on a laser printer and photocopier, what you turn out may not do your product justice.

4. Make Sure You *HAVE* a Product

If your product doesn't work, or doesn't work properly, or not ready to go to market, you'll lose more customers than you'll ever gain.



5. Do Pre-Show Promotion

Experienced trade show exhibitors don't wait for the show to start to try to see customers and make new contacts. This could be done differently based on the show or audience but may include:

- Dimensional Mail campaign
- Pre-event email
- Include announcements in invoices prior to the event
- Personal invitations by phone or mail to your most important clients

6. Have A Giveaway Or Traffic Builder

Your goal is to attract people who would be interested in your product to your booth. This can be integrated with the pre-show dimensional campaign, sponsorship of the events lanyards, bags or other materials or a Brand-relevant Promotional Product that really spreads the buzz about your company. The giveaway or traffic builder doesn't have to be big or elaborate. Samples of your product given away at intervals during the show are ideal. Having a chair massage available at the booth, a contest for an iphone, sunsubscription to Netflix or a Plasma screen give away... Use your imagination if there aren't sufficient funds for expensive giveaways.

7. Take Notes

You will have conversations with dozens of people during a trade show. Many of them will give you their name or a business card. In the past exhibitors jotted notes on the back of cards. Get a digital voice recorder and quickly record the name, company and topics of discussion of key contacts while they are walking away so you never look like you are busy working when you should be busy WORKING the show!

8. Train Booth Personnel

Choose your booth staff carefully and be sure they know how to deal with the public. Among the faux pas to avoid (all seen at recent trade shows), are booth personnel who:

- Pick their nose while talking to prospects
- Look unkempt and/or unwashed
- Bad-mouth competitors
- Talk to each other or talking on a cell phone – No cell phones or laptops allowed PERIOD!
- Delight in garlic-laden lunches (or breakfasts)
- Sit at the back of the booth and wait to be approached

Your booth staff should be dressed well, preferably in branded apparel or something that is relevant to your business.



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9. Play to the Crowd

Plan demos so more than one prospect at a time can view them. If booth personnel are tied up giving a demo to one or two people, and that demo can't be seen by other passersby, you limit the numbers of potential leads and customers you will attract. If at all possible, use movie screens or projection screens, or large screen computers and have demos done with the demonstrator facing the any audience or the aisle of the trade show. Touch screen kiosks, looping presentations or videos and a properly designed environment can help to guide visitors through the are towards you.

10. Follow up!

Have a plan in place for following up on leads as soon as you get home from the show. Don't wait a month or two to get around to sending information to those who stopped by your booth. By then, the hot prospects are likely to have become good customers for one of your competitors. Over 79% of leads never get followed up on. Plan ahead using your voice recorder or use a target prospect list prior to the show. If the booth staff is too busy to follow-up – get someone back at the home office responsible to quickly follow up – within 5 days of the show or before the next weekend.

The Garage Promotional Group can help you target the most important prospects, design an environment that will draw them in and a plan to be sure they don't get away. We work as you partner to execute your brand in the tradeshow space effectively, efficiently and with an interest in increasing your tradeshow ROI.