

# 5 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR TRADE SHOW EXPERIENCE A SUCCESS

Exhibiting at a trade show is often seen as a blessing and a curse.

On the one hand, it can be a highly impactful way to get in front of a room full of prospective customers and share your story. It's a way to launch cool new products and services, showcase your skills and expertise, and really start to build one-on-one relationships with those who visit your booth.

On the other hand, it's a sh\*t-ton of work.

There's a ton of prep that goes into building a memorable display, there's no guarantee as to how well the event will be attended, you have to be on your toes (literally and figuratively) and be prepared for anything, and most importantly, you need to have a follow-up plan locked-and-loaded if you want to get the most out of the investment.

We've helped quite a few clients get ready for trade shows, and have picked up quite a few tips and tricks along the way.



*By going into the trade show with intention, it'll guide all the decisions you make.*

## 1. Know your intent

Before you even sign the contract to exhibit, ask yourself a few questions. Are you on defense or offense? Are you there to “protect your turf” from the competitors, or focus on reaching potential new customers? Do you see this as an expense or an investment? Are you there to remind attendees of your products or services, or launch something new?

By going into the trade show with intention, it'll guide all the decisions you make about what to showcase, how to set up your booth for maximum impact, where to invest in materials, the message you want to get across, and what your follow-up plan will be.

## 2. Have a lead generation plan

Obviously one of the biggest goals of any trade show is to generate leads. But, don't go into it blindly. Set specific goals, clearly define your ideal customer, have a process or system in place to collect qualified leads, and most important of all, have a follow-up plan.

*Quality over quantity will win the day when it comes to lead generation.*

Quality over quantity will win the day when it comes to lead generation. While it may feel counterintuitive to not focus on getting “as many names as possible,” in the end, your prospect list will be that much more valuable if you focus on qualified leads because it's filled with people truly interested in learning more and, ultimately, buying from you. In addition, it simply makes everything more efficient and impactful – is it easier to manage a list of 100 qualified leads, or 500 random names dropped into a fish bowl? It's the 80/20 rule at work, where 80% of your success comes from the top 20% of your efforts.

## 3. Give before you receive

This is Sales 101 stuff. Give before you receive.

*Focus on establishing relationships and making an excellent impression.*

The truth is, people rarely remember specific details about services or products. What they DO remember are the people they met. Focus on establishing relationships and making an excellent impression. *Listen* to visitors to your booth, and show that you're an advocate for current and potential buyers. Don't blast into your sales pitch before even learning your booth visitors' names. A



good rule of thumb is, before you even mention the name of your company or product, ask them three questions about themselves... and really listen to their answers.

Not only is this the first step in establishing a personal relationship with potential buyers (and we all know people tend to buy from people they like and trust), but it's an excellent way to show that you really care about who your company works with.

## 4. Be prepared ... for anything

One of the tricks of successful implementation of a trade show booth is to be prepared for anything. If you go in with the only intention of spouting off your 30-second elevator pitch a thousand times over, you'll be caught flat-footed in a sea of bustling attendees who can have the attention spans of fruit flies.

It makes sense to invest plenty of time up-front flushing out scripts for your sales team, having the most up-to-date handouts ready to distribute, and teeing up videos or interactive demos on your laptops. But, what about having your contact list handy to offer referrals to complementary businesses? Or extra bottles of water behind the booth? Or your calendar to schedule an appointment right on the spot?

Trade shows can be exceptionally high-energy, high-octane events, and if you're prepared to pivot on a dime to meet someone's needs, you'll be that much more effective at generating the attention you want for a successful event.

## 5. Be smart with your booth set-up

Think critically about your booth set-up. Who is the primary attendee? Are they going to want to touch your products? Try a demo of your service? You will need to appeal to a few key types of attendees – there are those who prefer to pour over reading materials, and others who are more visual and will benefit from a real-time demo.

But, sometimes more is just ... well ... more. Be careful about overwhelming visitors with too much stuff; it's important to strike a balance between having

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plenty of opportunities for attendees to learn about you and your services, and creating a space that just feels cluttered and claustrophobic.

Also think carefully about giveaways. Yes, it's always nice to know someone walked away with some swag with your company logo, but make sure it's useful swag. Nobody wants a stress ball or cheap reusable bag. Make sure your promotional items have a chance of seeing the light of day, and not locked in someone's junk drawer.

## **BONUS: Have a follow-up plan!**

The vast majority of any revenue you see as a result of being in a trade show will be after the event. So, it makes sense that the single, most important thing you can do is to have a follow up plan after the show.

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One study we read showed that fewer than 70% of exhibitors have any formalized process in place for how leads are followed up with ([www.spearmarketing.com](http://www.spearmarketing.com)). Don't fall into this trap; it's as good as money wasted.

Here are a few items that should be added to your post-show to-do list:

### **Add people to your customer/prospect database**

Yes, this is a pain and time-consuming. In fact, it's probably the **LAST** thing you want to do after an exhausting few days of talking to a gazillion people. But, none of your other follow-up procedures can happen until after this step. So, just do it.

### **Be QUICK about it**

The longer you wait to launch your follow-up plan, the less likely prospects will even remember they even visited. So, implement your follow up plan quickly. The first follow-up should be less than a week from the event.

### **Include strong calls to action**

Sorry, "Learn more" isn't strong enough. Invite people to different communication "tracks" (such as email newsletters, or liking your Facebook page), or suggest they watch a video, or offer a free demo. Something to keep visitors engaged with your company and service.



### **Provide good – and USEFUL – content**

People stopped by your booth because they wanted to learn about you, your business, and/or your product. But, try to resist bombarding them with nothing-but-salesy content. It'll be the quickest way to get a bunch of unsubscribes. Instead, focus on teaching your prospects something. In the world of digital marketing, content is king. Make sure your content is good.

### **Be personal**

If at all possible, reference specific conversations you had with them or questions they asked. Or share photos from the event as a reminder. Or share insights from other areas of the show.

### **Think long-term**

You just walked away from a successful event with a giant list of qualified leads; don't let that list get cold! While it's great to follow up in the first days and weeks following an event, have a plan to continue pinging your leads throughout the year. In a lot of cases, people don't need your product until they need it, and it could be 6 months or a year down the line.

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Participating as an exhibitor at a trade show can be a highly effective tool in your overall marketing plan. But, it takes a lot of work to walk away with a return on your investment. But, if you plan ahead, go in with set goals, and have a post-show to-do list, you'll reap the rewards of having a list of countless new customers.

**Shameless Plug** | *Need help with any of your pre- or post-event task list? We can help! Rescue Desk is a full-service virtual assistant firm, and our job is to take those important -- but time-consuming -- administrative and marketing tasks off your list. We've helped countless business owners free up their time and grow their businesses by doing things like managing their social media, setting up email campaigns, and yes, even uploading contacts into databases.*

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