



Exhibiting is strategic, not just logistic

Most exhibit professionals are known as logistics experts who ensure that exhibit properties get to the show on time, take care of making hotel and airline reservations and order show services within the deadline period.

Candidly speaking, too many exhibiting companies fail to do their homework about shows. They fail to set objectives, fail to measure results and fail to follow up on leads.

Your first question should be: 'Why are we going?'

Experience has shown that there are four areas that serve as the cornerstones for nearly all show objectives - and, for that matter, all marketing ventures. These are typically tightened down with measures and assigned strategies that enable reaching them.

The four:

1. Increasing sales and reinforcing market share
2. Increasing share of customers and getting current customers to buy more
3. Introducing new products
4. Positioning or repositioning your organization, its brand and products

Setting Objectives and Measurable Results Worksheet

Why are you exhibiting?

- Lead Generating
- Creating or Increasing Awareness (Product, Service, Organizational)
- Developing New Customers
- Maintaining or Extending Relationships with Existing Customers
- Introducing a New Product to Current Markets
- Introducing a New Product to New Markets or Market Segments
- Introducing an Organization to a New Market
- Introducing New Applications to Existing Markets
- Recruiting New Distributors, Dealers or Representatives
- Recruiting Personnel with Specialized Skills
- Attracting Press Attention to Company, Products or Services
- Teaching or Learning - Informing and learning from others

- Supporting the Industry Association
- Counteracting Competitor Claims
- Maintaining Pressure and Market Viability
- Other: _____

What are your objectives?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Who do you want to reach?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How will you measure your results?

- Number of leads
- Investment per lead
- Sales generated in specific period of time (6 months after the show)
- Return on investment (ROI)
- Number of visitors viewing live presentation
- Pre- or post-show surveys for perception or memorability
- Exit interviews

7 Big Hairy Exhibit Design Questions

In designing an exhibit that fits your needs, you have to ask a lot of questions. Here are 7 essential questions – and why they matter.

1. What kind of image do you want to convey?

Your exhibit conveys your company's personality - worthwhile because it creates an emotional reaction with your customers, and people buy for emotional reasons. The shapes, materials, surface treatments, colors, images, and even typography you choose help convey your company image. A company that wants a high-tech, innovative look will end up with a completely different exhibit than one that seeks a professional, established image.

2. What are you trying to accomplish?

Believe it or not, your objectives can dictate the actual shape of your exhibit. If you want to generate a lot of leads, you need an open, inviting space that allows easy entry for attendees and open sightlines for booth staffers. On the other hand, if you're looking to build relationships with a select number of key individuals, then you need an exhibit with conference rooms where you can spend quality time closing sales. Two different objectives, two radically different exhibit designs. Exhibitors that want to build their image tend to go for bigger graphic images and larger architectural elements to create a bigger impression.

3. What booth sizes are right for you?

Many companies use several booth sizes - island exhibits for their national shows, and then inline exhibits for their regional or vertical market shows. With foresight and planning, exhibitors can design one large exhibit that can be reconfigured for their smaller booth spaces. Not only do they save money by not having to purchase multiple exhibit properties, but they also present a more consistent look at all their shows.

4. How can you stretch your exhibiting budget?

Everyone wants the Taj Mahal. Yet everyone must come up with a justifiable budget. Balancing those needs is the goal of every exhibit designer. Skyline uses its compact, lightweight exhibit materials to deliver an effective exhibit that still saves clients thousands of dollars in operating costs compared to traditional custom exhibits. For some exhibitors who need to preserve capital or only exhibit in a big space once a year, rental exhibits help maximize the budget. And reconfigurable components let exhibitors create many exhibits from one.

5. What matters to your target audience?

Answer this question, then make sure that's what you're showing on your exhibit. You'll get to what matters by determining the benefits your clients are seeking and then what your key advantages are. It can take a lot of discussion to arrive at this, starting with what your products are, moving to their features, then the benefits of these features, until you distill the message down to the key benefits that drive your buyers' purchasing decisions.

6. What message do you want your visitors to get in the first three seconds? And what do you want them to remember after visiting your booth?

Do you want them to remember your new products? Your competitive advantage? Or your company's brand image? Keep it simple. Designers who are used to creating brochures or ads have a tendency to overload exhibit graphics with way too much information to be effective in a trade show exhibit. Think billboard, not bulletin board. It's better to go for impact -- less is definitely more in trade show exhibit copy.

7. What functional needs do you have?

In creating an exhibit, you're also creating a temporary workspace for your booth staffers. What are their needs? You may need to create areas for demos, presentations, conferences, and storage. And still balance that with your need to create an accessible exhibit with graphic messages.

Trade Show Exhibit Design For Different Booth Sizes

Trade show exhibits are not all created equal. Ranging in size from tabletops to islands, exhibits have a different effect on attendees, and require different design approaches to maximize their impact.

Tabletop Exhibits

Tabletop exhibits are usually used at shows that limit the booth size to that minimum standard. However, you can still use a tabletop with great effect, because the entire surface area of your display is close to eye level, and is thus easily seen at a glance. A tabletop exhibit is basically a two-dimensional object, like a miniature billboard, so you'll have greater results with a single, large image than with many small photos arranged like a bulletin board.

Ten-Foot Backwall Exhibits

More than half of all trade show exhibit booths are ten-foot backwall exhibits. Ten feet provides enough space for a company to display its message and host attendees. Backwall displays are still primarily a two-dimensional medium, so take full advantage of your limited space by covering it with attention-getting graphics. Curved wall pop-up displays work well for these spaces, as their surfaces always face the attendee, surrounding them with your graphic message. Curved displays even focus sound to the center of the booth, so it makes it easier to be heard within a busy show hall. Again, remember to make your display more like a billboard and less like a bulletin board.

Also, avoid the temptation of putting a big table in front of your backwall exhibit. Although that gives you a place to put your literature, it also creates a barrier between you and your prospects. It's better to have your booth staffers standing on that valuable real estate right next to the aisle, ready to greet and meet with your future customers. A smaller table is a great place to put an extra graphic that's close to the aisle, and still display your product samples, literature, and more. If it's a Skyline exhibit, you can often store your cases inside the table.

Twenty-Foot and Larger Backwall Exhibits

Once you graduate to twenty feet of booth space, you enter into a different trade show arena. With twenty feet you have new design possibilities. You can create small work areas within your exhibit for demonstrating product, making presentations, or meeting with clients at around a small table. Twenty feet means you have twice the time to catch an attendee's eye as they walk past your booth. You can use part of your exhibit for a high impact graphic, and still show smaller detail graphics or display products on the other half.

And twenty-foot booth spaces offer greater three-dimensional design possibilities. Now it's legal to have a bridge coming off your backwall to the middle of the front of your booth. A bridge puts your name or message at a perpendicular angle to the aisle. Why is that important? Because now prospects can see your name from a greater distance as they walk towards your booth. That gives you even more time to get noticed. Plus, you can also put a tower, perhaps 10' or 12' tall, in the middle of your backwall exhibit, for greater attention-getting impact. Backwall booths beyond 20' let you combine several of the design possibilities of a twenty-foot backwall. However, most exhibitors who grow to a 10' by 40' exhibit choose a 20' by 20' island exhibit instead.

Twenty-Foot by Twenty-Foot Island Exhibits And Larger

If backwall displays tend to be a two-dimensional medium, then island displays are true three-dimensional marketing powerhouses. Within an island booth, you have the opportunity to create a work environment for your booth staffers and attendees that accelerates communication and opportunity. You can have separate areas for demonstrating product, writing leads, meeting in private conference rooms, presenting to groups, and even storing staffers effects and promotional giveaways. You can create graphic messages that are seen from every side on towers, bridges,

and even hanging signs. And all this can be combined into a single, impressive exhibit that communicates that you're someone worth doing business with.

There is one other major advantage of an island exhibit: More aisle space. A 20-foot by 20-foot island exhibit has 80 feet of aisle space, twice as much as a 10-foot by 40-foot space with the same square footage. Double the aisle space means double the chance to stop and engage passing attendees. Even a 20-foot by 20-foot peninsula space, which has aisles on three sides, offers 60 feet of aisle space.

With even larger island exhibits, you can create larger environments for conference rooms, theater-seating presentations, product demonstrations, and multiple workstations for booth staffers, with computer monitors and lead processing machines. And according to research, the bigger your exhibit, the higher its memorability. So at trade show, bigger is often better.

Design For Budget

Like it or not, your exhibiting budget is probably in a race with budgets for trade magazines, electronic media, or direct mail: the best ROI wins. Here are some ideas to consider when designing your exhibit that can squeeze more out of your exhibiting budget and ensure it's viewed as an investment, not an expense.

Plan ahead

Don't just buy your exhibits from one show to the next, but instead, plan for entire annual show schedule – or even better, your next three years. Plan all your potential booth sizes, and design all those configurations from the beginning, with the greatest amount of common parts. Figure out what graphic messages you will need to change according to product, division, or vertical market.

Know When To Rent

If you are exhibiting at multiple shows, it's usually better to buy your exhibit – unless if you exhibit at one show in an exhibit much bigger than the rest. At that bigger show, it makes fiscal sense to rent the additional components to fill out your big booth. No sense buying and paying to store all that exhibit.

Measure, Calculate, Adjust

Be sure to put aside 1% to 3% of your exhibiting budget to track what is working, and what is not. Then you'll be better able to talk your VP out of going to that unproductive show in the city he likes when you can prove it gets the worst ROI of your entire program.

Shift Unproductive Exhibit Operating Costs Into More Productive Areas

You can create attractive, and functional lightweight modular exhibits for even your island exhibits that save up to 50% or more on your non-productive shipping and drayage costs, and may also reduce your refurbishing and I&D costs, too. Keep the savings, or increase spending on graphics, pre- and at-show promotions, more booth staffers, and better ROI measurement.

Design your exhibit to compellingly communicate your marketing message, to provide a great workspace for your staffers and experience for your attendees, and to get the most out of your budget. Then you'll be much closer to achieving your trade show success – in fact, you will have hit a homerun!

Lead Management

Almost 80% of leads generated are never followed, according to the Center For Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR). Rather than sending your hard-fought trade show leads into the abyss, strive to be part of the elite 20% that actually follow up on their leads! We've heard horror stories of exhibits pulled out of storage to prepare for a show – only to find the leads from the previous show still packed with the exhibit. What a tragedy! Remember, trade shows are very effective tools to create qualified leads. They could also be an effective media to create sales – but only if the leads are followed up appropriately.

Maximize your leads

Want to attract to your trade show exhibit the clients you want to work with? Lead generation is always a primary goal. Sales people depend upon quality leads to make sales for your company. Follow these tips to maximize your leads.

- Use pre-show promotions and invitations to your exhibit one to two weeks prior to the show. Studies show promotions can boost your lead counts by 33%.
 - Train booth staff to reiterate the benefits expressed in the pre-show promotion.
1. Engage in a 30-second dialogue of open-ended questions.
 2. Determine what to present to this prospect within two minutes
 3. Present product(s) that benefit the prospect in a ten-minute timeframe.
 4. In a minute's time, complete your lead card, agree on the next step and move on.
- If your lead machine prints on location, have staff take notes directly on lead sheets.
 - Ask attendees open-ended questions that start with what, when, where, how, tell me, describe and who. Timely post-show follow up is essential to turn leads into clients.

Start Following Up On Leads BEFORE The Show Starts!

To efficiently follow up your leads it is important to make preparations to follow them up before you leave for the show.

Before leaving for the show:

- Write (and, if not personalized, even print) the follow-up letter
- Prepare the follow-up packets — be sure to have a stockpile of any brochures you may need
- If you're going to promise to send anything after the show, be sure to have it already back in the office
- Create the lead management forms
- Identify the person responsible for lead management

By preparing before the show starts, you can fulfill your leads without delay once you return from the show.

Obtaining Substantial Leads

The most common method of gathering trade show leads is the "fish bowl approach." However, there's something lacking from those business cards, giving sales people little desire to follow-up with leads that have insufficient information. Perhaps, because of this, approximately 80 percent of leads gathered are not followed-up.

Here are tips to use to give your leads substance:

- 1.** Send a pre-show mailer to trade show attendees encouraging them to visit your exhibit. For example, you may want to send a card that is redeemable for some sort of tangible item at your trade show exhibit.
- 2.** Make a prior list of promising customers/trade show attendees and strive to address them by name - makes a great first impression.
- 3.** Greet every visitor with a handshake and use his or her name, if wearing a badge.
- 4.** Fax or overnight your leads back to your fulfillment department each day of the trade show. This enables your sales force to connect immediately with prospects.
- 5.** Your exhibit staff should take pertinent notes that will help make the sale. For example, is the prospect on a timeline? Do they have a specific need? Are they already familiar with your product? By doing so, you will identify how your company can offer the most help.
- 6.** Most importantly, always ask open-ended questions. This technique encourages conversation. For example, "Tell me what you're looking for in the show."

Remember, trade shows are very effective tools to create qualified leads. They could also be an effective media to create sales - but only if the leads are followed-up in a timely manner.

A lot of your success depends on YOU

There are a lot of variables that drive success in the trade show and event industry, and one of them is YOU. We thought Marc Goldberg's advice on what it takes personally to succeed in this business merits repeating. Marc is a consultant in the industry and owner of **Marketech**.

Maintain peak physical and mental condition

Be conditioned physically so you can withstand the rigors of 10-12 hour days, exhibit set-up and tear down, and the "work all day, fly all night" schedules. Have the mental agility to bob and weave with the variety you face day-in and day-out.

Master the skills of the profession

Be a student of exhibiting. To be in control of our exhibit and event programs, you need to master skills such as planning, budgeting, marketing, project management, elements of design, and logistics. You need to be a life-long learner.

Be tough on yourself

That doesn't mean work your self into a stressed-out condition that leads to burnout. It means setting goals, identifying what is working and creating plans for growth and professional expansion.

Work hard and smart

To achieve top performance you cannot just work hard. You also need to work smart so you have time and energy left to live the remainder of your life.

Maintain a positive attitude

To maintain balance and achieve the performance you desire, you need a positive attitude. We're not talking about "looking at the world through rose colored glasses." We are talking about glasses being half full and not half empty. We are talking about strategic thinking that allows you to work out issues logically and rationally, not emotionally.

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