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Create a Trade Show Booth That Generates Buzz

By Dick Wheeler

The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas in early January 2006 was a blow-out four-day trade show attracting some 150,000 guests and 2,500 exhibitors. The trade show floor was 28 football field's worth of space and exhibits spanned 1.6 billion square feet of convention space. This dynamic trade show gave us a peek into the future of a plug and play lifestyle where we can work, play, and keep in touch when we want, where we want.

"The incredible momentum around these new products and services shows that the digital lifestyle has truly gone mainstream this year," Microsoft chairman Bill Gates said in his opening keynote address. "Now it's time to bring together the devices, software, and services in people's lives and take all these experiences to the next level."

To introduce the latest technologies, the most effective trade show displays combined drama, creativity and design to broadcast their message and pound home their brand awareness. On the other hand, there were trade show exhibits that lacked creativity and pizzazz and went virtually unnoticed by the milling show floor throng.

Clients who want their trade show appearance to make a dramatic impact often ask about the traits of a trade show booth that hits it big on all cylinders. They want to know what the innovative trade show leaders do differently and how they can also stand out against the competition.

Event Marketer covered the CES show and ranked the trade show booths as to their appeal. Just a few of their favorites were AOL, Dolby and Daewoo. Here are a few pointers that resulted from why they picked these trade show exhibits:

1. Have your trade show booth provide a valuable service to attendees

AOL scored big when they offered their high speed Internet service free to all weary trade show goers. Attendees found a comfortable place to relax, check their email, and surf the web. While this was going on, AOL got to showcase their company's services such as music on demand, Mobile, AIM, and City Guide. This was a win-win situation that helped trade show attendees check in with their offices in real time while appreciating AOL as their host.

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2. Find a location that stands apart from the crowd

AOL was inside the concierge tent and therefore got lots of exposure and foot traffic. They commanded a corner in the concierge tent which was located in the parking lot outside the main hall. Their entry had a 20–screen TV wall showing brand logos and concert videos. There were 20 laptops for guests to use and six were mounted on mechanical arms, which could be reached by attendees relaxing in comfortable chairs.

3. Find creative ways to be "in the moment". AOL corporate executives off site were able to view the inside of their trade show booth as a web camera filmed the action inside their booth at the show in real time. They could critique booth activity in real time and coach exhibit personnel on traffic flow, visitor reactions and fresh ideas for engaging prospects.

4. Use eye–catching designs, shapes and tension fabrics. Daewoo used a large wall constructed of

17 LCD screens with 36 fabric screens with rear–projected graphics as its focal point. Huge fin–shaped tension fabric structures with custom lighting lined TV display stands at the sides of the exhibit. They used a logo laden two–sided tower perched on top of the info desk at the entrance with 10 LCD screens built into the pillar. Visitors were fascinated by the compelling visual drama.

5. Create a space for attendees to try out your products. Dolby had a gaming zone that allowed guests to try out their new Xbox 360 racing game, Burnout. The Xbox's Dolby Digital sound was like a beckon that cast a spell on visitors alluring them to the trade show booth.

Remember that by incorporating movement, color, lights and action in your trade show booth you get to showcase new technology while entertaining and mesmerizing your guests. Techniques such as these can make for an unforgettable trade show experience.

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Eight Success Tips for Your First Trade Show Booth

By Rena Klingenberg

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:

1) Rent the smallest possible booth space for your first trade show. 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.

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) For 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 the trade show, 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.

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

Create a Trade Show Booth That Generates Buzz

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.

In summary, 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.

Rena Klingenberg is a jewelry artist and small business owner. Her website,

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, is filled with new success tips and articles to help other

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Trade Show Tactics Revealed

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