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Five Reasons Trade Show Exhibits Are Popular

By Dick Wheeler

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Why are companies joining the trade show bandwagon? One of the major reasons for the continuing trade show popularity is the personal contact opportunity to observe innovations in business products and services. In an era of impersonal electronic communication, trade shows offer face-to-face meetings that are critical for companies to compete in an ever-changing marketplace.

The size of the trade show display industry is impressive and it is growing.

According to Trade Show Exhibitors Association (TSEA), 51 million people attended trade shows last year in the United States. There were more than 13,000 trade shows in the nation with 1.2 million companies exhibiting. This is a testimony to the tremendous value in networking and being able to touch and demonstrate new products. Trade shows connect buyer to seller and people to people in a way that virtual marketing can never achieve.

Here are five compelling reasons why trade show displays across the U.S. are successful:

1. Networking with the right people at the trade show. You get to see and be seen. You meet your clients and client prospects face-to-face and get instant feedback. This is certainly good news since there has been a dramatic business shift to online marketing, home offices, smaller field sales forces and the depersonalization of the sales function. With e-commerce dominating the business process, cell phones, email communications and Web commerce, there are fewer opportunities for face-to-face business development. The realization that relationships drive commerce has forced companies to view trade shows as a key opportunity for personal encounters. And, research shows that two or three days of dealing directly with decision makers in a trade show exhibit environment can cut the cost and time of closing deals by as much as 50 percent.

2. Showcases company's new products and innovations. Trade shows draw massive attention to new products seen by the right people. At the trade show, your booth staff can help educate attendees

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on your company's array of products and services as well as walking prospects through the decision-making process. People need to see and feel new products as this helps build their business relationships.

3. Expanding business by reaching the people who make purchasing decisions for their businesses at the trade show. Trade shows attract decision-makers, influence purchasing decisions, provide a point of contact for new customers, and make lasting impressions.

4. Brand exposure and identity enhancement in a big trade show arena environment. Exhibitors think of trade show displays as the grand launch of their most valued new product or business service. An excellent opportunity to give customer prospects your best most memorable and consistent look to increase brand exposure.

5. Great place to learn about the new trends in your industry. You can bet that you will learn what

the "buzz" is in your own industry and watch what attracts prospects' interest. E.g., in the latest fancy food industry's winter trade show the trend is toward organic and natural products.

The trade show exhibit industry continues to grow and the added value of this personal prospecting environment suggests continued growth for 2006 and beyond.

Dick Wheeler is President of Professional Exhibits & Graphics, headquartered in Sunnyvale, California. The firm is a full-service premiere trade show exhibit, graphics and management services company. For additional information, go to

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Nine Tips on How to Set Goals for Your Trade Show Exhibit

By Dick Wheeler

It is often said that if you don't know where you are going, you may miss it when you get there. And, as Malcolm Forbes also points out, "If you don't know what you want to do, it's harder to do it." This is good advice especially in the trade show exhibit arena. It is crucial to establish goals and set objectives before you plan to exhibit at a trade show. As with any important marketing effort, you measure

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success by how well the activity performs against your stated goals. For example, ask how many hot leads do I need in order to justify the cost of our exhibit? What is my projected close rate needed to warrant my trade show booth budget? You get the idea.

Start by being clear when you consult with your top management and marketing teams as to the reasons why your company wants to exhibit in a particular trade show. Ask the tough question -do you plan to have a trade show display because your competition is exhibiting or is it because you want a set return on your trade show investment? Analyze in advance what you want to achieve from your trade show display, convey this to your exhibit team, and put it down on paper.

Here are nine key goal setting recommendations from "Tips & Techniques For Exhibiting Success" by Nomadic Display:

1. Trade show display objectives should reinforce your corporate marketing goals. Clear, concise trade show exhibit objectives need to be in sync with your overall marketing plan, not function independently of it.
2. Is increasing your brand identity at the trade show a key reason to attend? How will you brand your trade show exhibit? Will your logo be part of the branding? Will you incorporate your brand on all your handouts?
3. Do you expect to increase sales on the trade show floor? If so, by how much? Be realistic and set attainable sales figures.
4. Outline your expected trade show results. The more specific, the better. Are you planning to introduce new products or services at the trade show? If so, what are they and how will you showcase these new products/services?
5. Is an important emphasis of your trade show display to educate your target audience? If it is, will you have on-site speakers, website presentations, handouts at your trade show booth display?
6. Do you expect to gather industry information and customer preferences at the trade show? Do you have a formal survey and will you offer incentives for people to fill out your survey?
7. Is one of your goals to attract new business? If so, how many new orders do you feel are realistic?
8. Is recruiting new dealers or distributors a priority? If so, how many new dealers or distributors will be at the trade show?
9. Do you expect to educate customers? How do you plan to do this? Free literature Handouts? Internet presentations? In-person talks by your top management?

By putting your goals in writing, you have a list that you can manage and measure. Your specific goals need to be realistic and timed. Make deadlines and meet them.

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You already know that trade show displays can enhance your marketing plans with measurable results. You now need to focus first on your goals and objectives so that your measurement and return on trade show investment are indeed meaningful.

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