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**Winning Ideas for Trade Show Display Success**

**By Dick Wheeler**

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According to a survey by market research firm Exhibit Surveys Inc., trade shows are critical to marketing-oriented companies. Trade shows attract decision-makers, influence purchasing decisions, provide a point of contact for new customers, and make a lasting impression.

Think of your trade show display as the grand launch of your most valued new product or business service. Give customer prospects your best look and greet them with your most competent sales staff. Here are the tips on how to succeed at your next trade show:

- Pick the Right Shows - Select the trade shows that your targeted market prospects and competitors attend. Check out trade show directories on the Web. Get statistics for show attendance and a profile of attendees. Talk to former exhibitors about their trade show experience at the shows you select.
- Plan Ahead -Determine the space size and dimensions of your trade show booth. Reserve a good location early for your booth by studying the floor plan. Avoid dead-end aisles, freight doors, poorly lit corners, obtrusive columns. Attendees usually turn right when they first enter the trade show exhibit hall and they look up so be sure to make your booth visible with dramatic overhead signage. Once you nail down your trade show booth number on the show management map, be aware of any booth rules and regulations that apply such as height limitations and any obstructions on show floor before planning your booth design.

Allow enough time to select, design and build a trade show display and take advantage of early show services discounts. You will be able to avoid costly rush charges and you are better able to insure against glitches. Identify the date of the trade show and also the move in date for your trade show display

- Set Objectives For Lead Development - Set trade show exhibit goals to reinforce your overall marketing objectives. Make sure the goals are reasonable and attainable, share them with your trade show exhibit team and set up systems to measure your results and validate your objectives.

Accurately qualify and measure your Return On Investment. There are software packages that allow you to identify a half dozen weighted multiple choice questions in advance that will determine how viable a client prospect is. You need to identify buyers, filter out those who are not qualified, and measure results. Rank your prospects as " A" (highly qualified), " B" (somewhat qualified), or "C" (poorly qualified) prospect. Have your sales force follow up on "A" leads immediately. Measure the results of these leads in stages from the number and dollar amount of proposals made to monies

## Winning Ideas for Trade Show Display Success

received from actual sales.

- **Build a Dramatic Display** - Before deciding on what type of trade show booth you need, determine your space size requirements and determine the number of trade shows you will be exhibiting in the next 12 months. This information will help you decide whether to buy vs. rent. If you buy, there are three categories of trade show booths: custom, custom modular, and portable. Check out advantages and disadvantages of each. Light weight materials are less expensive to operate than the traditional all- wood displays. Use tension fabrics, woods, colored metal, layered graphics that use fewer shipping containers, have a current design trend look, and save on operating costs. Older traditional trade show exhibit booths can be obsolete because they are expensive to handle due to heavy weight, require larger size and number of crates to ship, and they are not consistent with current design trends.
- **Build Traffic by Being Creative**- Start with a dramatic, attention-getting hanging sign. Upon entering the trade show exhibit hall the first thing attendees do is look up -Your overhead sign should have a unique design, shape and movement to it. Gobo lights traveling across a tension fabric can provide changing color and mesmerizing interest. New technologies bring high drama to your booth such as 3D

video/laser image displays suspended above, your own interactive Website on large screen, robotics, holographics, waterscreen projections. Take advantage of your trade show exhibit supplier's expertise on graphics, portability and cost management.

- **Recruit the Right Booth Staff** - Although the sales function of your firm is usually fundamental to trade show exhibit booth staffing, you'll want to make sure that you have representatives who match up well with the positions of those who visit your booth.

If engineers visit your booth engage them with your engineer personnel. Also, make sure your staff knows how to engage, identify and qualify attendees as important leads, and dismiss those who are not key business prospects.

- **Send Pre-Show Notices to Attendees** - Trade show exhibit surveys report that three quarters of show attendees make out their schedule for exhibit visits and seminar attendance in advance. Set up meetings with clients, prospects, and press ahead of time. Contact them months ahead through direct mail, email and personal phone calls. Give them your trade show booth number and location and have an incentive at your booth that will be of value to them. Link your incentive to a direct prospect benefit and make it redeemable only by visiting your trade show exhibit. One example is to cut a numbered gift certificate in two and send half of it in advance and have the remaining half available only at your booth.

- **Understand Show Services** - You will need to have supplemental assistance from show services at the trade show exhibit hall. These are representatives and union laborers who provide a range of support services which include installation and dismantling, carpeting, furniture, lighting, phones, drayage and security. If you are aware of the nuances of these services and plan in advance you can save money while avoiding numerous pitfalls.

- **Control Costs** - Consider weight when buying a trade show display. You save substantially on trade show exhibits using lightweight materials that reduce the size and number of shipping crates.

- **Follow Up Immediately** -The hard work doesn't end when the show closes - this is when you have to diligently follow up on all those sales leads. It's best to respond to your top level "A" prospects immediately after the show. After the "A" prospects are all contacted, go on to the "B" level prospects. Be sure to have a well-planned strategy to close sales with these prospects. Tradeshow industry research shows that sales leads from a tradeshow are closed in half the time and at almost half the cost as leads from other sources.

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

<http://www.proexhibits.com>

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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.

## Winning Ideas for Trade Show Display Success

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

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,

<http://www.trade-show-booth-display.com>

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

small businesses market their products. Subscribe to her free "Trade Show Success on a Small Budget" ezine at

<http://www.trade-show-booth-display.com/newsletter.com>

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