



101 Rules of Tradeshow Marketing

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Over the 12+ years I've been involved in tradeshow marketing at Interpretive Exhibits and since forming my own company Communication One Exhibits in 2011 in Salem, Oregon, I've had the opportunity to learn from dozens of experts, consultants, writers and speakers about what it takes to succeed.

The following have either appeared on the Tradeshow Marketing podcast, the CDSEminar "Inside Secrets of Tradeshow Marketing" or in some other way been helpful with their knowledge and information: Thomas David Thayer, Orvel Ray Wilson, Ruth Stevens, Julia O'Connor, Marlys K. Arnold, Susan A. Friedman, Candy Adams, Mac McIntosh, Paul Holland, Skip Cox, Francis Friedmann, Joan Frazer and Jerry Gerson.

Thank you all!

This list started out as a few fun posts on Twitter where I use the handle [@tradeshowguy](#). I would post a 'rule' and include the hashtag "#tsmrules". I started getting feedback with people adding their own or commenting on the rules I had posted.

So with a wee bit of inspiration, I dug a little deeper and created a list of 101 tips, comments, observations, guidelines, and thought - what the heck - let's call them **101 Rules of Tradeshow Marketing!**

The list is not intended to be the complete, thorough list of what you need to make a tradeshow successful. As with any marketing endeavor, tradeshow marketing can be a colossal waste of time and money. But it can also be the best marketing investment you've made. Bottom line? You **MUST** plan! Know your objectives, know the particular jobs of each participant, and spend wisely.

Whether you're a long-time exhibitor or just planning your first show, I hope you'll find some worthy ideas in this list.

1. The most important thing to determine for each and every show is: What is your objective - for THIS show? Each show is different, and your goals may change from show to show. Be sure to recognize what's important NOW - at THIS show!
2. The main job of your booth graphics is to grab the attention of a visitor long enough to bring them into your booth to learn more. It's like a billboard when you're driving 60 MPH. You have 3-7 seconds to capture their attention. Striking graphics are very effective.
3. Look at your exhibit as if standing in a visitor's shoes and ask: What's in it for ME? Answer that accurately and you're well on your way to capturing their attention.
4. Tradeshow floor selling is chaotic. Sometimes the worst tradeshow sales people are your regular sales people. Make sure that your booth staff is well-equipped for the environment.
5. A crowd attracts a crowd. What can you do to create a crowd at your booth?

6. One media 'hit' can make your whole tradeshow. What are you doing to get the media involved?
7. Engage your visitors by asking open-ended questions that relate to your product or service. Closed-ended questions (yes or no) do little to further the conversation.
8. A trained tradeshow staff can double or triple your show results. An untrained booth staff is often the weakest link in your tradeshow marketing chain.
9. Giveaways should be tied to your product and handed out only to qualified prospects.
10. Get your visitor's hands busy doing something - anything - and they'll stay longer in your booth.
11. If your visitor is NOT a prospect, politely disengage and move on to another visitor. However, keep in mind that they may be able to refer someone to you.

12. Before your prospect leaves, find out from her exactly what the next step is – make a note; book it.
13. Stock your staff with outgoing happy people and show them the BIG picture as to WHY your company is using this marketing method.
14. Follow up on just HALF your leads and you'll do better than most of your competition.
15. Be nice and friendly to ALL visitors, even non-prospects. A referral can come from anywhere.
16. Spy on your competition at tradeshow. Chances are pretty good they're spying on you. Tradeshow are often the once chance you get to see what your competition is pushing.
17. Three critical parts to your tradeshow timeline: pre-show marketing, show execution, post-show follow-up. Miss one at your peril.
18. Plan ahead. Graphic design and production always takes twice as long as you think.

19. Grab a copy of the show book and keep it in your library. You never know when it'll come in handy.
20. Take a survey of your visitors and uncover things to help you at the next show. Break your survey into two parts: a quick and easy part that can be answered in just a few seconds (2-4 questions), and a more in-depth part for when the visitor and you have more time.
21. Find as many ways to connect with your visitor as possible: do demos, e-mail newsletters, follow-up meetings, on-site meetings, promote upcoming webinars, etc.
22. Brand yourself often. What impression would it leave someone on an airplane if you were wearing a sharp-looking embroidered company shirt?
23. In tradeshow design, don't underestimate the power of good lighting.

24. Think of your tradeshow booth as a 3D version of your company. Does it truly represent who you are and what you do?
25. Rule of thumb: purchasing a booth costs about 2 – 3 times more than renting it.
26. When engaging a visitor, ‘peel the onion’ with questions to find out what their ‘pain points’ are.
27. Each show is a learning experience, with many lessons for your business and selling skills. Take notes and review them regularly.
28. Invite people to your show! Clients, prospects, potential partners. Make it personal – everybody likes to be wanted.
29. A themed booth only works if it’s tied to your company, makes marketing sense and is done right.
30. In a tradeshow booth, you ARE your company. Act accordingly. Your image, dress and behavior are all reflections of your company.

31. Tradeshows decrease the sales cycle by dropping a couple of steps. Cold calling, for instance.
32. Follow up every 'hot' tradeshow lead within 7 days to double your sales to those people. 7 days goes fast!
33. Review your show as soon as you're able. A thorough de-briefing with all staff within a couple of days will shed light on many important issues.
34. Know your company's website inside and out. More people are researching your site before they stop at your booth - make sure you can answer their questions.
35. Post your tradeshow schedule on your website. Invite people to schedule appointments through your site.
36. Make use of the latest technologies available. Sending tweets or posting videos from a tradeshow floor shows you're in touch, reaching out, and keeping non-visitors in the loop.

37. The number one visitor turn-off? Staff people eating in your booth. Just don't do it!
38. Standing in your tradeshow booth with your arms folded is a defensive, off-putting posture and will keep people from entering.
39. The Number One Thing you can give a tradeshow booth visitor? A smile.
40. If you don't have the answer to a question, find someone who does or promise to get back to them with the answer. Then do it.
41. Define the skills needed by your booth staffers. Write a job description.
42. A tradeshow is a short conversation. The deals usually happen elsewhere.
43. Offer visitors something of value in exchange for their contact info: a free report, a white paper, a short consultation to address their challenges, a sample.

44. Your lead capture form should be customized to get exactly the information you need. No more, no less.
45. Seek to disqualify visitors. The sooner the better. For both of you.
46. After qualifying a prospect, before they leave, you should BOTH know exactly how and when you'll follow up.
47. The little things count for more than the big things. At least according to Sherlock Holmes.
48. If you have a satisfied customer, have them give you a video testimonial, such as:
<http://youtu.be/6CUOEhhzKVs>
49. Pick up as much literature from your competition as you can. Great way to gain insights into what they're currently up to.
50. Take your competitor's customers to lunch. See what you can learn.

51. Prepare your staff for a tradeshow by videotaping them role-playing. You'll be amazed how much they'll learn upon playback.
52. Create an objection list. It prepares your staff to answer all possible objections as they come up.
53. Boldness goes a long way. Ask bold questions. Approach CEO's with boldness. Live from a bold mindset.
54. Avoid gimmicky giveaways such as iPads or TVs. They usually waste money. Instead, give away something you sell to help narrow down the entries.
55. Shoot a live commercial in your booth using people who have just sampled your wares. What else can you do to attract attention?
56. The more you know about your yearly schedule, the better you can determine what kind of exhibit and graphics will work for all shows. Plan ahead.

57. A photo wall backdrop of happy clients is a great way to draw potential clients into your booth.
58. When using music in your booth, use high-mounted speakers from the back aimed down to the front to avoid disturbing your neighbors, and still creating a musical ambience in your booth.
59. Knowing the needs of show attendees will help inform your marketing strategy.
60. Set measureable objectives for everyone that participates in your booth.
61. Eliminate the fishbowl for business cards giveaway. Business cards can't swim and fishbowls are for fish.
62. The signage at your show should clearly communicate what your company does and why your visitor should care.
63. Face-to-face marketing is still the most effective. Tradeshows bring thousands of people face-to-face. Do

the math. Tradeshow marketing is still the cheapest way to collect strong leads.

64. Don't just gather names of visitors. Qualify, qualify, qualify!

65. Compared to other marketing mediums, tradeshows are expensive. Without clear metrics and established goals, it's probably a waste of money.

66. A tradeshow is a great place to gain and provide access to high-level decision makers. Do your CEO or President attend shows on a regular basis?

67. A tradeshow can be an effective launching pad for a new product. If launching a new product, that should be your focus for that show.

68. Corporate marketers view tradeshow marketing as a 'very valuable' marketing medium compared to TV, radio, newspaper and direct mail.

69. Exhibit at the shows which cater to your prospects' industries vs. your own.

70. If you're new to a show, attend it as a visitor before exhibiting. Ask questions of everybody to get a feel for its usefulness to your potential clients. Show management typically offers potential exhibitors a free floor pass.

71. Know the numbers: booth cost, rental space, graphics, pre-show marketing, travel, shipping, attendance, etc. You can't have too many numbers to work with.

72. Don't ignore regional shows as they can give you a big bang for your buck.

73. Read the show rules. It's amazing how many exhibitors don't. It can cost you unexpected money if you break a rule. Ensure your staff knows the rules.

74. For added exposure, offer to speak on a panel or give a presentation or seminar at the show.

75. The earlier you plan and book the more discounts you'll find from hotels and airlines to printers, show reservations and more.

76. If a show is too expensive for your budget, drop it. Consider sending a speaker, or sponsor an event.

77. A professional presenter may seem a bit spendy, but the right one will more than pay for the investment.

78. When hiring a booth designer, the most important element is likely to be how well you get along with them personally and professionally. Ask for references and check them out.

79. Get competitive bids on booth design and fabrication.

80. Graphics cost more than you think. Don't cut corners on cheap graphics – just do your homework and get good estimates so you know what it'll cost.

81. You should be able to read the text on your booth from thirty feet away.

82. It's cheaper to dress up an old booth in new laminate and graphics than it is to have a new one built.

83. A sturdy shipping crate is a good investment. Preventing damage to your booth during shipping will help you cut down on your overall costs.

84. Let your signage do the work. Don't make your visitor struggle to figure out what your company does. Good signage qualifies and disqualifies visitors quickly.

85. Done right, a 10x10 booth can outshine a booth ten times as large.

86. Events are a people business. Your tradeshow staff is the 'front line' of your company. How do they measure up?

87. Find half a dozen complementary businesses at the same show and put together a promotion that drives visitors to all of your booths.

88. A staff meeting each morning before the show floor opens will increase morale and effectiveness of your staff.

89. A booth staffer should spend as little time as possible but as much as necessary with a prospect before moving on to the next. Good booth staffers will learn to walk that line effectively.

90. If your carpet is the same color as the aisles, a small psychological barrier to entering your booth is largely removed.

91. Direct mail is still the best way to inform a potential attendee that you're exhibiting at a show. But don't forget social media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

92. If a visitor is disqualified from doing business with you, ask for a referral. "Do you know anyone that might be interested in what we offer?"

93. Productive post-show follow-ups include personal notes, thank you letters, reminders of expiration dates on show specials and any media coverage of your show appearance.

94. A non-booth can be effective. Set up some nice tables, a few signs and some clever attractor and invite people to sit down and talk about your offerings.
95. If the show management provides a table, don't use it unless it's necessary for booth function - otherwise get rid of it. It's a barrier to people who might like to enter your booth.
96. Imagine that the next person entering your booth is wearing a sign that says "Make ME Feel Important!"
97. If you can't afford to hire a 'real' celebrity to appear in your booth, consider hiring a look-alike.
98. Never, ever pack your tradeshow leads in your exhibit shipping case. Take 'em back to the office with you. Make copies before you leave the show if you can. Electronic lead gathering technology has improved enough so that you can send leads back instantly.

99. Encourage candid feedback from your staff while de-briefing. The more information you have the better equipped you'll be to make adjustments.

100. If your booth wins an award, put out a press release about it.

101. A show's website is usually packed with great information if you just look for it.

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Communication One Exhibits is a full-service custom tradeshow design and fabrication house, located in Salem, Oregon.