

TRADESHOW TIP SHEET

JULY 2010

Show Services Round-Up

When it comes to making a checklist for show services, your list could literally go on for pages and pages. Where do you start? Where do you end? Who does what? When? How? Does it include shipping? Drayage? Vacuuming the booth? Installing the electricity? Hanging a banner from the roof? What exactly is involved in the catch-all term 'tradeshow services'?

In all the years I've been in tradeshow marketing, the loudest, longest and most pointed complaints from exhibitors come about because of frustrations with tradeshow services. It costs too much; they're too slow; too inflexible.

Start at the Beginning

Yes, it sounds too simple: start at the beginning. Okay, so what's the beginning? Is it the moment you register for a show and send your money in? Is it when the booth ships from your warehouse? Does the beginning start the moment you walk on to the show floor?

Realistically, the beginning is when you make the commitment to the show. Perhaps even before that moment. Before booking a show, your research should take into account the various costs you might encounter and the services you might need: electrical drop locations, wi-fi needs, garbage cans, chair or carpet rental or the myriad other items that show up when you set up a tradeshow booth. If you can determine exactly what you'll bring vs.

Part of those complaints are valid – costs do keep going up, some crews are over-scheduled and that makes it difficult to get coverage on all exhibits at a moment's notice.

Other complaints come about because of the inexperience of exhibitors and unrealistic expectations they have of a tradeshow services provider in a chaotic environment.

So let's see if we can put a circle around the various elements that are involved in typical 'tradeshow services' and see if we can try and help you (and the vendors) set and meet realistic expectations.



what you'll need the show services company to provide you can at least ask specific questions based on your actual needs. Find out what it costs for the electrical, the rentals, the cost to hang a banner; then start toting up the figures. This will help you determine the realistic budget. And of course it's on a show-by-show basis as each show will likely have different costs for the similar items.

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**YOUR
ULTIMATE
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BE TO MAKE
YOUR BOOTH
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AS POSSIBLE
AT THE
LOWEST
REASONABLE
COST.**

Shipping, Drayage and the Power Lift

If only you could flex Superman-like muscles and carry your exhibit from your warehouse to the exhibit floor, you'd save a ton of money. But instead, you're stuck with earthbound shipping and drayage companies. And truth be told, the effort to get your exhibit and related materials from one place to the other in a timely manner and in one piece can be a complicated dance. Frequent exhibitors work with tradeshow shipping specialists to manage warehousing, exhibit crate construction, packing and shipping. Then once the freight arrives at the show, whether a warehouse or the loading dock, it still must move from the dock to the correct booth at the right time so that the set-up crews can begin.

Often an exhibitor will contract with the same

show services company to set the booth up; other times the option is to use an outside vendor. For smaller booths – pop-ups and easy-to-set-up modular booths – you may even do your own shipping and set-up. You'll have to do the math, figure out the man-power requirements and determine what works best for you.

A drayage contractor is responsible for items such as coordinating shipping company drivers in off-loading and loading crates, moving your exhibit to the correct booth, removing crates and boxes once you've assembled and stocked your booth, and bringing back your crates and boxes at the end of the show. With some shows having thousands of exhibitors, the coordination of this is indeed a complicated dance.

The Show Set-up

While you bring as much as you can to the show, chances are you'll need some of the basics to flesh out the operation in your booth during the few days you'll be in business. You're actually setting up a business outpost, along with hundreds of other exhibitors, and you'll need various things to actually DO business: internet access, electricity, chairs, carpet, display cases, tables and more. While you may think the cost of renting all of those things is expensive – and the costs DO add up – the overall cost of purchasing the items, shipping them, shipping them back home and storing them in a warehouse can also add up. That's one of the calculations you should make to see which makes more sense for your company.

Other costs you may run into: hanging an overhead banner, periodic booth cleaning, garbage cans, tele-

phone hard-line, chairs or other furniture, computer rental – and other assorted items. Every item you rent has an additional

cost and the more you can do without the more bucks you'll save. But you'll have to weigh the cost of NOT renting something (and doing without or having it shipped in) – but wishing you had it half-way through the show. Your ultimate goal must be to make your booth run as efficiently as possible at the lowest reasonable cost. You may determine that while the cost of renting waste cans is significant, the benefit of having that service far outweighs the hassle of bringing in your own trash cans and continually emptying them.



Bottom Line

With all of the items on your 'show services' checklist, there's no way this small newsletter can get to all of them. So as you go through your list, double-check the show's website for the latest information as it applies to you: height restrictions, recycling opportunities, move-in/move-out hours, important phone numbers to keep handy, show policies, rolling carts, strollers, badge reprint fees, photo/video policies, live presentations or demos

– yes the list goes on and on and on.

The more versed you are in the show guidelines and requirements, the better equipped you'll be to handle dealing with the various issues that come up with show services, drayage, set-up/dismantle and so on. Even for experienced exhibitors, it's not a bad idea to brush up on those guidelines to make sure your show comes off smoothly.