

TRADESHOW TIP SHEET

MARCH 2010

Why Does Tradeshow Marketing Cost So Much?

While people may not use those exact words – ‘why does tradeshow marketing cost so much?’ – the sentiment is an undercurrent for almost all transactions regarding tradeshow marketing. From renting the space, to renting or fabricating a booth, to shipping the booth, designing and creating new graphics, and the assorted travel costs to get your tradeshow booth staff to the show – yes, it all adds up.

Add to that the frustration voiced by many exhibitors who run into odd rules from different show locations and management – such as freight shipping restrictions by time which make no sense, show set-up

times that don’t compute (and is more expensive if you want to do it at a more ‘normal’ or convenient time) and you have the end result: exhibitors – especially new ones – who often conclude that tradeshow exhibiting is extremely expensive. And they have a hard time finding places to cut costs without cutting deeply into their staff, the look of their booth, or any needed bells & whistles at the actual booth.



So let’s take a closer look at costs that eat away at your tradeshow budget – and try and find ways to pare those costs down to more manageable numbers.

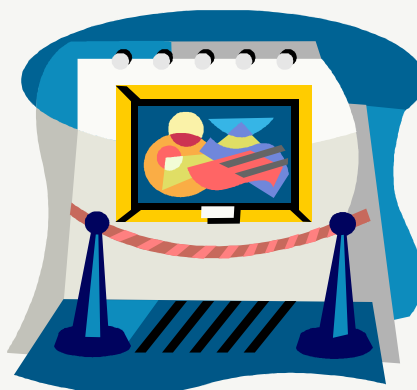
The Booth and Accessories

Your booth may be the best place to shave costs. Of course, it really depends on what the overall objective of your show appearance may be. Are you there to introduce a new product? To show off a bold and dynamic image – which often means a custom and most costly booth?

Articulating your show objectives helps to point your booth project in the right direction. Custom booth = better branding but typically more expensive. Rental or standard pop-up or ‘off-the-shelf’ booth = less branding impact but typically lower cost.

You can often shave dollars off by bringing carpet sweepers, waste baskets and other items that will typically increase your overall cost. Do away with expensive booth items, such as light boxes; get a bundled show-services package instead of

getting it piecemeal from the show services supplier. And often you can get rented carpet from your I&D supplier rather than the show services supplier and save money as well. Since they’re setting your booth up, they can probably just add the rented carpet to the package. It never hurts to ask!



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IF YOU'RE ABLE
TO WORK WITH
AN I&D COMPANY
THAT IS SETTING
UP SEVERAL
BOOTHS AT THE
SAME SHOW, YOU
CAN PROBABLY
WORK WITH YOUR
REP SO THAT THE
CREWS CAN BE
FLEXIBLE.
IT HELPS TO KEEP
THE OVERALL
SET-UP AND
DISMANTLE
HOURS DOWN

The Shipping and the Set-Up/Dismantle

Shipping is one of the harder places to save money. After all, you have a certain amount of weight (your booth) that needs to go a certain distance (the show location). Shop around. There are some shippers that excel in tradeshow booth shipments and go to great length to not only treat your booth with the loving care it deserves, but can even save you money on the shipping. Ask around, shop online, make calls, get quotes; ask a lot of questions. This is an area that you'll need to do a little more legwork.

When possible, combine product samples and literature and any other assorted materials that you'll need at the show and stick them in your booth crates. It adds modestly to the overall weight, but the cost of adding the weight is typically less than shipping the products or literature separately. One caveat: when the show is over, the

tendency is to stick all of that material back in the crate – which is okay, but several months might go by before anybody bothers to go through the crates, which means a possible surprise (and more work) for the person that's eventually assigned to the duty. And the earlier you schedule your shipping the less you'll run into up-charges.

As for setting the booth up, there are many options. Look to different I&D companies to see if they are flexible in combining crews with your exhibit house's other show exhibits so that teams can move quickly from one booth to another. The advantage of having crews setting up several booths – and having a flexible I&D company – usually means less overall set-up and dismantle labor hours.

Travel and Booth Staff

Every show is different and every company has different goals and plans on who is going, for how long, how far, etc. But one thing doesn't change: you have to get people from your city to the show location. Naturally, the earlier you decide who's going, the earlier you can book airfare – which is usually a cost-saver.

If the show is within driving distance, carpool or rent a large van so that everyone rides together. Instead of staying in hotels – even sharing rooms with another employee – look into renting a house or a couple of condos for a week. Chances are it'll

still cost less overall than renting a hotel room right near the show. And with that van you rented you can save on local travel expenses.

You may not be able to avoid eating out at restaurants all the time, but with a condo or apartment the likelihood is that you can at least eat up to half of your meals there. If someone in your crew loves to show cook, ask him to plan on preparing a meal or two for the whole gang – heck, even invite a client or two over. Work the scheduling right, and you'll still get out to those client dinners, eat at 'home' and save money, too.

Bottom Line

As earlier mentioned – it never hurts to ask! When it comes to cost-cutting, often the savings come when you ASK for the savings. I regularly ask my cable company on a yearly basis (when they raise my rates off of the 'intro' package rates) to see if they can give me a better deal. They always do. Always. It's because I ask. If I don't ask, I won't get. They won't go out of their way to offer. So ask.

To get everyone on your staff to carries a cost-cutting attitude, you might offer a small reward for the person who comes up with the best suggestion.

Hold a contest among your employees and see who can dream up the best way to save money on the next tradeshow. The suggestion, when implemented, that saves the most money, gets the prize.

There are always ways to exhibit at lower costs. I once saw a tradeshow booth built from recycled bicycle parts. It was unique and eye-catching. And it didn't cost more money – just some time and creativity. So use your time and creative brain to find ways to get that exhibit to the show and bring people to your booth – on a slim budget!