

TRADESHOW TIP SHEET

SEPTEMBER 2010

Exhibit? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Exhibit!

Tradeshows mean different things to different people. To some, it means the arduous task of organizing the shipping and set-up of a large exhibit; the scheduling of booth staff, the coordinating of management, media and other players. To others, it means a brief holiday with a few hours of visiting the floor of a tradeshow booth. To others yet, the marketing aspect of the show is irrelevant. To them, it means attending several workshops and presentations to see what's happening in the industry.

Large tradeshows can handle all of those complementary and competing goals...and more. If you choose not to exhibit – or maybe missed a cut-off date or are on a waiting list to get into a popular show – there

are still ways you can promote and position your company at a tradeshow without actually exhibiting.

Of course we don't recommend you try and sell your services on the tradeshow floor without having purchased a booth space. That is unfair to the exhibitors who did pony up the big bucks to be there – and if blatant could probably get you unceremoniously dumped at the entrance .

But with a little finesse and creativity you can find ways to make contacts, talk about your product or service and still adhere to the guidelines of the show.



Tell-All Hotel

One of the more successful ways to 'appear' at a show is to rent a suite at a nearby hotel. This way, you control the environment and the guest list. Depending on the type of product you have, this might be a way to position your product as a more exclusive product than what's at the show. With the right enticements and mailing list, you could draw top management of target companies to your suite for intimate one-on-one face time and customized demonstrations. By setting and confirming appointments ahead of time, you can possibly fill a couple of days of engagements that work around your prospects' schedules.

The downsides to this approach may include:

- Hard to get people to walk more than a block or so
- With no-shows, you're sitting around twiddling your thumb
- Since you're not part of the actual show, you may be seen as

trying to ride on the show's coattails

- Perception of doing a demo in a hotel suite may be seen as a bit 'undercover' – possibly a negative thing, possibly not, depending on how you position it.

The pros:

- Run the numbers – most likely cheaper than exhibiting
- Nice suite doubles as a hotel room for at least a couple of company employees
- Intimacy that isn't possible on the show floor
- Ability to control time and space; set up custom demos for each visitor

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IF YOU'RE
SIMPLY
CRUISING
THE FLOOR
LOOKING TO
SELL YOUR
PRODUCTS OR
SERVICES TO
THE
EXHIBITORS,
THAT'S A NO-
NO.

Speak Up!

Almost all tradeshows have break-out sessions, education and training sessions and keynotes. All of these sessions, which can number by the score, need speakers and trainers. If you or someone in your company is experienced at speaking this is an effective way to create more exposure for your company.

Large tradeshows may be the hardest ones to crack, so to begin it might be a good idea to target the small to medium-sized regional shows. Start by checking out the show website, finding out what kinds of sessions they've held in the past. That will give you an idea of what they're aiming for at the next show.

Many shows also have panel discussions, which is a good way to get started in speaking at conferences

Get in the Mix

As an attendee you have a ticket to the tradeshow floor. Which gives you access to virtually every one on the floor. How good are your networking skills?

If you're a salesperson looking for new business on the show floor, it doesn't hurt to stop, talk, ask questions, take notes – and offer your services if the question comes up. Indeed, a lot of business is done this way. Of course, if you're simply cruising the floor looking to sell your products or services to the exhibitors, that's a no-no. The exhibitors paid (dearly) for their space and not only would they resent someone trying to sell to them, the show rules no doubt expressly forbid that type of sales activity.

On the other hand, if you're discussing the exhibitors' products and services, asking probing ques-

Bottom Line

You don't have to be an exhibitor to benefit from tradeshows. Be creative. Be frugal. Set up a laptop with a Twitter account. Offer free demos to visitors in the lobby of the hotel you're staying in. Other companies have successfully done things just like this. All it takes is the willingness to work a little harder, think a little smarter, travel a bit – and you can find a large, targeted market – just by visiting a tradeshow, and without setting up a booth.

without having to carry the weight of being the only speaker – which can be quite a challenge if you're not an experienced speaker. You may know the material frontwards and backwards, but public speaking is not something to take lightly. It's a learned skill which takes time to develop. Some people are natural at it and others dread it.

Every show takes a slightly different approach to compensating their speakers, from trading exhibit space to covering travel expenses to ponying up the big bucks for big name speakers.



tions, making friends, collecting contact information, taking notes on the needs of the exhibitors, keeping your visit short, and are sincerely looking for a way to help them, you can easily follow up the show a week later with a phone call. This is a good way to network at a tradeshow.

Ask people how to connect with them on their blog, on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. By making a social media connection, you're now a part of their online world. Back in the office, you now have a much easier way to make contact. Keep it light, offer good value, share interesting online links – and slowly build a relationship. If either of you recognize a need that you can fill, you can easily transition into a service-oriented salesperson.

Sure, as tradeshow builders and designers, we feel that there are tremendous benefits to exhibiting at the shows. But if that's simply not in your budget this year, look for other ways to drum up business. If you're successful, perhaps next year you'll be knocking on our door to purchase your first booth!

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