

**T R A D E
S H O W
S U C C E S S**

**More Visitors
More Leads
More Sales**

By BROCK HENDERSON

Here is one of your best opportunities to come face-to-face with existing and potential customers. Trade shows can be very effective, or of little use; it all depends on how you run your booth. Most companies simply do not make maximum use of the trade show opportunity.

A trade show is not a singular event where you set up a display. It is a microcosm of the entire marketing process. Part of an intricate, coordinated effort that begins weeks before the show, and ends a couple of weeks after the show. It involves direct mail, advertising specialties, print ads, and telemarketing—plus the booth itself, including how the individuals working the booth conduct themselves.

There are three distinct phases: Pre-show marketing, At the show marketing, and Post-show marketing.

PHASE I: PRE-SHOW MARKETING

1. Most shows of any size put out a special edition trade magazine for the show, purchase at least a 1/4 page ad so you will be easily seen. In addition to the name of your company give your booth number and location.
2. Four to six weeks before the show, send a letter to every conceivable attendee inviting them to stop by your booth and see what you have to offer. In the letter include some sort of ad specialty. The best gimmick I have heard of is a company that sent out a work glove—the left hand—and told the recipient that to receive the mate—the right hand—they needed to stop by their booth and pick it up. You could also have a scratch-off game card for them to bring by the booth to see what prize they may have won.
3. About 10 days before the show, identify the top companies or individuals you want to talk to and personally call each one and invite them to stop by and introduce themselves. This personal touch adds a lot, and leaves a very positive impression on the prospect.

PHASE II: AT THE SHOW

1. Have an attractive booth area with lots of eye-appeal. Visually draw them into your booth. They won't stop if you blend in with everyone else and they can't see you.
2. Have a drawing offering some appropriate and nice prize. It could be luggage, or free product, or something else of value that would be appreciated by the typical attendee. To regis-

ter to win all they need do is drop a business card into a bowl or box; you now have an instant data base of at least some of the attendees.

- A. Hand out an ad specialty with your company name imprinted on it, or possibly even product information. For example a their presentation.
- B. No food or drink in the booth for the workers, attendees may of course bring in anything they want.
- C. Workers should get the business card of every individual they talk with, and make notes about the individual and their needs on the back of the card, or on a note card that is stapled to the attendees business card.
- D. When not talking with a specific attendee, workers should be smiling and greeting passing attendees, not engaged in conversation between themselves. (When the workers look occupied in any fashion—food, drink, conversation, etc.—attendees will NOT interrupt them and walk past the booth. And you have lost, possibly forever, a potential sale.)

5. Keep the booth area accessible, allowing attendees to come into the display area. By having a booth with a table on the aisle you are encouraging people to simply walk by picking up literature as they go. By keeping the area open it draws attendees in and gets them to stop. That way you can answer questions, provide information, and maybe even close a sale, or at least set the stage for setting an appointment or providing a proposal.

PHASE III: POST-SHOW MARKETING

All of the following steps must be taken immediately after the show is over, don't allow more than 10 work days to pass between the end of the show and these last contact opportunities.

1. To every attendee that dropped off a card to register for your free prize, send a thank-you note with the winner's name and company.
2. Send the winner their prize along with a letter of congratulations and your appreciation for stopping by your booth.

3. To every individual that you talked with, (getting their business card and taking notes), send a follow-up letter. Summarize what was talked about and keep the door open for future communication and business.
4. Consider sending each attendee you talked with a modest, but nice gift. Either a pen, folder, or something else that you personalize with the attendees name. This will have substantial added impact and create a great deal of goodwill towards you and your company.
5. Put everyone's information into your data base and start sending them you company newsletter. (Don't have a company newsletter? Then start one! An electronic newsletter, (or e-zine), is one of the least expensive marketing tools available. A simple monthly newsletter sent via e-mail will keep you, your company and your products in a prominent position in your customer's mind. These publications are an excellent way to announce new products, new services, and company news to your prospects and customers

By doing all this you have hit the individual with your name at least 12 times:

Pre-show letter

Ad specialty in pre-show letter

Personal telephone call

Ad in trade show magazine

Booth display

Literature taken with them

Ad specialty given at show

Talked with them at show

Thank you card announcing winner of drawing

Personalized thank-you letter

Follow-up gift

Your monthly newsletter

Twelve exposures of your company in about a two month time frame. Even more than that if they walked by your booth more than once, or read you literature.

WHAT TO HAVE AT YOUR BOOTH

Especially if the show lasts more than one day here are some excellent items to have at your booth for use by your staff and the attendees.

1. Phone—even though it seems like every individual over the age of 10 has their own cell phone, having a land line is important. All too often large venue locations have so much steel and electrical cables that reception can be spotty or even non-existent. The land line eliminates the interference problem, and allows you to easily call the home office to check for messages, confirm orders, and resolve customer issues.
2. Computer, printer/scanner—These are especially useful if you are making sales at the trade show and are using a computer to write/send the customers order. Computers also allow you to prepare and print quotes right on the floor so decision makers can have a hard copy of exactly what you are proposing.
3. All the other essentials—Order forms, referral forms, blank paper, letterhead stationary, pens/pencils, business cards, paperclips, stapler, staple puller, rubber bands, scotch tape, duct tape, ruler, scissors, and aspirin. (I'm not kidding, you can't make a good presentation if your head is throbbing.)

BOOTH LOCATION

The earlier you can commit to doing a trade show, the better the location you can select. Here, in no particular order, are the best locations for a booth:

Close to the bathrooms

Close to the refreshments

Close to (at) the entrance/exit

These locations are important because they force attendees to pass your booth a number of times, not just once. The extra name exposure and opportunity to meet could be the difference between an order and nothing.

The worst location is anyplace outside the main room. Frequently when a trade show has a large number of exhibitors, the last to sign on end up in the show annex. If the annex is easily accessible and will receive a high degree of turnout. Odds are you won't be that lucky.

If you know in time that you are going to be stuck in the annex, you must beef up your pre-show marketing. Send a map of the exhibit hall to the attendees with clear directions on getting from the entrance to your far away booth. Give verbal directions when you telephone

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VENUE CONTRACTS

There are some things to be aware of when signing a contract for exhibit space in a trade show. In particular, what are you getting for the base fee and what charges are going to be added to that base fee.

Every show will be different, but generally for your base charge you can expect to receive: one or two chairs, one trash can, one table, skirt or bunting for the table, and a simple sign with your company name neatly printed on it.

Some venues will charge for the following and some will not: electrical outlets, telephone line to booth, (though not phone hook-up or long distance charges), storage, internet access, and some will provide portage of your supplies into and out of the exhibit hall, though this is rare.

In larger facilities in large cities, portage charges can be inescapable. Even if you are just rolling in a box of literature and a small pop-up display, you may be billed for portage in, assembly, and portage out ... even if you do it all yourself. If you request electricity at your booth site, you may end up paying an electrician a minimum fee just to hook up an extension cord. All of this financial pain in the pocketbook is because some unions have exceptionally tight contracts with exhibit halls, and you have to pay for it. Period.

I helped a client one time where the contract stated that the booth must be vacuumed daily, and in another part of the contract it said that vacuuming must be done by a union member. The exhibitor paid the union two \$50 payments for two days of vacuuming a 10' x 10' space.

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When dealing with individual consumers, it is not practical to do the high degree of pre-show marketing that I recommend, but you should always follow the rest of the marketing suggestions. Pay particular attention to employee behavior in the booth, if your employees appear to be “busily” engaged in talking with each other, drinking, eating, sitting, sleeping (yes, I’ve seen that), reading or some similar activity, the general public will not want to bother that “busy” representative. They will simply walk past your booth, and you have lost an opportunity forever.

In a nutshell here are the two most common mistakes that will guarantee people won’t stop at your booth:

- Table on aisle, keeping foot traffic outside the booth area.
- Representative doing anything that inhibits eye contact with attendees, (sitting down, reading, talking with anyone, eating, and drinking), anything that implies “I’m busy”.

You exhibit at a trade show for one of two reason; either to make sales, or to make contacts that will lead to sales. If you aren’t going to do a trade show booth to the best of your ability why do it at all?

Now, go have a great show.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brock Henderson has spent most of his life in sales and marketing helping businesses succeed.

He has taught sales, marketing, and related business courses at the college level for six years; written extensively about marketing issues for various industries; and given numerous presentations and training courses to individuals and businesses.

He is an expert in successful trade show marketing, and offers an insightful sales training program to improve every salesperson's sales ability regardless of their current level of expertise.



**Contact Brock now for assistance with your next trade show,
or to help with any of your marketing needs.**

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