



Trade fairs provide suppliers and decision-makers with networking opportunities

Planning for a successful trade show

Trade fairs and exhibitions are among the best ways of promoting your brand and generating new and repeat sales for your company. Marie Feliciano reports

Signing up for a trade fair is no joke. It is expensive, time-consuming and requires considerable preparation. An international exhibition, however, can do wonders for your business if you do it right. Here are some tips that can help you make your trade show a success:

Choose the right show

"There are thousands of shows held worldwide every year, but choosing the right one for your organisation needs some research," says Susan Friedmann, a US-based 'how to' coach specialising in the trade show industry. Friedmann, who works with organisations who want to boost their exhibiting results by attracting new business at trade shows, is also the

author of 13 books including *Riches in Niches: Making it Big in a Small Market*.

According to Friedmann, companies can take their pick from the following shows:

- ◆ International shows – major events within a specific industry that attract exhibitors and attendees from all corners of the globe.
- ◆ National shows – primarily targeted at buyers and sellers in a specialised industry and



Trade show coach Susan Friedmann

promoted to attract visitors nationwide.

- ◆ Regional shows – organised in a particular area of the country and attract visitors from a 100 to 200-mile radius.
- ◆ Local shows – drawing attendees from the immediate vicinity and often open to the trade and the general public. These attract many local attendees.

"Choosing the right show for your purposes requires some serious thought. Whenever possible, visit the show first before making a decision to invest. You can then determine first-hand whether it's right for you," says Friedmann.

Know your objectives

To make exhibitions a powerful dimension of a company's overall marketing operation, management must make sure that total alignment exists between the strategic marketing and the company's exhibit marketing plan.

According to Friedmann, exhibitions should not be a stand-alone venture, but rather a key component of a company's marketing communications mix, designed to contribute to specific goals for both the long- and short-term objectives.

"The goal of strategic planning is to identify target markets that can be reached through exhibition marketing, long-range objectives for reaching those markets and defining a communications message for those markets," she says.

Before participating in an exhibition, companies need to ask themselves these five questions:

- ◆ Where do exhibitions fit into your marketing strategy?
- ◆ Why is your company exhibiting?
- ◆ What does your company want to exhibit?
- ◆ Who is your target market?
- ◆ What is your exhibiting budget?

Friedmann underscores the importance of participating in trade fairs and exhibitions in spite of tough economic conditions.

"It's important to remember that even though economic circumstances may change, organisational buying patterns – and the people who make up the organisations – do not," she says.

"The paramount aspect of most purchasing decisions remains the relationship between buyer and supplier. Trade shows remain amongst the best methods to begin and cultivate those relationships."

Some organisations may pull out of trade shows during an economic downturn. They may save money in the short term, but the consequences could be enormous, she continues.

"Companies that opt out leave existing relationships wide open for the competition – to say nothing of the lost potential of relationships you never got to start," says the trade show coach.

"Plus, trying to get back in the game once the economic situation recovers will cost a company far more as they will need to start their marketing and brand awareness all over again. Customers certainly don't appreciate this approach."

Blow your own horn

Exhibitors can generate some pre-show buzz and anticipation by communicating with the people they want to invite to come and visit their exhibit, Friedmann says.

TOP 10 QUESTIONS

Before signing up for a show, ask the following questions that help match the type of show with your company's exhibiting goals and objectives:

- ◆ How well does this show fit our marketing needs?
- ◆ How convenient are the show dates?
- ◆ What other events are scheduled on those dates?
- ◆ How convenient is the show location?
- ◆ What percentage of attendees falls into your company's target market?
- ◆ What percentage of attendees comes from your company's major service areas?
- ◆ What does show management do to promote the show?
- ◆ What is the show's past success rate?
- ◆ Which of your company's competitors also exhibit at this show?
- ◆ What return on investment can your company expect from the show?

Source: www.thetradeshowcoach.com



Exhibitors at the Arabian Travel Market 2009 use eye-catching signage to attract fair-goers

To generate traffic to their exhibit and create name and brand awareness, trade show participants should consider using the following marketing tools:

- ◆ Personal invitations,
- ◆ Telemarketing,
- ◆ Direct mail,
- ◆ Advertising,
- ◆ Public relations, and
- ◆ Internet (using social media and company websites).

Sponsorship

Studies have revealed that pre-show promotions raise the quality of booth visitors and increase the exhibitor's chances of securing qualified leads. Ask the show's organisers for a mailing list of attendees and send an announcement of your booth number, show hours and company and product information. When contacting potential clients prior to the show, always give them a compelling reason to stop at your booth.

Shine at the show

Make sure that your booth does not disappear in a sea of displays and signage. Your signage should be highly visible, easy to read and professional looking. Some companies with deep pockets are even willing to go the whole nine yards, building pavilions and staging

performances and lucky draws to attract fair-goers. Those who are on a tight budget should invest on their company's signage. Keep it sharp, vivid and eye-catching.

In addition to meeting the corporate objective, exhibits designed for international markets must also be appropriate for the local environment, as well as accommodate the values, cultures, and expectations of the international audience attending the trade fair, says Sandy Flom, CEO of US-based Extraordinary Show Productions Ltd (www.espexhibits.com).

"Be aware of the meaning of colour. In China, red signifies good fortune but white signifies mourning. Exhibit design and colours used must be appropriate for the market and the culture," Flom says.

Capture leads

Booth promotions such as lucky draws are an effective way of capturing sales leads. You may request show attendees to fill out ballots or simply put their business cards in a drop box.

Post-trade show follow-up

Follow up immediately after the show. Capitalise on the leads you have gathered at the trade fair by sending those prospects a more detailed product offering that is tailor-made to their preferences. Call every lead contacted at the exhibition.

Evaluate results

Once a trade fair wraps up, you have to evaluate how well it has met your objectives. How much repeat and new business has the show generated for the company? By analysing the show's results, you will be able to determine if a trade fair is worthwhile doing again.

For more exhibition tips, visit trade show coach Susan Friedmann's websites at (www.thetradeshowcoach.com and www.richesinniches.com). ■



Secrets of successful meeting planners



Arabian Travel Market 2009

Planning meetings and events is far from easy, but it can also be fun, exciting, exhilarating, stimulating rather than boring. Here are eight tips that can help meeting planners enhance the great job they are already doing.

1. Planning and organising

The most common reason shows go wrong lies in the simple fact that not enough time is devoted to adequate planning and preparation. Many of those shows that are believed to have been successful, are often so more by chance than through actual organisation. Successful meeting planners have both a strategic and tactical plan of action. They then use the following five basic questions as their foundation before making any arrangements:

- ◆ Where does this meeting fit into our corporate marketing strategy?
- ◆ Why are we meeting?
- ◆ What is the purpose of the meeting?
- ◆ Who should attend the meeting?
- ◆ What is our budget?

2. Taking care of details

So much of putting a meeting together means taking care of the details, and there are usually more of these than you care to think about. Being detail-oriented is a definite plus. The key to so much of a meeting planner's success is having a system that works. With the hundreds of pieces that make up the meeting puzzle, the only way to put them together and keep tabs on all the details is with a checklist.

3. Practicing savvy marketing

Supersuccessful meeting planners know the importance of developing a meaningful theme or message that ties into their strategic marketing plan, and that will guide their promotional decisions. They know and understand their target audience and plan different promotional programs aimed at the different groups they are interested in attracting.

4. Being a team player

Good meeting planners know exactly how to work together as a team, helping each other out whenever and wherever necessary. They help everyone get acquainted, develop a level of trust, and familiarise themselves with and understand each other's strengths. They know what it takes to create an environment of camaraderie where the staff, as a whole, pull out all the stops to succeed and set themselves apart from the competition.



GITEX Technology Week

5. Knowing how to manage time

Leading meeting planners have mastered the art of managing their time. They are well organised and have essential information at their fingertips, which means that their work environment is orderly and efficient. They know their priorities, do not over-commit themselves, and can differentiate between important and urgent tasks. They are superb delegators and are not afraid to ask for help whenever they need it. And, finally, they do not procrastinate; on the contrary, they practice the 'do it now' habit.

6. Negotiating skilfully

Skilful and savvy negotiators know exactly what they want. They spend time doing their research so that they know as much as possible about their opponent. They are prepared with strategies and tactics, questions and possible concessions. They are masters at finding alternative ways of talking about, reacting to and solving problems. They use their talents of intuition, flexibility and concern for others to reach an agreement where both sides win. They look to create a feeling of cooperation to build a mutually beneficial working environment.

7. Applying a positive attitude

Research successful people and you will find that having a positive, can-do attitude ranks high on their list of characteristics. Not only are they positive and upbeat, they surround themselves with naturally positive and successful people. Give it a try and see if their attitude rubs off on you. When you focus on what you can do versus what you cannot do, expect to find solutions to your various challenges.

8. Evaluating results

Any master continuously looks to improve on their performance and a professional meeting planner is no different. Create a system to evaluate your results. Ask your participants for their feedback. Find out what they liked about your event and what they would like to see improved in the future. In addition, ask yourself what you thought went well and what you would do differently if you had to organise this event again. Chronicle all your data and keep accurate records so that you can refer to them the next time around. ■

Source: www.thetradeshowcoach.com



Making waves at trade shows

Signing up for an exhibition is easy but companies need to generate some pre-show buzz to raise their success rate at the show, reports Marie Feliciano

What should exhibitors do to win valuable contracts, win repeat clients and snag potential customers at an exhibition?

They need a well-defined promotional plan.

A significant part of an exhibitor's marketing campaign includes promotion – pre-show, at-show and post-show, US-based trade show coach Susan Friedmann says.

Most exhibitors unfortunately fail to have a plan that encompasses all three areas. Budget is naturally going to play a major role in deciding what and how much promotional activity is possible.

The key to a successful pre-show promotion is targeting those people who you really want to actively walk into your exhibit, find out more about you, and do business with you. The best pre-show promotions are multiple, distinct programs aimed at various target visitors.

Here are three basic questions you need to ask to develop a high-impact promotional programme:

- ◆ How can you create a programme that provides memorability for your company, your corporate message, and your products/services?
- ◆ What strategies will produce successful measurable results?
- ◆ How best can you allocate your budget? It is important to realise that it is not what you spend but how you spend it that is critical.

The three things you want to achieve with your promotion:

- ◆ Attract quality prospects into your exhibit.
- ◆ Engage visitors in interesting activities that encourage interpersonal interaction.
- ◆ Enhance positive memorability for your products, services and messages.

"The key ingredient to the success of your promotional programme is understanding what your audience is looking for. Just like retail, the number one reason customers go into a store is because that store is selling something they want to buy," Friedmann says. ■

TRADE SHOW TACTICS FOR PORTABLE DISPLAYS

- ◆ Make the company name and/or name of a recognised product highly visible.
- ◆ Use large colourful graphics for maximum visual impact.
- ◆ Light products and graphics to significantly increase awareness.
- ◆ Invest in a display system that gives you a professional look.
- ◆ Theme your display based on the venue or time of year. Themes always grab attention and usually make people smile.
- ◆ Don't clutter or create barriers to your display with too much product, literature, or too many giveaways. Don't put a table at the front of the booth space and stand behind it – it's a barrier that says 'don't come in.' Make your display area open and inviting.
- ◆ Make eye contact, smile, stand and look like you're interested in and proud of your company and products. Don't sit and read a book or sit with crossed arms and watch people walk by. These actions send the message that you aren't interested and they aren't welcome in your booth space.
- ◆ Save money and add value to your brochures, giveaways, and samples by saving them for those genuinely interested in your product or service. Everybody loves free stuff but if you lay it out for people to simply grab and walk away – they won't remember you or your company.

Source: Sandy Flom, Chief Executive Officer, Extraordinary Show Productions Ltd www.espexhibits.com