

How To Exhibit

Maximising the power of exhibitions and making them work for you!

Simplicity itself

Even a company that knows nothing about exhibiting would find it difficult to come away from a busy show without generating new business. After all, the business comes to you.

But there are a few simple principles that any company can use to multiply the value of every exhibition they participate in.

Preparing the Ground

What to do before the show

Set specific goals

Do you want to generate 200 sales leads?

Launch your new product to customers, prospects and the media?

The tighter the goals, the better your chances of achieving them.

How about meeting at least 25 qualified new prospects? Or finding three new dealers? Or handing out 500 samples?

Exhibitions are incredibly versatile, but you need to focus on your most important goals.

Want to demonstrate your product to 25 top buyers? Make 20 new appointments?

Establishing specific, measurable goals is probably the single most important thing you can do before every exhibition.

Plan the stand to meet the goals

Your stand location, design and activities should reflect what you hope to achieve. Even if you have a company exhibition stand in storage, think how you can tailor it to a specific audience.

The number of staff manning the stand and the mix of disciplines should also be goal-driven. Do you need technical staff to explain things in detail? Top managers to meet blue-chip decision-makers? Energetic extroverts for maximum smiling and sampling?

Let your goals be your guide. Tell people why they should visit you

The simplest and most obvious tactic of all is also, amazingly, the least practiced: tell the world what you're up to!

Research has shown that **83% of the most successful companies** at a range of exhibitions (in terms of business generated and leads collected) were ones that took the trouble to **contact their prospects and customers** before the show. [Source: CEIR]

Make the most of pre-show PR and advertising

You can mail your own lists, buy in a list or mail to the event's list of pre-registrants (organisers often make theirs available). It's common sense: tell people what you'll be doing at the show and why they should take the time to visit you. Stress the benefits. Add some intrigue. Have a bit of fun. But never skip this vital step.

Ask the show organiser to tell you which media are doing show previews (many summarise this in the Exhibitor Manual). Get the editors' names and addresses. Make the most of the deadlines and start spreading the news. Again, benefits are king. And photos help. You may also want to run your own ads in Preview issues, with a 'See us on Stand 20' flag (the organiser will provide the show logo).

Don't forget sponsorship opportunities

Sponsorship can be an extremely cost effective way to jump out of the pack at your next exhibition. There is usually a list of off-the shelf packages available at most budget levels. But some of the best sponsorships are often bespoke programmes designed by the organizer and exhibitor sitting down together and brainstorming.

Talk to the organiser. Tell them your goals and your budget the only limit is your imagination.

Train your show staff

The first rule of exhibitions is 'The people make the stand'. Make sure yours are well trained for the job. Selling at an exhibition is different from selling in a one-to-one sales call. Your stand staff need to understand the goals of the stand and each member's specific role in achieving them.

Use the web

Many shows have web sites to promote the event and register visitors. If you've got a website, it's a great place to promote your presence at the show. Find out if the show site can provide a link to yours.

Lights, Camera, Action! - What to do at the show

The day has arrived. You've done the groundwork. Your goals are clear. Your people are trained. The doors to the exhibition fly open and the visitors start streaming in. This is where the rubber meets the road...

Brief your stand staff each day

The people on your stand make the difference between a good event and a great event. A highly motivated, well informed team does more than any other factor to differentiate you from the other stands and make an impact on your market. Daily briefings are a must. Remind everyone of your goals, your key messages and the role of each team member. Report on your progress towards your goals. Make adjustments if necessary. Announce the winner of your lead-generating competition. Most importantly, keep the energy up and the attitudes positive.

Spend the optimum amount of time with visitors

The key to success is to find the right people and spend the right amount of time with them - not too much (there are lots more to meet) and not too little (you need to get that lead or appointment). Again, the optimum time per visitor will depend on your goals. But make sure you've planned a system that matches your needs.

Speak fluent body language

We've all seen them. The crossed-arms-and-frowns brigade. The newspaper readers. The quick lunch eaters with their backs to the aisle. The staff who are so busy chatting with each other they ignore the visitors on their stand. Try this. Divide the total cost of your participation in the exhibition by the number of minutes it's open. Then remind yourself and your staff how much every minute is worth. Smiles, eye contact, open questions ... it may be common sense but it's not common practice!

Focus on your targets

Chances are, your key prospects are a subset of the total audience at the show. Decide who your key targets are and brief your team to focus on them. Set your goals accordingly (not just '100 leads' but '75 production directors or senior managers').

Collect lead information

High or low tech - collecting business cards from the pre-screened prospects is easy, but consider light pens for capturing even more data about your visitor, plus it's quicker than data-capturing business cards.

Leads: It's all about quality!

The best exhibitors don't just measure the number of leads generated, they measure lead quality as well. One lead classification system grades every lead this way, making sure the hottest leads get the attention first:

A Large order, ready to buy

B Small order, ready to buy OR large order, longer time frame

C Small order, longer time frame

D Send literature or add name to database

E Other eg. Press, salesman

The more information you can obtain about your potential customer, the better focused your post-show activity can be.

Earn media coverage

Invite key journalists to visit your stand - or visit theirs. Keep a good supply of bright, well-presented literature in the Show Press Office (too many exhibitors let this resource go untapped!). Work with the show organiser to steer the right journalists your way. And make sure your story is ready when they arrive.

Keep it all business

Lots of comfy furniture encourages people to drop in and stay on your stand. Do you really want that? Current customers might expect to monopolise your time. Unless they're your main reason for attending, try to set aside specific times for customers, ideally in a hospitality area on or off the stand. Networking and social contacts are part of the appeal of an exhibition, but you'll want to keep it under control.

“Exhibitions are an important part of our marketing mix - and the only part that lets us demonstrate our lift trucks to potential customers. We also use exhibitions as a platform for generating coverage in the major trade magazines.

Bob Helbert, Lansing Linde

Reap the Rewards

What to do after the show and measuring its success

The visitors have all gone home. The stands are being taken down. Now is the time to follow through all of the new opportunities you've generated. Here's where some companies squander the benefits they've worked so hard to achieve while others capitalise on them and turn them into profits.

De-brief the team

When you get back to the office, sit down with the stand staff and key managers. Do an honest assessment of what worked and what didn't. Elicit suggestions for improving performance for future events. Your staff's insights are a valuable asset, especially while their impressions are still fresh.

Measure your results

Remember your specific, measurable goals? Now is the time to measure your success against them. If you exceeded your goals, try to determine why, so you can replicate that success at the next show. If you fell short, figure out what you could do better. The following section in this guide provides a framework for developing your own approach to exhibition measurement.

Track the leads

Don't just evaluate your results immediately after the event. Many companies do written lead-tracking reports three, six and even nine months after a major exhibition to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line. Only then can you truly determine the value of the exhibition for your company.

Follow up all contacts

Every visitor to your stand should receive a timely follow up. The degree of follow-up will depend on the classification of the contact, ranging from a simple thank you letter to a sales visit, phone call or information pack.

To your prospects, the days and weeks following the exhibition make it clear who most wants their business and who may not be ready to handle it. Don't blow it now!

Send a mailing to all show visitors

You may not be able to meet every visitor, but you can contact them. Most organisers make the visitor lists available in their entirety (often free, sometimes for a one-time rental fee). A quick 'Sorry we missed you but did you know...' can mop up quite a few new leads.

Follow through on all press releases

Call all the editors you mailed your press releases to or who visited you on your stand. Ask if there's any more information they might need. Tell them of your successes at the show. A timely phone call now could mean a solid mention in a post show review read by thousands.

Reserve a place for next year!

If you've met or exceeded your goals, now is the time to lock in a prime location at the next event. Visit the Show Sales Office, or make sure you see a floor plan so you can reserve your stand early.

Write a final report

Summarise the results achieved against the goals you set. Share the report with key managers from sales, marketing and top management. By the time next year's show comes up, you should all have a pretty complete idea of the value of your participation.

"Exhibitions help us generate a significant amount of new business, raise our profile and educate the market about the breadth of services we offer. It's all about targeted versatility." Pippa Mallinson, OCS Group

The Measure of Success

Helping you measure your exhibition activities Every exhibition is different for every exhibitor. No single measurement tool will work for everyone 'off-the-shelf'. Instead, each company needs to develop a simple measurement methodology that's appropriate to its needs and goals.

This section provides a framework for developing your own approach to exhibition measurement. Try it. Use it. We think you will be surprised at how easy it is - and how much exhibitions already do for you that you may not even realize! We're convinced that the more marketers measure their exhibition results - and compare them to those of other media - the more they'll use exhibitions.

Why measure?

There are four reasons for measuring the results of every exhibition you attend: To justify your investment - Every item in your marketing budget needs to show a return on investment. Measuring gives you the facts you need to get the marketing mix right.

To encourage goal-driven activities - What gets measured gets done. If you want to see your team focused on results, tell them what results you mean - and show them you're measuring!

Put it this way, it's easy to see why measuring your exhibition results is not just important, it's essential. Marketing may be a science, but it's rarely a perfect science. Every time you evaluate an exhibition, you're actually measuring many things at the same time, including the show itself, the market climate and your competitors' activities.

It's dangerous to jump to a conclusion about an event based on only one experience. You might conclude that an event was wrong for your company when actually it was a competitor's special promotion that rained on your parade. Similarly, you might think your pre-show mailing was a major success when it may have been due to the show audience doubling.

The key is to capture your learning so that you can improve your plans over time.

Quantifiable goals driven action

As we have seen in the 'Preparing the Ground' section, the best goals are quantified. Even when it comes to more qualitative goals, it's usually possible to find a way to measure success and build that metric into the goal itself.

So instead of stating the goal as, 'To earn media coverage', you might say, 'To earn five articles or product reviews in the top three trade titles over the next two months'. You can see how much easier it would be to measure your performance against this goal when it is stated in a measurable way.

Make your goal list comprehensive

As you can see, exhibitions can help you achieve a huge variety of goals. But to make the most of each show, you need to list your goals to reflect this.

Don't just stop at sales-lead targets. Try to capture all of the value you can get from your exhibition activities by listing (and pursuing) as many goals as apply. That's how you maximize return on investment - and how you give each exhibition the credit it's due when it comes to evaluate and set budgets.

When to start goal-setting

If you've recorded your results from past shows, setting goals for an upcoming event will be much easier.

You can also talk with other exhibitors who target similar people to find out what kind of results they've achieved. In the absence of any input, just wing it! You've got to start some-where. Your first goal-setting exercise might not be accurate, but if you take the trouble to capture your learning, you'll get better every time you exhibit.

Twenty-one goals! Here are twenty-one specific goals that exhibitions can help you achieve:

Sales

- Generate sales leads
- Make direct sales
- Build a contact database

Customer Relationship

- Build relationships with current customers
- Educate customers
- Up sell and cross-sell customers
- Collect customer testimonials
- Re-sell lapsed customers

Market Research

- Market test a new product
- Research your marketing campaign
- Test market awareness and perceptions

Brand Building

- Create or raise market awareness
- Position or re-position your brand
- Educate by demonstrating
- Boost financial analyst/investor perceptions
- Develop new markets

Channel Support

- Identify and recruit new distributors or partners
- Support your sales channels
- Build your reputation as a partner

Media Relations

- Get on the 'media radar'/generate coverage
- Build relationships with key editors and journalists

Eye to Eye Marketing

Don't let anything get between you and your prospects. When it comes to the total quality of marketing interaction, nothing holds a candle to exhibitions. Ever see one of your print ads turn a hardened sceptic into an evangelist? Ever see a radio spot absorb an objection and turn it into a sale?

'You never have a better chance of getting your message across than at an exhibition. All those months of running ads and sending mailings and, suddenly, there in front of you is the customer and at last marketing has a human dimension.' Arnold Vink, Head of Marketing, Xerox International Systems

Concentrated Marketing Meet a self-selected core of buyers

Think about your hottest prospects. What is their most valuable commodity? Their time. That's why, in business-to-business markets, it can be so hard for your sales team to get in to see them. And in consumer markets, the visitors are spending their leisure time, which is arguably even more precious.

Given the value of their time, what does it say about a prospect who invests a day to visit an exhibition? It says they're motivated. It says they have a reason to be there. It says they're serious buyers in active buying mode.

This is the power of exhibitions: no other medium concentrates your efforts on the most active buyers in your markets at any given time.

Decision-makers Prefer Trade Shows 'Extremely useful source of purchasing information':

91% Trade shows

88% Article in trade publications

86% Friends or business associates

70% Manufacturers reps

70% Ads in trade publications

[Source: Simmons Market Research, provided by the Centre for Exhibition Industry Research, USA]

Versatile Marketing

Whatever your goals, exhibitions can take you there Because they represent the marketplace in one place and time bringing together suppliers, buyers, purchase influencers, consultants and the media - exhibitions are an incredibly versatile marketing medium.

If you want to launch new products, generate media coverage, build brand awareness, generate leads and retain existing customers, exhibitions let you do it all in one bold stroke.

Maybe we should call them 'Flexhibitions'

Exhibitions are effective for:

- Personal selling to potential buyers
- Building prospect databases
- Building relationships with existing customers
- Seeking new customers
- Educating the market
- Generating sales leads
- Demonstrating products or services
- Generating media awareness
- Building brand awareness
- Launching new products
- Positioning company as market leader

Cost Effective Marketing - Exhibitions deliver measurable value

The days of using exhibitions as 'flag waving exercises' are long gone. Today's best marketers expect exhibitions to deliver a significant return on investment - in measurable terms, including cost per lead and cost per sale. Many even track the value of each exhibition over three, six and twelve months (after all, a single news customer can represent huge lifetime value to your company).

80% of trade shows visitors are personally involved in buying the products or services on show. And 29% never see sales reps other than at exhibitions! [Source: aeo Exhibition Effectiveness Research, Multi-show study 1999]

'On top of generating sales leads, attending exhibitions provides a focal point for a range of marketing activities, including advertising, PR, telemarketing and web promotion.' Zoe Allan, JBA

'Intimate contact with travel agents and consumers is what it's all about. We use shows to stamp an image of our destination into people's minds. Exhibitions help us generate visits to the Bahamas. That's the measure of our success.' Tommy Thompson, Bahamas Tourist Board

Intelligent Marketing - Exhibitions make sense

As a marketer, you've never had so many marketing media to choose from. Some may boast 'interactivity' - but what is more interactive than a conversation between people?

Others may claim to be 'direct' - but can you get any more direct than face-to-face? Still others focus on targeting - but none can put you in front of a self-selected audience of active buyers.

No one would say that exhibitions should be the only medium in your marketing plan. But many would agree that exhibitions are the pinnacle of the marketing pyramid - that they deliver completely what other media can only get you a step closer to: personal inter-action with real buyers.

'Is face-to-face marketing important':

87% Yes

10% No

Top marketers in virtually every industry have known it for years. The right exhibition is the only marketing medium that:

- brings your most active prospects and customers to you
- allows you to demonstrate products, answer questions, overcome objections and meet your market face-to-face
- harnesses all five senses to drive home your messages
- allows you to further virtually all of your marketing goals at the same time

The effective part of the marketing mix

It's true whether you sell industrial power plants or sticky puddings: the better you know your customer - and the better your customer knows you - the more likely you are to make that first sale and the increasingly profitable sales that follow.

If you had to design from the ground up a marketing medium that's perfectly suited to this kind of relationship building and customer retention, it would probably look remarkably like exhibitions, the most direct form of direct marketing ever.

Are you using the most powerful marketing medium...

...as much as you ought to be?

Help is only a phone call away there are two important resources that can help you make the most of your investment in exhibitions:

1 .Your show organiser - A too-often untapped source of ideas, hot tips and marketing opportunities. Talk to your organiser team about your company's goals and ambitions. They can help you achieve them.

Contact Elaine Vandelli Event Director 0116 240 2330