



Achieving Success at a Trade Show

Caribbean Export's Guide to Maximising Returns from Trade Show participation

Introduction

Trade Shows and international exhibitions are powerful tools that can help your company achieve strategic and long-term relationships resulting in increased earnings as well as building your brand. Trade Show participation allows growing companies to market products and services to a large specified group of potential customers. Each year, thousands of trade shows across the world offer opportunities for buyers and sellers to meet face-to-face with millions of dollars in business resulting. Trade show participation allows for the marketing of your product or service to a pre-selected audience while investigating the competition and building relationships with new customers.

With the right strategy, every trade show your company participates in is an opportunity to expand your company's customer base. Trade Show attendees tend to be motivated, interested in the products or services your company offers, and often ready to commit to a deal on the spot.

Some Trade Show Facts

1. 99% of marketers said they found unique value from trade show exhibits they did not get from other marketing mediums. Their 3 most valued aspects of trade shows were: 60% of exhibitors said they value the ability to see lots of prospects and customers at the same time; 51% of exhibitors said they value face-to-face meetings with prospects and customers, and 47% said they value the ability to meet with a variety of players face to face, such as customers, suppliers, re-sellers, etc.
Source: CEIR: The Changing Environment of Exhibitions
2. The average company allocates 31.6% of their total marketing budget to events and exhibiting, and more than \$24 billion dollars is spent annually by US Exhibitors for trade shows displays, yet 70% of these exhibitors set no specific objectives for the trade shows exhibits.
3. 81% of trade show display attendees have buying authority. Which means more than 4 out of 5 people walking the aisles are potential customers for exhibitors.
Source: CEIR: The Spend Decision: Analyzing How Exhibits Fit Into the Overall Marketing
4. The #1 reason for attending (not exhibiting) trade show displays is to see new products. 92% of trade show attendees say they are looking for new products. It has been the number one reason to attend for 25 years! So trade show exhibits are a great place to introduce or feature your newest products. Though just 13% of companies introduce their new products and services in trade shows.

While trade show participation has substantial benefits to companies, the costs associated with participation can be quite exorbitant.



Company's participating in trade shows must invest in features such as;

- Trade Show Display Solution, Graphics, Flooring, AV & Furniture and Accessories.
- Show Services: Material Handling, Electrical, IP Address, Lead Retrieval, Daily Cleaning & Plants
- Travel Expenses & Personnel
- Collateral & Giveaways

The industry average to purchase individual portable trade show displays is \$100-\$150 per square foot for larger displays. For example, 20x20 displays would cost between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

Therefore if trade show participation is a strategy your company wants to employ, you need to ensure that you are ready to make the investment and prepared to reap maximum rewards.

This guide will assist you in planning, executing and evaluating your trade show participation.

The guide is divided into three main areas;

1. Pre Show Planning
2. At Show Participation
3. Effective Follow-up



Pre Show Planning - Time Frame (6 months to one year prior to opening day)

I. Selecting the right show

“One of the biggest mistakes a company can make is to jump into an event without enough forethought,” - Douglas L. Ducate, President and CEO of Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR).

Goal: Assure the events you participate in deliver your **target** market.

- Do your homework on which trade shows your target clients attend
- Research the show to determine the event’s attendee demographics and psychographics. Most reputable shows have event brochures on their website that list this info. Check out pictures and read reviews. It’s better to participate in established shows with existing buyers.
- Check out the events section of your competitors’ websites to see which trade shows they are participating in.
- Compare the cost and benefit of participating in big, expensive horizontal industry trade shows vs. smaller, less expensive vertical or niche trade shows. Consider the disparity in the overall costs of exhibiting and your results from exhibiting at a trade show with 50,000 attendees where only 5,000 are your target market and a trade show of 5,000 where 2,500 are your target market. Know what you are spending, per person, to reach your target market.
- Research costs of flights and hotels as these are often expensive during show times.

II. Setting Objectives for Participation (one year before show)

Planning and goal setting is by far the most important element of your planning. Set specific and realistic goals for participating in the show

e.g.” I want to generate 200 leads, make 20 orders valued at US\$100,000” or “I want to launch my new product to 2000 attendees by giving out 5000 brochures and 5000 samples”

Based on these objectives you can answer the following questions

- How much booth space will we require?
- What is the profile of customers I want to target?
- How many prospects can we expect to see?
- How many salespeople will be staffing the booth?
- How many hours are in the Show?
- How many sales presentations can each person make in an hour?
- What percentage of these prospects should we close?

Spend your budget on those items that directly help you reach your goals for participation.



III. Plan The Content Of Your Exhibit including Booth Size (6-8 months before show)

Bigger is not always better – don't spend thousands of dollars on a large booth when a smaller, simpler booth will do just as well.

The right booth size depends upon your show budget, the product selection that you want to bring to the Show, your desired objectives, and the profile of buyers that you want to attract.

Key guidelines in selecting space requirements;

- The physical exhibit (products and displays) generally occupy approximately thirty percent of your available space.
- Ensure enough room for your sales force as well comfortable meeting spaces for buyers and visitors.
- Avoid congestion! Your exhibit should be open and inviting to the attendees, not cluttered and claustrophobic. Booth visitors tend to stay away from areas they perceive as crowded or confining.
- Do you need storage space for products?
- Do you need space for services such as kitchens?
- Map out your exhibit before committing to booth space

Exhibition Content

Custom Booth vs. Rental Booth

A custom booth is a one of a kind structure that belongs to your company. It can be used for future trade shows. It has your colors, your logo and your size requirements. Of course, custom booths are be very expensive.. Plan for it to be used for three to five years – which limits your flexibility if your company's messaging, logo, colors or other assets change.

Rental Booth is a cheaper option, gives you more flexibility to adapt your sizes, configuration and look and feel for a specific show. You're not tied to colors, messaging or logos. The drawback: you're limited on design, branding and the "custom" feel that sets you apart.

You have only a few seconds to get the buyers attention as he/she walks past your exhibition. To do this you need to ensure your booth immediately communicates;

- Your company name - Who you are?
- Your product/service - What you do?



- Your image and/or company slogan - How you can help them?

Use clear, strong, graphics and direct your message to your customers. You can use working products, hands-on demonstrations, audio-visuals, and other special effects, but everything should draw attention to your products and/or services.

Determine which product or product lines (whether new or existing) you want to be the feature of your exhibition. These products need to be on the frontline or in highly visible areas.

ALWAYS ENSURE THAT YOUR BOOTH DESIGN IS TARGETTED TO YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER AND COMPLEMENTS YOUR OBJECTIVE

If you are selecting a booth contractor on the ground here are some useful tips;

- Ensure that the contractor understands your needs and is on board with your objectives
- Check references and previous work to ensure they have the resources to undertake your design.
- Work with show management to ensure that booth codes are adhered to at all times
- Work out the details about booth build up, breakdown and support during the exhibition.
- A booth contractor that has long standing relationships with the show as well as the exhibit hall can save time and money as well as the stress of trying to manage the participation from a distance.

IV. Pre-show Marketing and Promotions (6 months before show)

Making the right contacts before the show improves your chances for success.

Pre-show promotion is a key tool in getting the word out about your participation at the Trade Show. Not only will you alert existing and prospective customers to be on the lookout for your exhibit ahead of time, but you will also establish yourself as a major player in the industry.

- Reach out to show attendees as well as pre-selected buyers to alert them of your presence at the show
 - Where possible, obtain a list of buyers attending the show
 - Contact the local chambers of commerce
 - Contact buyers directly based on in-market research
 - If the resources are available, contract an in-market consultant to assist with identifying buyers and opportunities.
- Prepare one page company brief and fact sheet and send out to buyer list
- Advertise your participation in the Home Show in all magazine and newspaper advertising appearing during the month before the Show. Also, advertise in Show supplements and directories.
- Become a sponsor of a special Show event and increase your on-site exposure. Investigate the availability of literature bags, aisle banners, you are here boards, etc.



- Alert your local media and Show Management about any new products/services that will be on display in your booth that might be newsworthy.
- **Make sure your company website and social media links are updated.**

V. Establish a budget (6 months before show)

Know your resources and use them effectively.

- Prepare an event budget, taking into account your goals and objectives. See downloads for a use template

Some budget tips

According to EXHIBITOR Magazine, here's how the average trade show budget breaks down:

- Space = 33%
- Trade Show Booths & Graphics (construction/refurbishment) = 18%
- Travel & Expenses = 18%
- Show Services (electricity, cleaning, drayage, I&D) = 12%
- Shipping = 9%
- Promotion = 8%
- Miscellaneous = 2%

Many trade shows have a number of hidden costs (many which are mandatory) including energy surcharges, cost of water, storage, receiving of samples, electricals, press materials and furniture rentals so be sure to read your exhibitor manual carefully.

VI. Select your show staff (one month before show)

Show staff must be highly knowledgeable and experienced salesperson and must be able to engage with potential customers

There are many things to consider when choosing your sales show staff:

- Salespeople should have a good personality and excellent prospecting skills.
- The staff should be technically knowledgeable as well as product knowledgeable.
- The salesperson must make it easy for the attendee to stop and talk.
- The salesperson must have the right attitude in line with the company's marketing strategy.
- Booth staffers must feel responsible for the quality of the visitor's time in the exhibit:
- Utilizing proper welcoming, qualifying, presenting, and closing skills is critical to the success of the staffer and to the company's participation
- The staffer should commit quickly for follow-up action (whatever that might be), assure the attendee that follow-up action will be taken, and thank the attendee for visiting the booth.



- For foreign shows, booth staffers should have the language capabilities necessary to communicate with foreign buyers. In the event that the language skills are not available in house, suitable interpreters should be sought.

Train your booth staff to cover greeting/engaging, qualifying, conducting product demonstrations, recording lead information, cross-selling and dismissing.

VII. Ship your samples and marketing materials (2 weeks prior to show)

It is important to have your samples, display materials and marketing materials ready and waiting for your arrival.

Useful tips

- Ship your items with enough lead time to allow for delays
- Most shows have official shipping partners. Contact them early and get all the required information including rates, documentation required, labelling, storage and handling arrangements, etc.
- Should you choose to ship items directly to hotel; ensure proper documents are filled out and hotel is informed about incoming packages.
- In many cases it may be cheaper to travel with your samples and marketing materials. In this case, contact local customs facilities to determine what are the necessary entry requirements as well as possible duties.
- In most instances, show samples (in the right quantities) will be allowed to enter a country without paying duties but the necessary declarations need to be made

Tip: For foreign trade shows; you can print marketing materials on the ground rather than ship them from your home country. Similarly you can also use local dealers, distributors, or hire local “talent” from industry agencies who specialize in staffing trade show exhibits and you will not have to pay airfare, hotel and per diem

VIII. Other Logistics

Hotel & Travel

Obtain the list of official hotels for each expo from show management. Assemble the list of authorized personnel assigned to the expo and arrange all hotel & travel reservations in advance. Often times, exhibitors don't schedule their hotel & travel reservations until the last minute and they find themselves without a room because all available “official hotels” are booked. Since show management has negotiated a rate for exhibitors involved in the expo, it is to your advantage to use the “official hotel” for all exhibit related functions.

Similar book flights in advance as rates go up closer to the event.



At-Show Participation (Days of the Trade Show)

Day 0 - Build Up

- Order all services prior to the deadlines.
- Order everything you need in the correct size, color, and quantities.
- Number and label your crates and boxes according to contents for easy move-in and set-up.
- Put a diagram on each crate showing how it is to be unpacked or repacked.
- Provide special instructions for your electrical requirements.
- Arrive at the hall early to see your booth location and find trade show service desks. Take this opportunity to familiarize yourself with the environment.
- Obtain work passes/exhibitor badges for yourself and your personnel.
- Receive your samples and promotional materials that were shipped in advance.

Don't overlook necessary tools such as: hammers, pliers, screw drivers, tape, velcro tabs, hooks, extension cords with adapter plugs, touch up paints and brushes in the exhibit shipment. Coordinate with your booth designer to make sure you have access to these.

Day 1 – end

Coordinate with the sales team to ensure that each member knows

- Procedure
- Objectives
- Method of Prospecting
- Literature Distribution
- Handling of Inquiries
- Maintaining Show Lead Sheets

Buyer Interaction

Use the first few minutes to qualify prospects before starting a presentation or in-depth discussion. Then make a decision whether to continue or back off. Often, you will find yourself talking to an enthusiastic listener who could never be a buyer. Complete your qualification process quickly while remaining polite and friendly.

Speak clearly and slowly – show floors are noisy. Maintain good eye contact with your prospect. If you are speaking to more than one person, be sure to address each one of them equally.

Take full details of every visitor whom you have identified as a prospect. Many exhibitors leave the expo without names, addresses and phone numbers, assuming their prospects will contact them later, only to be disappointed. Contacting your prospects after the expo will show your company's professionalism.

Use your lead sheet



Restrict the handing out of valuable literature. Provide your full price list and prospectus to those whom have met your qualifying criteria.

Schedule staff meetings at the end of each day to discuss the events of the day to determine strategy for the remaining days.

Remember

- Be available - Don't leave your booth unattended.
- Be warm - Smile and make good eye contact. Use good nonverbal communication.
- Don't offend - No smoking, eating, drinking, or chewing gum in your booth.
- Make a positive impression - Dress upscale to your audience. Keep your clothes neat. Place your badge on the right side of your body (that comes forward when you greet your booth visitor making it easier to read).
- Be actively involved with your booth visitor - Take responsibility for engaging the attendee in conversation.
- Keep the booth clean.
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.
- Have the exhibitor manual handy.
- Know the locations of the restrooms and restaurants.
- Sell the company rather than the product.

Necessary documents

- Brochures and Price List for your products. A laptop with internet connection will allow you to send to potential buyers immediately
- Lead capture form – See downloads for a sample
- Staff schedule of who will be working the booth on a daily and hourly basis
- Map showing the convention hall and vicinity to your booth location
- Necessary stationary – pens, notepads, stapler, tape, etc.

Last day of Show

Most shows prohibit dismantling of booths before closing. Please verify with show management the times allowed for dismantling. Coordinate with your booth contractor.

Should shipping of remaining samples and remaining booth materials be required; verify all shipping arrangements with the moving contractor prior to the closing date of the show. Pre-locate storage crates and packaging materials in the convention hall for quick access at the close of a show. Allow enough time for packing and shipping of materials.



III. Post Show (up to 1 year after the show)

Effective Follow Up

According to the Trade Show Bureau: "The majority of Trade Show sales take place within 11 months after the Show."

Unfortunately, many exhibitors lose these additional sales because they fail to follow-up on a continual basis. If you don't follow up, you have essentially wasted time, effort, and money. An effective follow-up system should be carefully planned as the rest of your Show activities.

Design or use a lead collecting system that makes recording and retrieval easy. Remember to prioritize and sort leads for easy follow-up. If large numbers are expected, make sure that the system will generate mailing labels without a lot of extra effort.

- Use telemarketing to find the best prospects. Telemarketing will ensure that you are putting the very best leads into the hands of your sales force as quickly as possible and in a time frame that positions you competitively with those big exhibitors. Taking the time to telemarket is especially important if your sales force is small in relationship to the number of leads.
- Set deadlines for all follow-up activities and brief all staff on the importance of meeting deadlines and their individual roles in the project.
- Set up a system to record and review the results of your follow-up program.
- Set a date for the final review.

Most importantly, make sure your staff follows through on all leads, inquiries, and requests for information as quickly as possible. Attendees react most favorable when sales leads are promptly followed. You should have contacted all of your leads within two weeks after the Show with at least a "thank you" or follow-up letter, and/or a telephone call.

Evaluation of Participation (Short, medium, long term)

It is important to determine if your objectives for participation were met. Therefore, there needs to be a system aimed at reconciling actual results with intended results.

You should review the results immediately after the Show and compare them with the goals that were set.

How to Measure Success?

Measure	Source of Info	Comments
Counting Leads	Lead Cards and Business Cards collected	Simple but least effective measure of success
Value of Business Gained - Immediately following trade show - Medium term (2 – 6 months following show) - Long term (6 months after show and repeat orders)	Invoices	The aim to get repeat business to justify trade show participation
In Booth visitor survey Post show visitor survey	Survey documents	Aimed at improving future trade show and marketing strategies Can be more qualitative.
Press Coverage Analysis	Survey of the media including number of interviews held, minutes of press coverage, etc	Requires monitoring of press post event

Trade Show Final Report

This report will act as a guideline for the planning of future shows, setting goals, and determining which shows are effective and which shows you should pass up.

Your report should assess the following:

1. The overall reaction of customers, staff, and others to your exhibit, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.
2. Recommendations for extra training, new approaches, etc., should all be included.
3. Make a comparison of actual costs to budget.
4. Compare actual results to corporate and individual goals.