

## **Tips for Innovative Meetings/Events (T.I.M.E.)**

**Topic: Trade Show Effectiveness**

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Welcome to our old and new subscribers to T.I.M.E., Tips for Innovative Meetings/Events. This issue talks about Trade Shows.

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### **1. WHY SHOW??**

Reasons to participate in a Trade Show:

- Trade Shows are more influential in evaluation and purchase than business-to-business advertising or direct mail. This is true for products as well as services.
  - The cost of closing a sale from a trade show lead is 45% less than closing a sale from a direct field sales call.
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### **2. PLAN FIRST FOR SUCCESS**

As powerful as a trade show can be, a successful event must be strategically and logistically well thought out. The balance of this issue will offer some pointers to help you do that.

In practice the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) states that only 29% of organizations ever determine trade show strategies or objectives.

You can't determine success if you don't know your destination. Plan first:

- Define your target audience

- Define your objectives
- Quantify your objectives -- such as the number of leads you want to generate, the number of sales you want to make, or the number of demos you want to give

Most companies have two primary objectives:

- Generating sales
- Generating qualified leads for the sales force

Other goals include:

- Creating or increasing public awareness
- Building brand identity
- Launching new products
- Gathering market research
- Developing partnerships and alliances
- Networking among the attending companies

Translate the overall goals into specific goals for the staff attending the show. Their performance will improve if they have specific goals such as a certain number of contacts, leads or demonstrations for which they are responsible.

And the sales people or staff in the booth should have a system for quickly qualifying leads for post-show follow-up.

Your desired outcome will determine your marketing and show strategy. For example, attracting qualified sales leads is different than gathering leads. If you want to generate qualified leads, giving away free stuff won't do it—you need to be even more creative.

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### **3. IDEAS FOR MARKETING YOUR PRESENCE**

Once you have a show scheduled and you understand your objectives, you can begin marketing and publicizing the show.

Here are a few ideas for publicizing your plans for upcoming trade shows:

- Include a trade show schedule with all product shipments so your customers know where you will be exhibiting.
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- Post your schedule on your Web site.
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- Include your trade show schedule in any direct mail or catalog mailings as well as on appropriate advertisements.
- Mail information to registrants in advance. Pre-Show "teaser" mailings can be very effective. Studies by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research show that

a pre-show gift sent with an invitation produced three times greater traffic than an invitation without a gift.

- Mail postcards and/or invitations to your customer and prospect database within driving distance of the show. Make sure you are mailing to contacts that most closely match the demographics of those attending the show.
- Send electronic invitations. There are many web sites that allow you to send free digital postcards.
- Personally call your best contacts and/or prospects to invite them to the booth.

Whatever the look to your marketing pieces, tie your mailings together with a unified theme and carry it through to the trade show floor. And don't forget to include the booth number!

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#### **4. AT THE BOOTH**

Here are some ideas on how to increase your effectiveness when exhibiting:

1. Communicate the strategy. Too often, sales people don't have a clear understanding of what the marketing goals of exhibiting are -- is it to gather leads, demonstrate or sell product, hand out literature...? Without a clear definition, people cannot perform properly.
2. The Welcome. Refer to people as your guests, not prospects, attendees or leads.
3. Limit the "Display". Don't try to cram too many products into your booth at once - this can be confusing for attendees and they can lose focus on "what's new." Rather, try to limit products to newer models or those that complement your new one(s).
4. Talk to People, then Qualify. If you stare at a badge, the guest feels like he or she is being sized-up, qualified or evaluated as being worthy of your time. Ignore the badge, introduce yourself and find out why the person is at the exhibit. More important than who a person is, is why he or she is visiting the booth. Put the visitor's agenda ahead of trying to pre-qualify.
5. Project Positive Posture. 56% of the way a visitor perceives an exhibit is based upon the body language of the personnel. The biggest contributor to negative body language is what salespeople do with their hands (arms crossed, hands are in their pockets, hands behind their backs, or in a fig leaf position). Each of these postures sends a negative signal. You can create a positive impression by holding something in your hands. A piece of paper the size of an envelope works

well. By holding something in your hands, you appear less formal and less likely to pounce. It also controls the amount of nervous energy you project.

6. **Boost Your Energy with a Smile.** When you smile you look more energetic. Smiling also releases a low-level amount of endorphins that will reduce or eliminate stress and fatigue. By smiling, you send a friendly, sincere greeting to the visitors. It also signals acceptance and approval and it has a neutralizing effect on someone you don't know.
7. **To Mail or Not to Mail.** Consider whether you want to distribute literature. If the attendees have flown in for the event, consider how much that person is willing to pack for the return trip home. Rather than loading your potential client up with documentation, CEIR reports, "many exhibitors have found that creating literature request counters in their exhibits is an effective method for handling literature requests."
8. **You're Always On.** Don't stop selling when you leave the booth. Actively seek out potential customers -- talk to them at the refreshment booth, after-hours events, in the hallways, wherever you can find them!
9. **Take time for debriefing and unwinding at the end of each day.**

But be prepared for more than Deals:

- *Let Your Guests Browse.* Let the visitors know they have an open invitation to browse your exhibit in comfort. Be available and present, but don't hover or give the impression that they are being watched.
- *How to Handle Complaints.* If a person should bring a complaint to your attention, it's possible to create additional sales opportunities by properly handling the complaint. Recognize that the person is usually prepared to defend his or her opinion and expects confrontation. You can surprise these people by not taking issue with or questioning them. Instead, thank them for coming to you and telling you about the problem. This causes a positive reaction and partnership in resolving the issue. Remember, people complain because they want to continue to do business with you.

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## **5. MORE TRAFFIC I SAY!**

This is one situation where you welcome traffic!

- Incorporate an interactive component into your booth
  - Set up a few computers so attendees can check e-mail, take a survey or visit your web site.
  - Use Games

- Use Humor
- Offer raffles, prizes as give-aways for attendees who answer questions correctly.
- Think “staging.” Think “entertainment.” Richard Liable of Liable Productions, Inc is high on humor. "If you hear laughter on a trade show floor, you are going to want to go and find out what's so funny, because there is not a lot of funny stuff at a trade show."
- Presentations and Demonstrations
  - When giving a demonstration, make sure that attendees can see you. A small pedestal or platform can increase visibility and allow you to stand heads above the crowd.
  - Take time to pause during your presentation to allow prospects to interrupt with questions or respond to what you are saying.
  - Bring along one or two backup units of your product, in case one becomes inoperable.
  - Have an expert on hand, if appropriate, to answer detailed questions.
- Offering food or drink at your booth will help drive traffic -- but be wary, because these may not always be the most qualified leads.
- Use technology to create a difference. Simple: Have a VCR hookup with a short (3 to 5 minute) tape set to play over again automatically.
- More Elaborate: Learn from an IBM experience at a Career Fair. While you might not think of a career fair as a trade show, the elements for success are much the same. Successful recruiting required more than the “Big Blue” name – IBM needed to showcase their technology. Their solution was a kiosk that featured 3D-multimedia. The presentation is based on the Leonardo da Vinci theme and depicts da Vinci entering a museum. As he searches for the Mona Lisa, he picks up a mop and uses it as a brush on one picture that turns into a screen showing IBM technology and services.
- Create "walking billboards" on the trade show floor, hotel lobby or outside the convention center. You can hire people to walk in high traffic areas or use give-aways as a form of free publicity. T-Shirts, tote bags and hats work great for this.

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## **6. SORE FEET AND MORE TO DO**

In any trade show follow-up is key.

Have a post-show marketing plan in place even before you leave the office. Many companies actually neglect this part of the process!

Be sure to send out information to interested prospects immediately. Some companies prepare and mail materials each night after the show; others do it as soon as they return. It should be no more than a week later. Even a simple "thank you for stopping by" with a reminder that you will follow-up with them shortly can work.

One idea is to have prepared "lead packets" ready back at the main office. Fax or e-mail names & addresses to the office staff, who can then quickly prepare personalized letters and mail information to leads the next day.

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## **7. IS THE GRASS GREENER...WHEN YOU ARE THE ATTENDEE**

When roaming a trade show floor, you also have your work cut out for you. People attend trade shows for the following reasons:

- Research new products
- New leads
- Make contact with current prospects
- Networking

Savvy professionals take the following steps to get the most out of the trade shows they attend:

- Research the show before signing up.
- Study the guide and floor plan. Formulate a plan of attack with emphasis on aisles that warrant special attention, as well as specific booths and product demonstrations you want to catch.
- Walk the exhibit floor during the middle of its run, when you will have the best chance of speaking with representatives. On the first day, exhibitors are usually swamped and have little time to talk to prospects; on the last day, some exhibitors are already packing up.
- Take notes as you go. Translate your notes as soon as possible to make certain you remember and record important details.
- Mark the pages in your show guide for easy reference.
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothes.
- Don't stop at booths where the product or service is of no benefit to you, no matter how interesting it is. This takes time away from more important booths you could visit or people you could talk to, and creates unnecessary information to weed through when you get back to the office.

- Seeing half of two seminars can be better than one full session. If the show offers educational sessions, bring a notebook and take quality notes. However, be prepared leave a session early if the session is of limited utility (or if the notes and handouts are copious). It's better to be rude than miss an opportunity to learn.
  - If there is a seminar led by someone who could benefit your company or career, play the star pupil role: arrive early, ask good questions, and stay late.
  - Size up Your Competition. Get the skinny from other participants or distributors.
  - Don't be stingy with your business cards. Even if you are already drowning in junk mail, don't limit your distribution of business cards on the show floor. Most trade shows will rent your name and address to exhibiting companies. Since you are already going to get mail, not passing a card won't help you much. Hording your cards also sends a clear message that you are (a) not important enough to have a card, or (b) not interested in what your new contacts have to say. Since business cards are cheap and first impressions are important, neither approach is a good idea.
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## 8. FREEBIES: STAFFING UP

How many people will you need to staff a trade show?

According to studies by Exhibit Surveys, Inc., 16 percent of a typical trade show audience comes to see your specific product. Of that 16 percent, 45% of them have a high enough interest to enter your booth.

So for a show with 15,000 estimated attendees over an 18-hour period, you can use the following formula to figure out booth staffing:

15,000 X .16 = 2400 attendees interest in your product  
 2400 X .45 = 1080 attendees interested enough to enter your booth  
 1080/18 total show hours = 60 attendees/hour.

Based on estimates of how many attendees your staff can handle per hour, you can figure out staffing:

# of attendees per hour/attendees each staffer can handle per hour = number of staff needed.

This is not your average sales call -- Be sure to plan for adequate staffing. It's difficult to stay fresh after standing around for 10 or 12 hours staffing a booth for 3 or 4 days straight. Allot time for breaks and/or staff rotation.

More Freebies: If you are interested in a timeline for planning a show, email us with the words “Trade Show” in the subject line and we will send you a logistics timeline with pre- and post-show activities.

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## **9. FUTURE T.I.M.E.**

Please forward this newsletter to your associates and colleagues! Your recommendations are key to our success. Or anyone can subscribe by sending an email to [stinnish@ameritech.net](mailto:stinnish@ameritech.net).

Past issues of T.I.M.E. can be requested by emailing us. Here is an index of topics and “freebies” offered in the past:

May: Teambuilding and (freebie) New York Times reprint and summary on why teambuilding programs miss the mark.

June: Green Meetings and (freebie) list of books that have 20-30 minute exercises for meetings and events.

July: American (Values) and (freebie) Meeting Analysis, a 1-page document that will outline the scope and needs analysis for your next meeting.

August: Minimum/Minimal Meetings and (freebie) Web Winners (web resources to make you and your meetings more productive).

October: Evaluations and (freebie) sample evaluation questions.

November: Politics and (freebie) on-line experiences.

December: Toys and (freebie) brainstorming ideas.

January: Sales, Award Presentations and (freebie) sales tips.

February: Change, Change Management and Communicating change and (freebie) Change Bombs (reasons change management fails).

April: What’s your Communication Style?

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