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Best Practices for a Successful Tradeshow

1. Have an Objective

The foremost consideration for attending a trade show is to have an objective for being there. “We’ve *always* attended that show!” or, “We’ll be conspicuous by our absence”. Or, “All our competitors will be there”. Are not good enough reasons to attend a trade show. You need to decide, *what you want to accomplish at the show* before you make the decision to attend.

Good examples of objectives are:

- Collect sales leads (almost always the best objective)
- Introduce a new product
- Show support for an industry or association
- See what the competition is doing
- Meet with customers or distributors.

2. Your Exhibit

The keys to attracting people to your trade show booth is a compelling exhibit *that tells visitors what you do* and, sad but true, a good giveaway. People will flock to your booth for a creative .50¢ item they can use or maybe bring home to the kids.

3. Your Message

Keep your message simple. Remember that a person walking the aisles of a trade show makes eye contact with your exhibit for about 5 seconds. The message on your exhibit must be simple, yet informative and compelling. The prospective visitor does not have the time to read product descriptions, features or benefits unless and until they actually enter the booth.

4. The Magic Line

Usually, the on-site objective is to get visitors to step across the “magic line” between the aisle and your exhibit booth. This requires just the right combination of message, customer need, sales savvy and a non-threatening environment. The next time you’re at a trade show, walk the aisles and ask yourself, would I want to “cross the line” and talk to these people? Why? Why not?

5. Boothsmanship

Boothsmanship is how your booth staff looks and conducts themselves while on exhibit duty. Do they look bored to tears? Scared? Are they on the phone? Eating an overpriced sandwich? Sitting with their feet up on the furniture? All of these behaviors are unacceptable. It is important that the booth staff be assertive but not too aggressive. Staffers need to fulfill the needs of the visitor, record the visitor's contact information and send him or her on their way, hopefully to make room for another visitor.

6. Follow-up

Perhaps the most important part of the trade show process is also the most frequently neglected – *follow-up*. If there is no timely follow-up of trade show leads, the entire venture is wasted. Keep the objective in mind. If you attend a show to get sales leads and have no plan to follow up, then create a plan or don't bother going at all!

7. Measurement

Depending on your objective, ask yourself the following questions: Did I accomplish what I set out to do? What did it cost? Was it worth it? Would I do it again? If your objective was to collect sales leads, what was your goal? Did you meet or exceed it? Calculate the cost per lead (show cost ÷ number of leads = cost/lead). There is no rule of thumb on this because there are too many variables. You just have to determine if it was all worth it based on your particular business.