

Communicate Virtually Anything

Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips on Using Tradeshows More Effectively

Whether you are a large organization that takes up an acre on the show floor or a small company with a table at the Chamber open house, these 8 tips can help you use your tradeshow more effectively.

1. Know who you are talking to

Who will be at the show? Are these people your primary target market? It's great if you already know that. If, however, you have already spent the money to appear at the show and are only asking the question now, at least you can use what you learn to help set your expectations and define your message.

2. Define your message

Now that you know who you are talking to, what is it you want to tell them? And how does this message fit within your overall marketing program? The message at the show should be targeted to the people you expect to see at the show. If you plan to have any giveaways or attractions, try to have them support your message to make them more memorable.

3. Set your objectives

Define exactly what you want to get out of the show. If you are generating leads (this is the objective for most companies attending a show) set a number that you think you really can reach. Here is the basic formula to help you define the number of leads you can generate:

$$\text{<anticipated leads per hour> X <the number of people you have working the show>} \\ \text{X <the number of show hours>}$$

So, if you anticipate 6 leads per hour (when you look at your message, you anticipate it will take 10 minutes to distill one lead from the number of people you talk to) and you have 2 people working the show and the show lasts 7 hours your objectives for the show would be 84 leads.

4. Plan your space and your attraction

Think of your booth at your show as your temporary office. So, how can you make the best use of your office space? For a large event, your tradeshow supplier will have detailed engineering drawings. For a smaller event, take the time to sketch it all out. In either case, know how you want to use of the space, where things go and how you want people to move around or through the booth.

Another part of the plan is an attraction – especially when it supports your message. A food service? Don't just hand out food, cook some of it up on the floor (or at least pretend). A news bureau? Don't just stack newspapers on the table, get a paperboy to hawk them. Give your target audience a way to take your message home with them.

5. Develop your post-show follow-up

Nothing cools faster than a hot lead. What is your plan for the number of names you'll collect? Remember, names do not always translate to leads. Will everyone get your "A" response? Don't wait until after the show, know what you are doing as a response before the show opens.

6. Let people know you are going to be there

You probably have some people you'd like to meet on the show floor. Do they know you are going to be at the show? While preparing your post-show follow-up do a bit of pre-show preparation and drop them an email. Do you get free passes? Make sure your best accounts and your best leads get them. Take advantage of being at the show and use the show floor to conduct business. If you are giving demos, you might even want to invite leads by your booth at a specific time. Wouldn't it be great to close some business at the show? You increase your odds if you let people you are there to do business.

7. Choose the right people to work the show

Some people think working a show is punishment. Don't let these folks near your space. You've seen that at shows you've attended. Hands in their pockets. Or on the phone. Or sitting in a corner. Remember, you have moved your office to the show floor – they don't act like this at the office.

While everyone need not be overly spunky (I hate that sort of vacuous show smile – you know what I mean), you can do a lot to help people work the show. Tell them why you are there and what is really expected; then reward the stars, they'll do even better next time. Run some scenarios (when people ask this, you say that). Define roles (you are in charge of the leads, you are handling media, you are running the demo). Remind them about the message and the objectives you have set.

8. Measure your results

OK, now it's all over – so how'd you do? We're your estimates close? Was the show worth the expense (you might not know that for a while, depending on your sales cycle)? Write it all down and you can use this as a starting point for the next time.