

# Exhibition Stand Tips

Exhibiting is an investment not just in terms of how much money you spend on the floor space and your exhibition stand but also in time, resources and effort. It's hard work. But exhibiting is also one of the most effective methods of face-to-face marketing. It's worth getting it right. With proper planning, promotion, stand staff training, follow up and measurement, the experience becomes enjoyable and the rewards great.

**Exhibiting tips and advice from Strokes Exhibits** builds a complete resource of useful and practical information to give you the tools for successful and hassle-free exhibiting.

- **Setting exhibition goals and objectives**
- **Writing an exhibition plan**
- **Create an exhibition marketing budget**
- **Read the exhibitor manual**
- **What are you going to exhibit?**
- **How to choose the right exhibition stand space**
- **Considerations for designing your exhibition stand**
- **How to choose the right type of exhibition display for your needs**
- **How to select your exhibition stand staff**
- **Is exhibition stand dress code important?**
- **How to prepare your exhibition stand staff (part I)**
- **How to prepare your exhibition stand staff (part II)**
- **How to prepare your exhibition stand staff (part III)**
- **Motivating your exhibition stand staff**
- **You can make a great impression and enjoy yourself!**
- **Develop a theme or message to promote your exhibition stand**
- **Developing a high-impact exhibition promotional campaign**
- **Using Direct Mail to increase visitor traffic**
- **Understanding your target audience**
- **Classify your leads for easier follow up**
- **Manage your leads**
- **Track your performance and follow up**
- **De-brief your exhibition team and evaluate the show**
- **Measure your exhibition results against your show objectives**
- **Have you remembered post-show promotions?**

# Setting Exhibition Goals and Objectives

When you are deciding to exhibit you need to be certain that the exhibition you have chosen fits into your overall sales and marketing strategy.

**Before you book your exhibition stand space, ask yourself the following questions:**

- Why am I exhibiting at this show?
- What products/services will I be exhibiting?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- What will I be doing to achieve the results?
- What image do I want to project?
- How does this specific exhibition fit into my sales and marketing plan?

Your answers to these questions will help you form specific objectives that you need to establish to be a successful exhibitor. The objectives you set should be measurable and obtainable. You will find it much easier to measure and judge your success if you are specific with your objectives. For instance, you can set a specific number of show leads to generate, appointments to make, units to sell.

Your exhibition objectives can be as challenging as you want to make them, but remember you and your stand staff want to succeed, so be realistic, particularly if you're exhibiting for the first time or setting show objectives for the first time.

**There are 6 principle reasons why companies choose to exhibit:**

- Build Sales
- Improve customer relationships
- Conduct market research
- Generate media relations/PR
- Build brand awareness
- Build and support sales channels

When you are setting your show objectives, consider each of the above to determine why you are going and what you want to achieve.

### **Can this show deliver on your objectives?**

To find out, get as much information as possible about the exhibition you're considering.

- Ask the show organisers for a copy of last year's registration form and an attendee profile. This will tell you who you'll meet on the show floor and will help you match your target audience to the expected visitor audience
- Ask for the names of other confirmed exhibitors, and search the list for your competitors
- Ask past exhibitors and attendees what they liked and disliked about the show, and whether it met their buying and selling needs
- Ask show management how they plan to promote the show, and what they will do to help your ideal prospect find you there

Select the exhibition because you believe it can deliver on your show objectives not because your sales team thinks you should be there or because the show organisers tell you your competitors are there.

**Knowing exactly what you want is a necessary element of success. Make sure that you understand your objectives. Make them SMART:**

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time bound

## Writing an Exhibition Plan

Planning is a necessary part of success. Careful and meticulous planning of your exhibition is no exception. It's easy to underestimate how long it takes to properly plan for an exhibition and therefore you should be starting 4 – 6 months ahead of the show. For some companies with larger exhibition stands and a more complicated exhibiting schedule, planning may need to start up to 12 months in advance.

**It's quite simple – planning for your exhibition makes life so much easier! And it can help you avoid additional expenses and last minute panics.**

- Appoint an exhibition co-coordinator with overall responsibility
- Write an exhibition plan with key activities, dates and responsibilities
- Get everyone involved that needs to be – circulate a copy of the exhibition plan with responsibilities and then keep chasing them
- Stick to your deadlines

A written exhibition plan should provide:

- Objectives
- Time scales
- Budgets
- Space requirements
- Stand and graphic design parameters
- On-site services
- Transportation and logistics
- Staffing levels and training
- Pre- and post-show promotions
- Show evaluation criteria
- On-stand data capture
- Follow-up procedure for leads

Each part of the exhibition plan works together to create synergy and success.

# Create an Exhibition Marketing Budget

Having an exhibition marketing budget focuses you to the actual cost of exhibiting and provides the basis for measuring and establishing your return on investment.

Make sure you don't leave anything out and be aware that your budget can vary from show to show as your requirements change. If you haven't set an exhibition marketing budget before, use the categories below as a guide:

- **Exhibition stand costs:**

- Exhibition stand purchase or rental costs. Note: include refurbishing and/or expansion costs when budgeting for subsequent shows

- **Graphics:**

- Vinyl, large format, digital fabric signage and graphics, light boxes etc

- **Exhibition:**

- Exhibition stand space, shipping to and from the show, install and dismantling, electrics, flooring, carpet, furniture, audio visual, photography, stand cleaning and other specialist requirements like waste/water, internet or telephone

- **Stand Staff:**

- Accommodation, travel, expenses, uniforms

- **Marketing:**

- Pre-show, at-show and post-show direct mail/email marketing, pr and media relations, advertising, sponsorship, promotional giveaways, literature or customer hospitality

Add a 5% - 10% contingency to the total budget

## Read the Exhibitor Manual

Reading the exhibitor manual seems a logical and common sense thing to do – and yet so many exhibitors fail to do it. Why read it?

The exhibitor manual is full of all the information you need to know about participating at your chosen show. It contains all the rules and regulations, checklists, order forms for show services, marketing forms for free pr and pre-show support, contractor information, build up and break down schedules, accommodation and hospitality information, floor plans, exhibitor lists and registration details.

Many exhibition organisers use on-line manuals and you will be issued with a login and password to access the exhibitor part of the show website. Some will use a combination of an on-line zone and a printed manual. And some organisers only use a printed version. Check with your show organiser to find out when the manual will be available and in what format it will be provided.

Read the manual carefully and make sure you note the key dates for ordering contractor services such as electrics, waste and water, cleaning etc – if you miss the deadline you can expect a hefty surcharge.

Depending on the type of stand space you order there will be rules and regulations that you need to adhere to – these are detailed in the manual.

As soon as the manual arrives on your desk or in your in-box take the time to go through it – that's the only way of making sure you know and can act on everything you need to.

## What Are You Going To Exhibit?

As part of setting your exhibition objectives and writing your exhibition marketing plan, you need to decide what products and/or services you want/need to exhibit.

Avoid displaying every product you have to offer. Your message will become confused and so too will the visitors. Keep in your mind that you have 3 – 5 seconds to grab attention. During that time the visitor needs to notice your exhibition stand, understand what it is you are telling/showing them and decide to want to know more. Make it easy for them with clear, concise messaging.

If you are launching a new product, for example, your exhibition stand design needs to focus on the new product. Once you have the visitor's attention, you can tell them about everything else you do.

**Remember you have 3 – 5 seconds to grab attention.** In that time you need to convey:

- Who you are
- What you sell
- The benefit of your product/service to them

# How to Choose the Right Exhibition Stand Space

Choosing your exhibition stand space takes more than a cursory look at the floor plan. Availability of good exhibition stand space depends on how early you book. You need to decide what type of space best suits your exhibition objectives and how you want to use it. If it's a new show for you, you may decide to leave it until quite late to take advantage of discounts from the organiser. However, you will be limited on choice.

**Consider the following when choosing your exhibition stand space:**

## **1. Visit the show**

It is a good idea to visit the show the year before you intend to exhibit to watch how visitors walk the show

## **2. At the entrance**

You may be tempted to position your exhibition stand next to or close to the show entrance. Be aware that often many visitors walk straight into the exhibition hall, bypassing these positions

## **3. Corner stands**

Corner stands give a feeling of openness and therefore catch visitors easily. The more sides open to aisles the better as it's easier for visitors to walk on.

## **4. High traffic areas**

Find out where the areas of high traffic will be. Areas where people congregate like seating areas, cafes, refreshment points and seminar suites generate traffic. Even toilet areas can work well.

## **5. Columns**

Look out for columns in your stand space as this will impact on your available display area as well as disrupting the presentation of your products/services to the visitor. Columns can also make it difficult for you to see the visitors approaching.

## **6. Neighbours**

See who will be exhibiting near you and don't be put off just because you have a large company next to you – this can work in your favour as you take advantage of high traffic

## **7. Height restrictions**

Make sure you know about any height restrictions your space may have. Generally, space only stands can be designed up to 4m high. At some venues, stands can be built higher than this but full structural drawings will be required to obtain approval

## **8. Shell scheme or space only**

In general, exhibition stand space that is smaller than 25 meters squared will use shell scheme and space over 25 meters squared will be a space only site.

The shell scheme option can be good for first time exhibitors or for those on a low budget. The shell scheme package will generally include carpet, walls and a company name board. It may also include spotlights. It will not include graphics, furniture or specific display items – you will need to order these separately. The standard size for shell scheme is 3 x 2 meters with a height restriction of 2.5 meters.

The disadvantage of using shell scheme is differentiating from all other shell scheme users and therefore standing out from the crowd.

## **9. Space Only**

Space only is renting of the floor space only and requires the exhibitor to provide everything. It is cheaper than shell scheme and the saving can be offset against a more beautiful looking exhibition stand that will work much harder for you. You can save more by renting an exhibition stand rather than purchasing one.

## **10. How much space**

Finding the right location is half the formula to choosing your exhibition stand space. You also need to decide how much space you need. Exhibition stand space is sold in meters and is priced per square meter.

To help you decide you need to refer to your exhibiting objectives and your budget.

- Do you want to make a statement about your size to the market?
- Do you simply want enough space to display your products?
- Do you intend to demonstrate a large piece of equipment?
- Do you intend to use an audio visual presentation?

Whatever your show objectives you need to book enough exhibition stand space for your products, demonstration and/or presentation as well as your stand staff and some visitors. Add to this the exhibition stand and you should have a fairly good idea of how much space you need.

If you have enough space at your business premises it's a good idea to mark out your intended exhibition floor space so that you can visualise how much room your products, demonstration and/or presentation will actually need.

# Considerations for Designing your Exhibition Stand

Designing your exhibition stand is a major contributing factor to successful exhibiting. Start the process at least 4 months ahead of the show. This will give you time to debate, produce a concept design, reflect and select the final design as well as giving enough time to actually create the stand you will be using. If you have a significant stand space you may want to start the process even sooner.

**Remember** – designing your exhibition stand includes your graphics and your messages. Graphics are an integral part of the exhibition stand and should not be left until the last minute.

Before you decide what to buy or rent and from whom, think about the following:

- What is the reputation of the supplier?
- Do they offer the type of product, design service and product guarantee required to create your ideal exhibition stand?
- Do you need the exhibition stand to be easy to transport and assemble?
- What are the on-going costs and will it be economical to expand, reconfigure or refurbish for future exhibitions?
- Can you rent the exhibition stand?

The type, size and make of your exhibition stand will be dictated by your budget. You also need to think about how you want to be portrayed – quality, traditional, high-tech, contemporary, established etc. The use of colour, shape and design will help you achieve the right image.

Also consider the amount of space you have and how best to utilise it with your exhibition stand. Always remember that you need room for stand staff and visitors and that the exhibition stand should enhance your product or service and not overtake it.

Consider the following when designing your exhibition stand:

- Your target audience
- Your exhibition stand should say who you are, what you do and the benefits of your product/service in just a few seconds
- Use an exhibition stand design company who are experienced in this specialised field
- Write a detailed exhibition stand brief that clearly describes your show objectives, target audience and the products/services you are exhibiting. Include in the brief how you want to be portrayed and remembered, your corporate identity, your key messages and any special promotions you intend to run – these all affect the design and layout of the stand space
- Height, light, colour and movement are four key elements to good exhibition stand design
  - Height – creates attention for your corporate image or key message by placing signs and displays as high as possible. Most organisers allow you to build up to 4m high on space only sites. Some will allow you to go to 6m and/or to suspend overhead signage but you will need to supply structural drawings for approval and to use riggers for overhead signs.
  - Light – attracts attention and brings the stand to life. Carefully selected and placed lighting can make a real difference to the ambience of your exhibition stand
  - Colour – attracts attention and enables you to stand out but choose your colours carefully. Your graphics will also serve as stand attractors
  - Movement – attracts visitors. Creating movement on your stand through demonstrations, presentations, moving objects and with your stand staff will attract visitor interest
- Try to avoid any physical barriers to visitors getting onto your exhibition stand – you want visitors to access your stand easily and to feel comfortable
- Think about storage space, use of furniture and accessories and how the stand design flows
- Your graphics are your silent sales person – they attract attention but keep copy to a minimum. Pictures and visual imagery work best with succinct and punchy text
- Make sure your stand staff are easily identifiable and can work with the final stand design
- Communication with the visitor starts 20 feet from the stand – your stand design needs to make sense and your stand staff need to look like they belong

There is a lot to think about when designing your exhibition stand – at the end of the process ask yourself – **“Would I stop and visit this stand?”**

# How to Select your Exhibition Stand Staff

Your exhibition stand staff are your company ambassadors. It is the stand staff that will make or break it for you and the way they conduct themselves will have a lasting impression on the visitor.

**Visitor communication starts 20 feet from the stand.** You can assume that by the time the visitor has reached your stand they already have a pretty good idea of the reception they will get. Don't mess it up!

Make sure your stand staff are well trained, know why they are there, know the show objectives, know what you expect from them and know what they are talking about! The attitude, appearance, body language and knowledge of your stand staff is critical for your future relationships with attendees, prospects and clients.

Consider carefully who you select for your exhibition stand staff team. The best sales people don't always make the best stand staff. You need to be able to engage, qualify, present and close in a short period of time and move onto the next visitor – sales people are more used to talking with a prospect for up to an hour.

Think about:

- Their personality
- Their attitude towards exhibitions
- Their previous experience and performance on exhibition stands
- Their product and industry knowledge

Also think about your stand staff strategy:

- Can all of them engage, qualify, present and close?
- What are the individual strengths and weaknesses of the team?
- Do you have staff that are better at engaging and qualifying and others that are better at presenting and closing? This may effect how your team 'work' the stand

**Make sure your stand staff can listen more than talk. Research shows that 76% of visitors attend an exhibition with an agenda. They want to see new ideas, find new suppliers and establish new relationships. Your stand staff need to know how to interact with the visitors.**

- They need to look at the person who is talking
- Don't interrupt when another person is talking
- Don't play with something in their hands or jangle coins in their pocket
- They need to change their expression so visitors know they understand them

They

# Is Exhibition Stand Dress Code Important?

You bet! How your stand staff dress is a reflection of your company image. It doesn't have to be formal business wear but it does have to be presentable.

Using an exhibition stand uniform is a popular approach. This can be business suits and ties with each staff member in the same colour of suit, shirt and shoes or it can be less formal using logo apparel as part of a broader brand awareness strategy.

Some companies opt for a theme to their stand and carry it through to their dress code in the form of a national costume, specially designed shirt or other bespoke dress wear.

What you decide is up to you but it should fit with your exhibiting objectives. What's important is that:

- You communicate the dress code to the stand staff beforehand so as to avoid embarrassment to an individual or the company
- Your stand staff all look the same
- Your stand staff are clearly identifiable for visitors

A dress code can turn your staff into a network of moving advertisements for your company. Your stand staff become easily identifiable on the show floor and your unified look can help promote a team atmosphere and make your staff feel more comfortable and therefore more productive. They need to smile and show the visitor they are happy to be there

# How to Prepare your Exhibition Stand Staff (part I)

Working an exhibition stand is hard work and very demanding. It's essential that the exhibition stand staff are motivated, fresh and professional at all times. How do you prepare your exhibition stand staff?

## 1. Deciding how many stand staff you need

2. Conducting a pre-show briefing
3. Telling them what you expect from them

Here we look at:

### Deciding how many staff you need

Deciding on how many staff you need for your exhibition stand depends on the size of stand and the available free floor space. It also depends on your exhibiting objectives. As a general rule you should have a minimum of 2 staff to allow each other time off the stand for breaks.

It's much better to have 3 exhibition stand staff so that there are 2 people on the stand at all times.

Think about:

- Don't flood the stand with staff so that there is no room for visitors or indeed to frighten visitors off
- Trying to plan your space allowing approx 2.5 square metres per person
- How much available floor space you will have once the exhibition stand is up and you have placed your products
- Leaving room for visitors and keeping the stand looking open and inviting
- How many enquiries you need to reach your exhibiting objectives and how long you will spend with each visitor
- Managing the staff break rota so that busy times have enough stand staff
- How you will 'work' the exhibition stand and interact with the visitors – you may choose to have one person demonstrating product and others flanking to catch visitors or stand staff engaging visitors and handing over qualified prospects to more experienced staff

Do not line your stand staff up in front of your exhibition stand – this creates a barrier through which visitors can not pass and sends out 'AVOID' signals!

# How to Prepare your Exhibition Stand Staff (part II)

Working an exhibition stand is hard work and very demanding. It's essential that the exhibition stand staff are motivated, fresh and professional at all times.

How do you prepare your exhibition stand staff?

1. Deciding how many stand staff you need

## **2. Conducting a pre-show briefg**

3. Telling them what you expect from them

Here we look at:

### **Conducting a pre-show briefing**

Your pre-show briefing needs to involve all members of the exhibiting team. Include the following items on your agenda:

- Reasons for exhibiting – your show objectives
- The target audience you want to reach
- The personal responsibilities and targets for each staff member
- A review of the products/services to be exhibited
- Explain the design of the exhibition stand including the graphics and how the design fits with your show objectives
- Go through any demonstrations or presentations that will be made on the stand
- Explain the enquiry handling procedure and how enquiries are to be recorded
- Explain how to use any sales literature that you are using on the stand
- Explain how to use any giveaways or incentive gifts
- Explain how any competition or prize draw will work
- Explain the dress code
- Circulate a list of all stand staff and a staff rota including scheduled breaks
- Include the show hours and what time stand staff need to be on the stand
- Explain any catering or hospitality arrangements
- Circulate information on accommodation, transport arrangements and details of any off-stand activities

## How to Prepare your Exhibition Stand Staff (part III)

Working an exhibition stand is hard work and very demanding. It's essential that the exhibition stand staff are motivated, fresh and professional at all times.

How do you prepare your exhibition stand staff?

1. Deciding how many stand staff you need
2. Conducting a pre-show briefing
- 3. Telling them what you expect from them**

Here we look at:

### **Telling them what you expect from them**

You need to explain to your exhibition stand staff why you are exhibiting and what you expect to achieve from exhibiting. It's important that you share with them the exhibiting objectives and how you expect them to achieve your goals. This approach brings the whole team together and gives purpose and commitment to what you are doing.

- It's important to review your performance at the beginning of each day. If you have set a daily target of leads to be achieved or appointments to be made or items to be sold, tell your exhibition stand staff team how many visitors they need to interact with and what information you are interested in capturing. And then review the performance for the following day so that the whole team know what needs to be done to reach the goals.
- Appoint a stand manager who can take responsibility for the smooth running of the exhibition stand including staff rotas and breaks, enquiry recording and stand cleanliness. It's really important that the whole team stay motivated and fresh so make sure each staff member is given time to see the rest of the show and to have coffee and lunch breaks.
- Remind the stand staff each day of any special activities happening on and off the stand for that day – such as seminars, presentations, press visits and brief them accordingly.
- And remember – no eating or drinking on the exhibition stand and no slouching around! Communication starts 20 feet away and no visitor wants to talk to you when you're eating a sandwich! How you behave is crucially important so staff should be told how you expect them to behave – no mobile phones on the stand, no chatting with colleagues, reading newspapers or backs to the aisles. This is business not a day out. You may want to consider that specific exhibition training will focus your exhibition stand staff to exactly what needs to be achieved. This may take the form of product training sessions so that your team are up to date with the products and services that will be exhibited or that they may need to demonstrate. It may be that you need a dedicated exhibition workshop focused to your specific exhibiting objectives that will pull the whole team together and give them the necessary tools to engage, qualify, present and close and to show them specific exhibiting strategies.

# Motivating your Exhibition Stand Staff

Motivating your exhibition stand staff is all about how you brief them before and during the show. By sharing your exhibiting objectives, explaining what you expect from them and training them properly, your exhibition stand staff will have purpose and commitment to what you are trying to achieve. They will take it seriously and experience the benefits and rewards of successful exhibiting long after the show has closed its doors.

Make sure:

- They are confident, are good communicators and know the products and services – train them
- Provide a hit list of prime prospects that you have identified from the visitor profile and classify the types of prospects you are looking for by categorising them in to A, B and C
- Motivate the stand staff with personal goals and incentives
- Reward them with a stand staffer of the day and/or show prize
- Keep the stand staff informed of the team performance throughout the show
- Give them regular breaks off the stand to soak up the atmosphere of the event – this is a great motivator if they know they are doing well and can see other exhibitors struggling. It will also keep them fresh and alert

**Your exhibition stand staff are your company ambassadors – make sure they realise how important they are to the success of your exhibition.**

# You Can Make a Great Impression and Enjoy Yourself!

There's no getting away from it – exhibiting is hard work – but you can and should enjoy yourself and the whole exhibiting experience.

The show floor is a vibrant and lively stage at most exhibitions. Keeping fresh and upbeat during the show is vital to wowing the many prospects that provide new business.

Get into the mood and embrace the atmosphere – it'll do wonders for the overall performance of your exhibition stand staff.

If you're using technical equipment, demonstrating equipment or using audio visual presentations – anticipate technical difficulties and leave enough time for troubleshooting. Always have a back up plan.

Enjoy the atmosphere and have fun – an upbeat stand will attract visitors.

Don't sit down and wait for visitors. Don't eat or drink on the stand or bury your head in a magazine or newspaper. It makes the stand less inviting and you'll miss the passers-by.

Use a stand staff rota for coffee breaks and lunch breaks. You'll be more productive and efficient with a short period off the stand, it will stave off any boredom and it will allow you time to take in the rest of show.

Wear comfortable shoes – it's hard enough standing up for three days but when your feet hurt your whole body aches. If the budget will stretch to it, cushion the floor as well. Sore feet on carpet-covered concrete are bad news!

# Develop a Theme or Message to Promote Your Exhibition Stand

Exhibiting is a powerful way to enhance your brand awareness. Everything your company stands for is being exhibited on the show floor. Exhibiting is an extension of your sales and marketing activity and therefore requires the same level of consistency, clarity and focus in every aspect of your exhibiting programme.

**The basis of your promotional activity derives from your exhibiting objectives.** Don't be an exhibitor that spends loads of money on being there but neglects to tell anyone!

You have many promotional avenues to choose from including:

- Personal invitations to clients and prospects
- Telemarketing
- Direct mail
- Advertising
- Sponsorship
- Internet activity
- Public relations

**Tell the world you are exhibiting** – no-one else will do it for you! Tell your audience what you will be doing at the show and why they should attend. What benefits will they achieve by visiting your exhibition stand?

Develop a theme or message to promote your exhibition programme but make sure:

- You use consistency and repetition – people buy from brands they know and trust
- Ensure all your marketing materials carry your corporate branding – everything you produce should have the same look and feel
- Perception of your company and products is a major factor in buying behaviour

The theme or message you develop for your promotional campaign is integral to how you are presented on the show floor. Your promotional campaign needs to invoke interest and intrigue – so make sure when the visitor is looking for you on the show floor they know what they are looking for.

**Create a message to be remembered** – the key to successful exhibition promotion is targeting the people you want to see on your exhibition stand. A successful campaign is that which has a unique message that differentiates you in the market and therefore gets the visitors to your exhibition stand.

- What is your company exhibiting that is so compelling that visitors need to come to your exhibition stand?
- What do you do better than your competition?
- What does your company offer of real value – better guarantee, better delivery, lowest price, best selection etc ?

The questions above are the questions you should be asking yourself to help you decide on your unique message.

‘Research has shown that 83% of the most successful companies at a range of exhibitions were the ones that mailed their prospects and customers before the show.’  
[source: CEIR]

Exhibition research shows that 76% of visitors arrive at an exhibition with a fixed agenda – if they don’t know you are exhibiting how will they find you? Effective and consistent promotion could make all the difference.

# Developing a High-impact Exhibition Promotional Campaign

Your exhibition promotional campaign needs to focus to your exhibition objectives and your budget. How you choose to spend your money is critical. Your exhibition promotional campaign should focus to the following:

- **Attract quality visitors**
- **Engage visitors and allow interaction**
- **Get your products/services remembered favourably**

Your exhibition promotional campaign is split into three categories:

- **Pre-show**
- **At-show**
- **Post-show**

## Pre-show Exhibition Promotion

Direct Mail – mail your database of clients and prospects, buy in or rent a list or you may be able to rent the show's pre-registration list. Make sure your direct mail piece gives benefits to the visitor and reasons why should visit you. Perhaps consider a competition or a gift in exchange for more details

Telemarketing – contact your customers and prospects and tell them you are exhibiting and why they should attend

Public relations – the show organisers will conduct there own pr programme and invite you to submit your news. This is free and if you do nothing else you should take full advantage of all pr opportunities. Make sure you take note of the deadlines for each publication and concentrate on benefits. Include photographs

Advertising – add your stand number and the show details to any existing advertising campaigns you are running or consider taking advertising in the official show catalogue or magazine supplements

Sales and business correspondence – include your stand number and show details on every single piece of correspondence sent out by your business including emails. The organisers will also supply you with free tickets to include in your business correspondence

Websites – include your exhibition participation in the news or events section of your own website and make sure you take advantage of the official show site where often you can list you company details and profile and include a link to your company site

Email marketing – email your participation and/or show offers to prospects and clients or use the show pre-registration list if available. Some show organisers will include you in their own email marketing campaigns. If your budget is restricted this is a cost-effective alternative to traditional direct mail

Sponsorship opportunities – many exhibitions offer sponsorship for brand exposure. Ranging from on-site banners and carpet tiles to carrier bags and show programmes, most shows will have a standard package of sponsorship opportunities. Make sure it fits within your show objectives and budget

It is important to remember that consistency and repetition are crucial factors in successful promotion. If you decide to conduct direct mail and/or email marketing campaigns plan for them in advance and contact your list at least twice before the show.

Try to devise your campaigns so that the visitor has a compelling reason to visit you. That may be entering a competition or receiving a free gift but be clear what your objectives are – try not to give anything away without getting something back in return.

## At-show Exhibition Promotion

Press packs - The organisers will ask you to submit press packs to the press office before the show opens. This is an important and free activity that you should not pass on. The press rely on the information submitted by exhibitors to determine their coverage of the show and individual exhibitors. You may even get a visit from a journalist

You can make more of this activity by inviting key journalists to your stand. The organiser can help you identify which journalists to invite. But be ready for them. Make sure you have a designated press contact on the stand primed and ready to answer questions. Have some spare press packs on the stand

On stand promotions – Using on stand promotions can be an effective way of increasing visitor traffic to your exhibition stand. Promotional giveaways are the most popular but consider the benefit to your objectives. If you offer a free prize draw, be clear with yourself that this is a contact database exercise and not real leads.

Creating movement on your stand by giving something away can also work well but make sure you have included your company branding and contact details on the item. Try to use it as a hook to engage with the visitor and get their details before giving it away. You may decide to have an inexpensive item to pass out like sweets to passers-by and a more selective item for real qualified prospects.

## Post-show Exhibition Promotion

It's tempting when the exhibition doors close to return to the office and get on with catching up on emails and paperwork and to forget about the wider interest that you created in that period. You still have a number of opportunities.

Not all visitors will have got to your stand and a number of pre-registrations will not even have made it to the show.

Some organisers will rent the visitor list to exhibitors for post-show direct mail/email marketing. It may be offered free or for a small one-off rental fee. A simple 'Sorry we missed you...' can generate a whole new set of leads.

And don't forget your contact database collected through a competition or prize draw. This is a ready list to start marketing.

Send out post-show PR to the journalists and magazines targeted by the show organisers. Tell them your experience of the show, how well you did and what's next for your company. They may feature you in their post-show review. Include your news story on your website and/or as part of your own email newsletter to your clients and prospects.

# Using Direct Mail to Increase Visitor Traffic

Using Direct Mail or email marketing is an important element of your exhibition marketing programme. You may decide to use one or the other or a combination of both but whatever you decide your campaign needs to have a specific purpose based on your show objectives.

Decide what action you want the recipient to take.

Do you want them to:

- See a demonstration of a new product or service?
- Receive a free gift?
- Enter a free competition?

You need to remember that your purpose for exhibiting is to gather data on future clients and therefore you don't want to be giving anything away for free.

What's more, you need to be able to measure the results and effectiveness of the campaign. The easiest way of doing this is to have the recipient return something in exchange. It could be a reply card or a competition entry form or it could be their business card.

Campaigns that include 'visit us on stand xxx and receive your FREE xxxx' can work well but will work even better if you give them an additional compelling reason to visit you that is benefit driven.

**Just remember – whatever you decide to do, get something back in return.**

An effective campaign requires consistency and repetition. Ideally you should plan to mail out or email your target list 3 times prior to the show but at the very least do it twice. The design can be quite simple but try to differentiate from other mailing pieces that visitors may receive from other exhibitors.

- Use a qualified mailing list – from the organisers, your own database or a good quality third party mailing list
- Use first class postage
- Address your mailing to an individual and not a job title
- Make sure there are no spelling mistakes
- Print up envelopes with a special message or theme
- Keep your message short and concise
- Think about different mailing pieces for different audiences – this is easily achievable and cost-effective using email marketing
- Use odd-sized promotional pieces that will make you stand out or bold/vibrant colours to get noticed
- Create a three-part mailing for repetition
- Keep your message and theme consistent throughout the campaign

# Understanding Your Target Audience

Why do visitors attend exhibitions? Visitors want to find new ideas for products and services, new technologies, new suppliers and new partnerships. They are looking for solutions to the challenges they face in their working environment. They want solutions that will save them time and save them money by using new products, technologies and applications. They want visiting the exhibition to provide them with the answers.

Study the visitor profile before the show. It will tell you who to expect and how many are likely to meet your target audience profile. It will give you industries, job titles, geographical locations and annual spend on products and services. This information will allow you to concentrate on finding the prospects at the show that you want to do business with.

76% of exhibition visitors have done their research and know who they want to visit at the show. Some of them will even know in what order they will visit. Your job is to get onto the visitors agenda. If you don't reach them before they have set their agenda, then you need to work hard at the show to grab their attention.

Work on the basis that the majority of visitors will want to talk to you – that's what exhibiting is about, face-to-face contact. The minority that visit the exhibition who have no intention of being stopped or engaging in conversation are beyond reach at this stage!

Educate the visitor and impress them with your industry knowledge and product expertise. Even if you don't have a new product or service to show you should still be able to talk enthusiastically and with passion about what you do offer.

People buy from people – if you do your job right, your products and services will be just what the visitor is looking for. And remember it can be the most unlikely looking prospect that turns into your largest win.

## Classify your Leads for Easier Follow Up

So you're ready – the stand is up and looking great, your stand staff have turned up and the show is open. Your first visitor arrives at your stand and you decide you need to write down the nature of their enquiry. So you turn to a scrap of paper that's folded up in your pocket and borrow a pen from a colleague.....

Let's start again. Be prepared and have a system in place for recording your leads. Most shows offer electronic data capture facilities such as light pens but the most effective method of recording leads is to use a specially designed lead card for each exhibition you attend.

Using a lead card enables you to determine the information you want to record about the prospect in advance. Include elements and prompts that address your exhibiting objectives. Record all the contact information or attach a business card and then use tick boxes for product interest, business size, buying time etc. Also record business type or industry, job title and the follow up action that is required. Leave space to record specific comments about the particular needs of the prospect. This will greatly aid the qualifying process and make the follow up easier.

Use a ranking system to classify the leads so that you can quickly identify the hottest prospects after the show. A simple system using letters or numbers can quickly identify your lead follow up priorities.

Easily categorise them as:

**A = immediate need; B = likely to buy in the next 6 months; C = contact database**

## Manage Your Leads

It's not enough to collect information on prospects and allow someone to keep the business cards in their pocket. You need a proper structured system to record the lead information for follow up and future marketing.

Use a lead card at the show to record the information and then record all the information you have gathered in a contact management database. Record everything including the additional notes and comments specific to the prospect's needs. This will make it much easier for the sales person who needs to follow up the enquiry and make you look more professional and efficient. You will be able to show that you understood the prospects needs and have remembered them!

To do this you need to encourage your stand staff to take proper notes at the show so that the information prospects are interested in is properly conveyed to the sales person following up the lead.

All the leads need to be kept in one place on the exhibition stand to make collation easier. Put someone in charge of gathering the lead forms and taking them back to the office. The original business cards can later be removed and given to the sales person assigned to the lead.

Remember – the actions you take during the follow up process will determine whether the prospect ultimately buys from you. If your sales person needs to go through the prospects requirements all over again that will send out clear messages about what it's like to do business with your company.

**80% of exhibitors don't follow up their leads – don't be one of them. Use a system.**

# Track Your Performance and Follow Up

Exhibiting is always a tale of two halves. First half is getting through the show gathering information on prospects and their needs. The second half is what you do with that information – the follow up.

Following up is crucial and how you conduct the follow up is even more crucial. Amazingly 80% of exhibitors do not follow up their exhibition leads which begs the question 'why exhibit?'

Less than 20% of exhibitors track the performance of those exhibition leads.

Using a specially designed lead card at the show will enable you to record valuable information about each prospect and their specific needs. Using a classification system will enable you to assign a quick and easy method to determining follow up priority. These systems allow an easy and straight-forward initial evaluation of your exhibition performance but will only give you a snap-shot.

Every prospect should receive a timely follow up within 3 – 5 days of the show based on your classification system. The hottest prospects should be followed up immediately after the show within 1 – 2 days. Some prospects will only receive a thank you letter whereas your hottest prospects will expect a sales visit.

Effective lead tracking should be conducted 3, 6, 9 and even 12 months after the exhibition (sometimes longer depending on your sales cycle). At each milestone, an evaluation of the show leads should be conducted to see the value to your business of each of the original prospects. Have you converted them? How many? Which classification of leads converted? What is happening with the rest? How often do they buy? What do they buy?

Answers to these questions will give you a much bigger and more accurate reading on the value of the particular exhibition to your overall sales and marketing objectives. It will also allow you to monitor the performance of your sales people in converting exhibition leads.

**And remember – if you don't follow up your leads, your competitors will. If you don't follow up your leads what was the point in exhibiting!**

# De-brief Your Exhibition Team and Evaluate the Show

Having planned your exhibition, promoted your presence, trained your stand staff and established your lead recording methods and follow up process it is important to establish an evaluation of the show from the people who were involved.

Immediately after the show have a meeting with your exhibition team and obtain an honest assessment and feedback of what worked and what did not. It's important to do this straight away while impressions are still fresh. If you can't pull everyone together then circulate a questionnaire or survey for individuals to complete when the show closes.

Which ever method you choose, write a report that summarises the evaluation and which highlights areas for improvement or change at future events.

What to consider in your post-show evaluation:

- How did perform against your exhibition objectives?
- What response did you get to your pre-show and at-show promotions?
- What is the overall impression on the quality of the visitors and the leads you took?
- What could you do differently to improve your performance next time?
- What were the major challenges that you did not expect?
- What changes could you make to the exhibition stand design or layout to improve performance?

How effective was the stand staff in achieving the goals you set?

- In what areas do you need more preparation?
- Were the stand staff trained enough and was their product knowledge satisfactory?
- Would you exhibit at this particular show again?

# Measure Your Exhibition Results Against Your Show Objectives

Setting exhibition objectives at the beginning of the exhibiting process allows you to measure your results.

Measuring exhibition results allows you see the effect of successful exhibiting on the bottom line and in so doing, justify the investment for future events.

Measuring will also enable you to choose better exhibitions in the future as you will know which activities need improving before, during and after the show and it will encourage you to set goal-driven activities.

When setting your exhibition objectives, try to quantify them. You can do this for all your objectives not just for the number of leads you achieve.

Measuring leads is simple to quantify – divide the total cost of the exhibition by the total number of leads provides a cost per lead. You can be more specific than this by using your lead classification system. Keeping an accurate record of your leads allows to measure sales directly attributable to your exhibition participation over a long period of time. This will enable you to demonstrate the profitability of exhibitions.

For other measurements refer to your exhibition objectives that fall into the main exhibition channels:

- Achieving sales – Eg, how many orders achieved; total cost per order
- Improving customer relationships – Eg, how many customers visited the stand
- Conducting market research – Eg, how many and which markets were identified
- Building brand awareness – Eg, how many visitors saw or were exposed to the brand
- Supporting sales channels – Eg, how many agents/distributors visited the stand
- Generating media coverage – Eg, how many article inclusions were achieved

If you expect your exhibition investment to pay off, you must follow up and measure the results.

## Have You Remembered Post-show Promotions?

When it's all over, the exhibition doors have closed and you've returned to the office, promoting your exhibition participation does not stop. There is still a lot you should be doing to keep building the brand and developing relationships with prospects and contacts.

Not every visitor will have got to your stand – if the exhibition visitor list is available, send a mailer or email with a simple 'sorry we missed you...' message – it could generate even more leads!

Follow up the pre-show press releases you sent out to journalists and magazines – tell them about your show experience, the results, what's next for you, whether you would exhibit again – you may just feature in the show reviews

Include your show participation on your website and to customers and prospects via a newsletter or email

Turn any big wins or unique wins into a case study and use it as part of your on-going marketing programme

If you held a competition or free prize draw – inform the winner and get their permission to feature the story in other marketing activity

**Keep the brand building wheel turning – you have a wealth of information from the contacts you made to add to your on-going marketing programmes.**