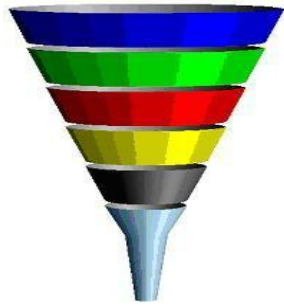




Tradeshow Best Practices White Paper

Overview

Tradeshows can be excellent sources of new business and great tools to touch base with your clients and suppliers. Many exhibitors are able to generate qualified leads for immediate results as well as initiate relationships that, when nurtured, have the potential for sales down the road. Best practices dictate that companies should use tradeshow as a complementary tool in their



sales funnel¹ to achieve best results; however, even those without a systematized sales process can experience compressed sales cycles and deeper connections to existing customers as a result of participation in a tradeshow. Tradeshows also involve significant time and investment. Participation has dwindled in recent years due to a variety of reasons including: relatively high costs of exhibiting compared to online marketing alternatives; fewer resources available to attend tradeshows; and the increasingly globalized nature of trade. If you

choose to include tradeshows among your marketing channels, this white paper outlines the best practices that will maximize your return on investment.

Contents

PRE-SHOW BEST PRACTICES	2
PLANNING	2
MARKETING	3
LOGISTICS AND STAFFING	4
AT-SHOW BEST PRACTICES	4
BOOTH VISUAL PRESENTATION	4
INTERACTIVE SALES PROCESS	5
NON-SALES BOOTH ACTIVITY	6
POST SHOW BEST PRACTICES	7
PROSPECT FOLLOW-UP.....	7
CLIENT FOLLOW-UP	7
RESULTS MEASUREMENT	7
NEXT STEPS	7

¹ A sales funnel (aka sales pipeline or sales process) is a systematic process to selling a service or product that allows a company to move a greater number of larger sales through the sales process in less time.



The first step is to determine which shows to attend and at which to exhibit. Critically examine the returns (both financial and non-financial) from a well planned and executed tradeshow event. *“Should we be participating in a specific show?”* must be asked and should not be taken lightly. A deeper understanding of tradeshow within the greater context of the portfolio of sales and marketing alternatives typically sharpens leadership’s focus on where to expend more resources to **grow profitable revenue streams**. Research the attendee profile. Are a large portion of the expected visitors existing customers of yours? If not, do they have the potential to be customers? What are some of the reasons they attend? If you know that they are there to gather information for a purchasing decision, then it may make sense to exhibit at the show. On the other hand, if they are exhibiting, explore the possibility of a company representative to visit them at their booths, rather than exhibiting yourself.

Pre-Show Best Practices

Planning

Set a Primary Objective for the show: Companies have many reasons to exhibit at a tradeshow, and while many things can be accomplished in a few days of exhibiting, not all can be executed on well. Choose your primary goal for the show and possibly a secondary goal. The goal should be measurable – for example, if the goal is “meet potential clients” the target for a two person booth might be to generate 20 qualified leads which will be followed-up within five days. This goal should then help guide all decisions relating to the booth from design, to collateral, to staffing. Some of the most popular reasons to exhibit are:

- Sell
- Meet new potential clients
- Introduce new products or services
- Create an image
- Increase exposure
- Demonstrate a specialized product or service
- Be compared to your competition
- Conduct market research
- Address past servicing problems



Assign a show champion: This is the one person who is ultimately responsible for performance at the show. Like a quarterback, they do not always have their hands on the ball, but they call the plays and all communication is coordinated through them.



Develop a budget: How much the company will spend on the tradeshow should be driven in part by the return on investment (ROI) expected from the show.

Determine your target market within the show: There are hundreds, even thousands of attendees at a typical tradeshow. Selecting a target market provides the booth staff criteria to quickly qualify contacts and either advance with them or move on to the next contact.

Marketing

Obtain the Exhibitor & Attendee List: Check the show website for the exhibitor list or contact the show organizers as they will usually make available the previous year's attendee list. Typically there is a 90% overlap year over year. The list should be used to find prospects, evaluate whether the tradeshow is worth attending vs. exhibiting at, and as a source of contact information for pre-show marketing.

Market to Prospects: Tradeshows are a cost-effective way to meet large numbers of geographically dispersed prospects in a single location. Let the prospects know you will be there and that you would like to see them. Phone the most important and email the others. Where applicable, schedule a meeting before or after show hours to have more in depth one-on-one contact.



Market to Existing Customers: The show creates an opportunity for Sales Reps to talk to clients about specific opportunities that are coming up. Additionally, having a booth makes it easy for them to introduce new product offerings.

Become Seminar Speakers: To get more exposure for your company, work with the tradeshow organizers to become seminar speakers on the company's areas of expertise. At the end of the show, contact information

should be gathered from the attendees for follow-up.

Schedule Demonstrations: Draw people into the booth by scheduling demonstrations throughout the day. These seminars should last approximately 15 minutes with the goal of attracting large crowds of prospects. Aim to be more memorable than any other booth at the tradeshow.

Explore other Co-promotion Opportunities: Alignment with like-minded exhibitors and seminar speakers can direct traffic to your booth and provide possible partnership opportunities after the show.



Logistics and Staffing

Develop the At-Show Plan: Beginning with the end in mind (the goals), lay out a plan that clearly outlines the objectives and operation plan for staff at the tradeshow. Elements of the plan include:

- Set-up and break down of the booth
- What to bring to the show (business cards, pens, markers, tape, stapler, etc)
- What to wear to the show
- Staff schedules for the booth and the floor
- Plan to secure equipment so that the booth staff can freely move around
- Collateral and marketing materials to give away during the show
- Post show follow-up strategy that includes collateral packages

Share the Primary Objective with Booth Staff: The staff cannot achieve your goals and objectives if they don't know what they are. Hold a pre-show meeting with the attendees of the show and communicate the plan to them.

Establish the Ground Rules: Ensure everyone knows how to behave at the show. No texting from the booth, no food in the booth, stow personal items out of sightlines, fresh breath! Booth staff should also wear similar clothes that distinguish them as being from your company.

At-Show Best Practices

Booth Visual Presentation

The design of the booth should stop passersby or at least get them to take a second glance. Within five seconds, passersby should easily be able to discern the following:

- The product and service offerings of the company
- The primary benefit of those services to the passerby's company

To accomplish the preceding goals, the following best practices should be followed:

- **Branding:** The name and logo of the company should be displayed prominently and be visible from multiple angles.
- **Layout:** Keep tables, chairs and brochure displays to a minimum to enable staff to easily interact with attendees and to allow for a smooth flow of traffic through the booth. Select marketing materials based on the possible impact that they may have on prospects and minimize clutter.
- **Color:** People need to feel comfortable in your booth. Avoid the use of jarring color combinations such as red and blue. Instead, choose color combinations that are aesthetically pleasing.
- **Message:** The overriding message presented by the booth should be very simple and clear.



- **Identity:** The displayed identity in the booth should be consistent with that of the marketing materials. This includes business cards, the website, catalogues and any other collateral that will be provided to attendees.

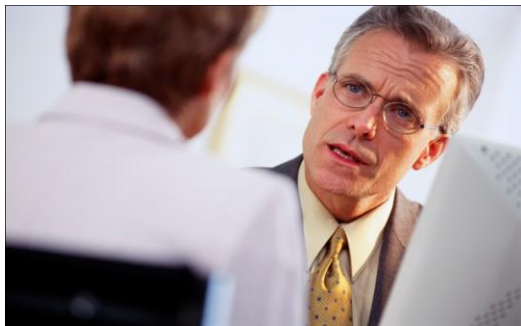
Interactive Sales Process

Active Approaches: Actively attempt to draw people into the booth. Stand closer to the aisle or outside the booth, rather than at the back of the booth. Tradeshows are a numbers game so staff members will need to approach as many people as possible.

When interacting, it is best to use open ended questions to get the prospect talking. A question such as “*What’s the most interesting thing you’ve seen in this show today?*” or “*What brings you to the show?*” or “*Are you familiar with us?*” is far more likely to start a conversation rather than the typical “*How are you?*” or “*Can I help you?*” Above all, staff members should be confident, enthusiastic and make the prospect feel at ease.

Qualification: Once the conversation has been initiated, the next goal should be to qualify the visitor and either advance them to the broadcast stage or eject them from the pipeline. Each conversation will be different, but the following information should be gathered:

- Is the visitor a client or repeat customer? If not, have they heard of your company?
- What do they know about the company?
- Are they looking to buy something or are they just browsing?
- What products/services are they looking for?



Broadcast: Tailor the broadcast to the needs and wants of the prospect. Concentrate on the benefits portion of the FAB model. During tradeshows, prospects will be inundated with information from a plethora of sources.

Active Follow-up: If the prospect is qualified and in the target market, booth staff should immediately attempt to set up a follow-up meeting.

“I don’t want to shoot from the hip on this. Let me do some research and we can continue this conversation outside of the show. Why don’t we tentatively schedule something now and I’ll call you in the next couple of days to confirm.”

If the prospect does not feel comfortable scheduling a meeting at the show, then offer to take down their information and schedule a time to follow-up on the phone.

The follow-up calls should be scheduled no later than five days after the show. On the back of the business card, write down some highlights of the interaction. This information will come in handy when doing the follow-up in a few days.



Other Leads: Throughout the interaction with the prospect, be cognizant of opportunities to ask for introductions to other people who might be a fit with your company's offerings.

Other Booth Activity

Kick-off Meeting: Ideally held in the booth, before the crowds arrive, the kick-off meeting reiterates the primary objective, each person's role and targets, and the ground rules. Finally, an upfront contract is set outlining how the team should handle any deviations from the plan. For example, if the team has agreed no texting while exhibiting or no food in the booth, how will they censure a rule-breaker?

Collecting Names: Collect business cards in a fishbowl only if you are using it as a basis to develop your permission based marketing list. If you are simply looking to build your database of attendees, the show organizers will often provide the attendee list to exhibitors as a benefit of exhibiting.

Lead Tracking: Develop a system for tracking leads. Asking for business cards from each prospect and taking a moment to record on the back one or two words about their interest will put you head and shoulders above the competition when it comes time to follow up. To keep the sales person sane in the follow up process, prioritizing the cards (hot, warm, cold) will allow them to be the most responsive to those prospects with the highest potential.

Mid-point Review: At the mid-point of the tradeshow, all staff should have a quick meeting to go over the progress made thus far. The goals and objectives of the show should be revisited and staff should share strategies that have worked very well.

Competitive Intelligence: Tradeshows are a great opportunity to gather competitive intelligence about what other companies are doing. Each person manning the booth should also take the opportunity to walk the show. Also, ask questions of the visitors to see what has had high impact and possibly adopt some of those ideas next time.

Collateral: These materials are expensive and often discarded. While it is important to have targeted collateral available, it is not preferable to hand it out to every person you meet.

Stress Management / Motivation: There is nothing that makes a stronger impression than the attitude of the booth staff. Plan how to keep the spirits and motivation up throughout the day. Breaks, water, practical jokes (within reason), all have a role to play in optimizing tradeshow performance.





Post-show Debrief: The show champion should take some time after the show to debrief the booth staff in terms of what worked and what didn't. They should also re-iterate the post-show game plan.

Post Show Best Practices

Prospect Follow-up

Prioritize and Allocate Leads: A follow up email should be sent as soon as possible after meeting a prospect. Create a generic email before the show that can be quickly customized and respond to all people that evening or the next morning. Having been prioritized in real-time at the show, more in-depth follow-up can be booked as time permits. Any leads that should be passed along to a more appropriate person are submitted to the show champion (where applicable) and redistributed within 24 hours of their receipt.

Enter the Sales Funnel: Insert all prospects into the sales funnel at the appropriate stage and begin to treat them as any other lead. Tradeshows allow the sales person to gain a wealth of information, sometimes from several stages in the process and out of the typical order. Resist the temptation to prematurely progress the prospect to a later stage until *all* advancement criteria have been met.

Update the CMS: Look up the lead in the database (customer management system) and update all appropriate information. This information should be delegated to administrative staff whenever possible.

Client Follow-up

Immediate Contact: Contact clients within five days with any information they requested. Depending on their interest level, either set up a meeting or ask them when a good time to call them next will be.

Results Measurement

Wrap Up: A common complaint heard from leadership is "I don't know what happened to all of those leads." The show champion should follow up with all people who were given leads. A final show wrap-up should be held one to three months post show to determine how the team performed against goals, what worked very well, and what to improve for next time.

Next Steps

Knowing what to do is one part of the equation. Getting people to do it is the other. Changing the attitudes, beliefs and actions of the employees in your organization is no easy task. Seamlessly integrating tradeshow activities with the other elements of the sales funnel is an important step in optimizing a company's **return on investment** for tradeshows.



To learn how other business leaders are making meaningful advances in this area contact Tara Landes at (604) 345-0424, or by email at tlandes@mrsibenchmarking.com.

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Tara Landes is President of MRSI Benchmarking Inc., a full-service benchmarking and change management firm committed to delivering lasting change in small and medium-sized businesses across the United States and Canada. Researching best practices from multiple industries, we take companies from where they are now to where they want to be, so they may achieve their goals and fully actualize their potential. Visit us on the web at www.mrsibenchmarking.com