



10.5 Secrets to Getting More Qualified Leads at Your Next Trade Show

With marketing budgets constantly being scrutinized, the importance of maximizing the return on your trade show investment is more important than ever. Trade show expense is the number two advertising expense for many companies, so you want to know how to get the most bang for your exhibiting buck.

As with any other marketing program, the success of your exhibition rests on how well it is planned out. “A major reason exhibitors fail is that they are inadequately prepared,” says Steven Hacker, president of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) based in Dallas. “There is an absolute need to do pre-show, onsite, and follow-up promotion. All of these components are not magic -- it’s what you do. Those who do it right get good results, and those who don’t get bad results. That’s not to say you can’t get lucky, but why rely on luck when you can do it right?”

Getting complete information about your trade show leads is essential to effective follow-up for greater sales results. Your booth representatives have the important responsibility of collecting, recording and qualifying trade show leads from visitors who come by your exhibit, and your sales force has the subsequent task of following up with these visitors after the show is over. If either group isn’t clear on how to best proceed, valuable leads can fall through the cracks. To help ensure success, follow the steps below. These 10.5 secrets have been gathered from the results and experiences of dozens of trade shows, along with several of the exhibition industry’s best practices and procedures that will give you the organization and tactics you need to make the most out of your trade show leads.

1. Establish Realistic & Quantifiable Goals

Make sure that the show(s) you are choosing have the appropriate audience and number of attendees. Develop a show qualification formula that calculates key ratios like attendee to exhibitor ratio. At least two months prior to the show, make sure to fill out a goals worksheet where you determine what measurable things you would like to accomplish like number of leads, conversations, and defined projects each sales person will capture at the show. This will determine how your overall show strategy will help you to meet your goals.

2. Define Incredible

Only 1% of exhibitors understand their target audience and have a show plan aimed to promote products and services that engage and attract their core buyer. Your tradeshow presentation must be simple and define who you are, what you do, and how you do it in a quick and easy way that invites visitors to learn more about you. The key is to define the type of prospects you are looking to attract, and then use a creative hook that engages them in a business conversation.

3. Pre-show Promotions

With a hall overflowing with fascinating products and services combined with time constraints, people need an incentive to come and visit your booth. The Trade Show Exhibitors Association (TSEA) reports that 80% of attendees preplan who they will visit at the show, but only 20% of exhibitors do any sort of pre-show promotion. 92% of trade show visitors at national and/or regional shows have not been contacted by an exhibitor. Obtaining a list of prior year show attendees and sending a pre-show mailer will increase the chance attendees will stop by your booth by 23%.

In addition, the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI) reports that including a promotional product with a pre-show mailing or an offer of a promotional product increases the



likelihood of an attendee stopping by the tradeshow booth by 41%. Whatever promotional vehicles you use, make sure that you give visitors a reason to come and visit you.

4. Offer Valuable Business-Related Incentives

The purpose of a giveaway is memorability. You want people to remember you after the show is over. Giveaways are a powerful way to show your gratitude for visitors spending time at your booth. You want something that will help distinguish you from the crowd, but remember: sometimes the best giveaways cost the least, such as free reports or consultation services in areas of your company's expertise.

Typically, free reports, discounts on services, or incentives for product purchasing will not create a buzz at your booth; however, when they're tied to a promotional product that creatively engages the customer into a conversation, you are one step closer to visitor qualification. The secret is that your tradeshow giveaway is for everyone that spends time learning more about your business, but your business offer will only be acted on by your true prospects.

5. Qualify Visitors

Your products and services are not for everyone, and that's okay. In addition, you will find visitors more interested in your giveaway than your company. That's why it's critical to have a tactical and professional plan to attend to every kind of visitor that stops by your booth. Welcoming an attendee into your booth by thanking them for visiting you is a great first step. This usually gets them to identify themselves and state why they have stopped.

Remember that almost everyone is tuned into the radio station WIIFM (What's In It For Me), which will work to your advantage if you let it. If you can get your prospect to do 80% of the talking, you will be tracking towards a valuable business conversation. While one of your objectives is to start business conversations, remember that ideally you don't want to spend more than three to four minutes with any visitor at the risk of losing another opportunity. Work with your sales team to know when to say, "I think we should exchange cards and set-up an appointment to talk further about this."

6. Sell Solutions Instead Of Products

With a hall overflowing with fascinating products and services combined with time constraints, people need something new, exciting, or different. First and foremost, their primary interest is in what's new! They are eager to learn about the latest technologies, new applications, or anything that will help save them time and/or money. Even if you don't have a new product or service to introduce, think about a new angle from which to promote your offerings.

Let's face it: there are at least half a dozen other competitors selling the same products as you at the show. If all you are doing is selling the same product in the same fashion, it's going to come down to price, and that's not going to be a rewarding sales experience.

7. Institute A Lead Tracking Process

There are many electronic lead scanning systems available today that allow you to scan attendees' badges, which then provide you with attendee contact information. You can even add comments fields for catalog requests, special notes, or designate follow-up classification and assigned sales person.

While these electronic systems are helpful, unfortunately, they are sometimes only as valuable as the data input on the attendee badge. Personal experience has shown that over 30% of the scanned badges had incomplete or inaccurate data transmitted. I recommend backing up every electronic scan



with a business card. Bring a separate college ring binder with a stapler for all real business conversations that require immediate action. Utilizing electronic scanners, business cards, and notebooks has proven to be the most effective way to guarantee you maximize the return on every tradeshow lead received.

8. Stream Line Your Post Show Follow-up

80% of all leads are not followed up on by sales people. The key to your trade show success is wrapped up in the lead management process. Plan for follow-up before the show. Show leads often take second place to other management activities that occur after being out of the office for several days. The longer leads are left unattended, the colder and more mediocre they become. It is to your advantage to develop an organized, systematic approach to follow-up.

One easy system is segregating your lead population into three categories: hot, warm, and cold. Hot leads receive a phone call within one week. Warm leads receive a personal email in one week and one follow-up phone call within two weeks. Cold leads get added to your email or catalog distribution list.

9. Sales Team Incentives

The longer you wait to call or contact a strong prospect who visited your booth, the less likely he or she will be to buy. Always make phone or written contact within one week of the trade show to make the most of your window of opportunity. Set timelines for follow-up, use a computerized database for tracking, and make sales representatives accountable for leads given to them. Run a sales contest and assign points based on post show contacts returned in one week, appointments set in the second week, presentations made in the third week, and every close within the first month.

10. Post Show Evaluation

Don't underestimate the importance of a post show evaluation. This is where you test the reality of the quantifiable goals you set several months ago and give some thoughts to what you might do differently next year. What was your return on investment, return on objective, or return on relationship? How many prospects did you attract? How about average visitors per hour? Did you find any new opportunities for PR, speaking engagements, learning activities, or networking events? Don't forget to include show-related events that can have a multiplying effect on your ROI.

10.5. Consult An Expert

Trial and error in the tradeshow arena can be a costly experiment. Consult with a trusted advisor and someone who has tradeshow experience before investing your marketing dollars. A good first step is to sit down with a promotional products consultant, marketing agency, or sales coach. These consultants should help you define goals, make a time-line, and establish a baseline budget needed to accomplish those goals. Whether you have been doing trade shows for years or new to exhibiting, consider talking with an expert in the field to maximize your return on investment.

**Looking for help with your next trade show?
Contact Artistic Toy Today.**