

Warne's Marketing

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Profiting from Trade Shows

It takes more than a snappy booth and some gregarious sales people.
It takes careful show selection, setting specific objectives, pre-promotion and a training program for booth personnel.

MOST EXHIBITORS DON'T receive full value from their participation at trade shows because:

1. Many (56%) do not have training programs for booth personnel;
2. One of three do not set quantitative objectives before a show;
3. Only 22% have pre-show promotion programs;
4. (Consequently) the typical exhibit reaches less than 50% of its potential prospects;
5. Only 17% provide management with return-on-investment data.⁽¹⁾

The one characteristic of exhibit personnel deemed most important by 79% of show attendees is product knowledge. Yet, 53% of attendees say exhibit personnel have "insufficient product knowledge."⁽²⁾ Attendees also have complaints about booth sales people not knowing the prices or delivery schedules for their products.

That's shocking when you realize that the major purpose of being in a trade show is to provide your sales people with the opportunity to make more contacts with more prospective customers than they could reach during their regular, day-to-day sales calls.

Trade shows are, in short, a sales effort and sales expense. Take any

show. Calculate the value of the time of your sales personnel. Then, compare that with your booth and display costs. Sales time and expenses will far outweigh the other costs, time after time.

Just being there is not good enough. Your sales people have to be "up" for a show. Visitors won't wait – 6% won't wait at all for a rep to talk to them; 11% will wait 30 seconds; 41%, one minute; 28%, three minutes and 14%, five minutes.⁽¹⁾

people by job function and business/industry who are prime prospects for your products and services.

Selecting a trade show involves thoroughly analyzing past attendance by studying the audit or attendance list. Plus checking this year's attendance promotion planned by show management. In many ways it's similar to selecting the best business publications to carry your advertising.

Once you've identified a prime show,

"Trade shows are a sales effort and a sales expense."

Those first impressions of dress, appearance, and cordially greeting prospects as they walk into your exhibit are absolute essentials. You just can't leave them to chance.

Training on product knowledge and pricing with question and answer quizzes, role playing and handling product demonstrations is also essential. You can't afford to "mess up."

In The Beginning

The first step is to select the right shows. It's the task of show management to attract the right type of people – the

the next step is to gain agreement on what you expect to gain by exhibiting in it – what, in fact, are your goals. Don't assume that the knowledge and interest of sales, advertising and marketing are the same. Get them together. Have them state their expectations. Then express the agreed goals as quantified objectives that can be compared to actual results in a post show analysis.

Start your planning process early. Sixteen weeks ahead of the move-in date for a show in your region. Twenty weeks ahead if it's in another province or state. Six months ahead if it's overseas.

Clearly outline responsibilities with a tight time-table. As sales time is the main investment, you might want to name an appropriate sales person as the chairman of planning.

Pre-Promotion is Vital

Some "76% of show visitors arrive with an agenda."⁽¹⁾ They've made up their minds what they want to see before they get to the show. To make sure they see you, mail an invitation before the show to prospects and customers. Be sure to mention the new products, services or technical developments you'll be demonstrating – those are the reasons why 50% of people attend shows.

Do expect that they'll be happy to hear from you. Some "83% of trade show attendees haven't been visited by a sales representative in the preceding 12 months."⁽¹⁾

Pay special attention to key customers and "hot" prospects. Send them personal invitations by letter, and phone follow-up to confirm the day and time you'll see them at the show.

Forget The "Joneses"

Don't fall into the trap of getting into a show just because your competitors will be exhibiting... or try to match them in space size or display "glitz." There's no relation between exhibit memorability and the successful communication of ideas about product features, uses and advantages.⁽²⁾ Do participate in a way that will assure you of a good dollar return on your investment of sales time.

When planning the physical arrangements and staffing of your exhibit, do remember the show visitors won't wait. Think about how you'll greet them. Then, about an area where you can have a serious "sit down" with the ones who really want to talk.

Develop your exhibit as a cohesive unit "creating the illusion of a small show-in-itself," so that it will hold "the attention of the visitor in spite of all the distractions posed by exhibits in the same area."⁽²⁾

Product benefits should be demonstrated in a simple, straightforward and believable manner "without undue emphasis on devices or statements which... are difficult to understand and to instantly accept."⁽²⁾ In short, follow the K.I.S.S. principle when exhibiting.

As they're part of your total marketing efforts, your exhibits should reflect your communications and marketing position statements. Don't let anyone design it as an orphan.

Send Literature After

Often the real selling starts after the show, with "fresh" prospects to "woo and conquer." Mail them requested literature right away – even while the show is on, if possible.

Don't give away literature at the show. A survey by The Wall Street Journal indicated that 75% of all literature at a trade show is discarded before attendees leave the site.

A week after the literature has gone out, get on the phone and telequalify all prospects who haven't been qualified at the show.

Post Planning

Have each person on booth duty report the sales calls they made during the show – from General Interest (wants literature) to Qualified (planning to purchase) to High Interest (wants quote or sales call) to Purchasers (awarded you with an order).

Combine the reports on total calls made and calculate the cost per call (total show costs ÷ sales calls). Compare that figure with your regular sales call costs.

Then have your show planning committee issue a post show report with recommendations on future participation.

Sources:

(1) Trade Show Bureau, Denver, CO

(2) Studies by the Industrial Advertising Research Institute, Princeton, NJ



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