

Tradeshow Exhibition: The Importance of Promotion

March 2008

Exhibiting at industry events provides a unique opportunity to gain exposure to a high volume of potential clients. To maximize investment and make the most of prospective business, participation must be well planned, executed, and last but not least, *promoted*.

The first step in trade show planning is to identify your core objectives. Start by answering the following key questions:

- Why are you exhibiting?
- Who is your target audience?
- What messages are you trying to communicate? Does your messaging communicate value to your target audience?
- How many key customer meetings, new business leads and follow-up meetings will equate to success for this show?

Generally objectives will relate to enhancing brand awareness, building strategic relationships, and obtaining or growing your market share through new prospects. Objectives may also involve introducing new products or services, maintaining or expanding existing customer relations, developing partnerships or alliances, among a host of other opportunities. Remember, as you form objectives, they should be specific, focused, timely and measurable.

HIT THE MARK WITH MESSAGING

Crafting solid messaging is an integral part of reaching tradeshow objectives. To connect with your target audience(s), clearly and concisely communicate the distinctive value your company brings.

- Establish your differentiators
- Communicate your value proposition
- Tie a theme around your message

Clarity and consistency are critical to successful messaging, and this messaging should be portrayed in your booth design and promotional efforts.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

Trade shows are like busy highways, with mobs of people whizzing up and down the lanes. Your booth is comparable to a billboard competing for attention on a congested highway. According to a 2006 Market Reality eSurvey, the average trade show showcases 286 exhibitors, making the competition steep. With so much competition, it is easy to miss the mark when it comes to getting your audience to take notice of your booth. With that said, how will you diversify and stand out to the crowd?

It is important to think strategically about your booth graphics and design. Long gone are the days of hanging banners and black drapes. In today's trade show world, it's about product, lifestyle and appealing sensory graphics. Your booth is the climax of the story you want to tell, and it is the

DID YOU KNOW?

- 22% of sales and marketing executives say trade shows are their number one source for leads
- 86% of trade show attendees are new contacts for those exhibiting
- 75% of attendees pre-plan the companies they will visit at the show
- 53% of attendees intend to buy within 12 months

Source: Center for Exhibiting Industry Research

chief tactic for capturing the visitor's attention. With only an average of three minutes to reach each prospect, your booth should provide a well-orchestrated message while stimulating the visual, auditory and olfactory senses of the passer by.

A lot to ask from a 10 x 10 space, but it is the catalyst for gaining more time with your audience, and should clearly state who you are, what you do and what you are offering. Graphics and messaging should be large, colorful and bold and be consistent with your theme for the event and corporate identity.

THE THREE STAGES OF PROMOTION

To reach defined objectives and maximize your company's return on a significant investment, it is imperative to promote your company's participation in the show before, during and after you exhibit. Generally, promotion will comprise up to ten percent of a tradeshow budget and will certainly be a primary catalyst for a successful event. Promotion efforts should reiterate key messaging and the event theme throughout all elements. When planning for a trade show, engage the following three stages of promotion.

STAGE 1: Pre-promotion

Pre-promotion increases booth traffic by 30%, according to the Center for Exhibiting Industry Research (CEIR), and provides the initial steps to success. To get started, identify your desired targeted audience. Consider initiating a variety of marketing mediums to reach your desired market and ultimately drive home your company's message.

For example, prior to participating in the next trade show, set an expectation by planning to increase existing customer revenues by a target amount through face-to-face meetings at the show. Prior to the event, send personalized emails to your existing clients, handwrite a letter and host a private client appreciation dinner while you have your audience captive.

If your goals are set on acquiring new business leads during the trade show, send email promotions or mailers prior to the event, inviting potential visitors to stop by your booth to see and learn more about your latest products and services. In addition, invite potential visitors to pick up a gift or enter a drawing to win a desirable prize. All of these promotions will help the attendee remember your company and could possibly land your company a spot on the attendee's agenda.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE TRADESHOW EXECUTION

1. Create an Itemized Budget
2. Set Measurable Objectives
3. Identify Target Audiences
4. Craft Messaging to Communicate Your Company's Value
5. Create a Promotional Theme
6. Design a Purposeful Booth
7. Participate in Other Events During Non-Expo Hours, i.e. General Sessions, Workshops and Socials
8. Implement a System for Tracking Leads at the Event
9. Follow-up on Leads within Two Weeks of the Event
10. Evaluate Event ROI-based Objectives

STAGE 2: At-show Promotion

At-show promotions create an experience for the visitor and, thus, generate enthusiasm for your presence at the show. Successful promotions attract, communicate and reinforce your company image, and often times include some type of take-away product/premium. A few helpful tips when selecting a promotional product/premium:

- It should be of high perceived value
- On the desk is better than in the desk
- It should provide a direct link to your products and services

Most importantly, create an interesting message to relay to visitors by educating your booth staff on how to speak to potential clients, conveying a consistent, accurate and concise story about your company that a potential client will remember. Additional quick and easy tips for improving your on-site presence at a trade show include coordinating your dress, purchasing available sponsorships from the hosting organization and inviting potential clients for meetings in your booth on the day of the show.

STAGE 3: Post-show Promotion

Post-show promotion increases the impact you make on visitors and reminds them of their experience with you at the show. By following-up with your visitors after the show, you create value and set yourself apart from your competition. Something as simple as a thank you letter or an email can speak volumes to a potential buyer. Deferred rewards, personalized promotional products and information packets are also great post-show communication tools. Regardless of your method for follow-up, target it for two weeks after the show, so that it is still fresh in their memory but does not get lost in their out-of-office catch up.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Your ability to plan and execute a comprehensive marketing campaign is critical to maximizing your return on investment. By setting quantitative objectives prior to the trade show, you set your company up for success for the post-event analysis.

- Did we showcase our new products successfully to our valued customers?
- Did we capture as many qualified leads as we expected?
- Are we likely to close new business from these leads?

These are all questions that must be answered when measuring success, which in turn will ultimately lead you down a path to the decision of whether or not to exhibit in next year's show.

UPCOMING KEY PRODUCE INDUSTRY EXPOS

United Fresh Las Vegas 2008

May 4-7, 2008
Las Vegas, NV
5,000 Participants
300 Exhibitors
www.unitedfreshshows.com

PMA Foodservice Conference and Exposition

July 25-27, 2008
Monterey, CA
1,500 Participants
150 Exhibitors
www.pma.com/foodservice

PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition

October 24-27, 2008
Orlando, Florida
17,000 Participants
800 Exhibitors
www.pma.com/freshsummit

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE BY REVISTING THE PAST

Things to consider when planning your budget and involvement in next year's trade shows are simple. First, take the pros and cons assessed when evaluating the quantitative objectives and compare the results amongst the various trade shows in which you have participated. Be sure to compare notes on the various marketing initiatives you engaged in and note what worked and what didn't. Second, don't be afraid to ask for help. By hiring an outside resource to manage your trade show presence, you give yourself time to continue running your business while the trade show marketing experts prepare you for the show.

The reality is trade shows are not cheap. If you are going to make the initial investment in exhibiting at a trade show, take the necessary steps to ensure that you have a successful show. Increase your return on investment by engaging a fully planned and well executed marketing promotion strategy before, during and after the show.

RESOURCES FOR TRADESHOW BUDGETING

One of the most overlooked areas of tradeshow planning, aside from effective promotions, is accounting for related expenses. The following resources are helpful when building tradeshow budgets:

Budget Template (Skyline Exhibits)

http://www.skyline.com/object-dsp/xls/tst_budget.xls

Budgeting Tips (Exhibitor Online)

<http://www.exhibitoronline.com/tips/category.asp?categoryfilter=Budgeting>

About DMA Solutions, Inc.

DMA Solutions, Inc. is a leading marketing and business development company in the fresh produce industry. Working as an integrated marketing resource, we provide customized solutions that positively impact our clients' bottom line. Our successful track record ranges from the enhancement of traditional sales and marketing tools to the development and implementation of cutting edge business strategies and marketing initiatives that enrich our clients' value proposition.