

A Winning Strategy for Successful Tradeshow Exhibition

May 2008

Exhibiting in a tradeshow can feel like a trip to Las Vegas – you can leave the show feeling like you hit the jackpot or like you were burning hundred dollar bills. But investing marketing dollars on a tradeshow should not feel like a gamble. You have a lot of influence over ensuring your outcome is a “sure thing.” The secret is to lay your wager on a winning strategy.

In spite of the bright lights, noisy crowds and over-stimulating atmosphere, tradeshow offer an outstanding opportunity to effectively showcase your company, products and services in person to a vast number of your existing and potential customers as well as industry influentials. If you manage your exhibit strategically, you can reap tremendous rewards.

Your goals may be to generate new sales leads, strengthen existing relationships, introduce new products, or all of these. While there are three key stages of tradeshow exhibition that will help to achieve these goals: (1) pre-event promotion, (2) onsite exhibition, and (3) post-event follow-up, this whitepaper focuses specifically on achieving success at the show itself.

By candidly evaluating your exhibition, you can determine how productive your booth is and what enhancements you can make prior to your next tradeshow to better accomplish your chances of success. Your assessment and the action you take with the results will directly correlate with your onsite performance.

In addition, if you exhibit at industry tradeshow like the Produce Marketing Association's (PMA's) Foodservice Produce Exposition, you are automatically entered into the “Best of Show” competition. The benefits of potentially winning this award are huge, including the opportunity to be the first to select your booth for the next year's Expo. This advantage alone makes it worth striving to achieve this designation.

BOOTH PRESENTATION

- How well is your corporate identity integrated into your booth design?
- How appealing are the design and graphical elements of your booth?
- How well does your booth clearly communicate your value proposition?
- Are you adhering to the show rules and exhibitor guidelines?

Your booth should clearly identify who you are, what you do, and what you offer – in an eye-catching, appealing way.

Your corporate identity – your company name, logo and tagline if applicable – needs to be a key focal point within your booth. Often times visitors plan ahead to visit specific companies at a show, and they need to be able to easily find you. Don't just rely on the company name sign provided by the show decorator – these are really just meant to show you where your booth is and should not be part of your overall display. Your offerings need to also be integrated within your booth design – so even if your brand is not easily recognized by a visitor, they will know what you can offer them by what you are showcasing.

The appeal of your booth design is another important factor. This includes incorporating attention-getting graphics as well as the overall structure and layout. If the design elements of your booth block you from your visitors so that they cannot easily approach you, such as a table in the front of your booth, this is a problem. Your furnishings need to adequately store any literature, promotional items or personal items so that you do not have boxes or other clutter in your exhibit space. Ensure any cords or cables are neatly tucked away.

To capture the attention of your target audience, you will want your booth to clearly communicate your company's value and offerings. This messaging is what highlights the distinctive qualities of your company. Printed messaging on your booth ideally would be within the top third so that it is not blocked by furnishings or people. Use the same rule of thumb for a video monitor. This can be closer to the front, as long as it doesn't block access into your booth.

Following the show regulations is a must. The rules exist for a variety of reasons, from safety to making the show experience more pleasant for all involved. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the policies of the show and highlight key points to your staff so that they avoid any inadvertent missteps.

PRODUCT PRESENTATION

- How effective are your product displays?
- How well is your product messaging communicated?

Clearly identifying what your offerings are – be it product or service – is an important element of your booth. This can be through actual product displays and/or through your booth graphics.



**FOODSERVICE
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PMA

**JULY 25-27, 2008
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA USA
www.pma.com/foodservice**

"BEST OF SHOW" CONTEST CRITERIA

Keep in mind the contest criteria when preparing for this show.

Booth Presentation

- Integration of company identity in booth design
- Design and graphic elements
- Clearly communicates message to attendee – gives a reason to stop for further consideration
- Adherence to show rules/exhibitor guidelines

Product Presentation

- Product displays
- Benefit messaging

Exhibit Personnel

- Professional appearance/etiquette
- Engagement with visitors
- Adequate staffing

Don't assume attendees already understand the value of your product or service. This is not always the case. Similar to your corporate messages, your product messages need to be clearly and succinctly communicated. This can be incorporated within your booth graphics and design, and also within your "elevator pitch." If your messaging is not well-delivered to the passer by, this can lead to lost opportunities.

EXHIBIT PERSONNEL

- Does your booth staff appear professional and are they utilizing proper tradeshow etiquette?
- How well do they engage with visitors?
- Is your booth adequately staffed?

To bring organization to the exhibit personnel, prepare a reference document for everyone who will be representing your company in the booth.

Note the preferred attire for your booth staff. To foster a cohesive look, one suggestion is to order shirts with company logos and have everyone wear the same colored pants. Be sure to order a style that flatters both men and women. And remind them about comfortable shoes. There's nothing like standing on a lightly padded cement floor all day in shoes meant for show but not for wear, and trying not to wince in pain because of this as you greet visitors.

While it may go without saying, maintaining proper etiquette is crucial. Have you walked by booths where people are eating, chatting amongst themselves (and ignoring you), sitting behind a table, or worse yet, working on their computers? It's pretty tough to engage with passers by when you are not paying attention to them. Be sure to include 'tradeshow etiquette 101' in your guidelines.

It's important that your booth staff is alert, enthusiastic and engaging with potential customers. That means they shouldn't look like they were networking until the wee hours of the morning at a local hotspot – whether or not they did so! And when someone visits the booth, your staff needs to know your company's key messages of focus, as well as the audience – be it a chef, menu developer, foodservice distributor, or restaurant operator. The best two words to use are "Tell me..." This shows visitors you are interested in who they are and what they have to say.

Having a booth schedule is another important factor to ensure you have adequate staffing coverage at all times. This can be a simple document that lists your staff and the hours they are expected to be working the booth. Ensure there is overlap in case someone is running late to their shift. A good rule of thumb is two people per 10 x 10' space. You do not want to overwhelm attendees with too many staff, but need enough staff to readily speak with someone visiting your booth.

COMPETING FOR BEST OF SHOW

Some key industry shows, like the PMA Foodservice Produce Expo, include a "Best of Show" contest. Achieving this designation will bring your company increased recognition from not only your potential customers, but also the industry as a whole – including your partners, competitors and the media.

Standing out from the competition with your booth speaks volumes to visitors about the levels of professionalism, quality and service your company provides. The impression you give is critical.

This contest provides a terrific incentive to showcase your company and be awarded for your efforts. In winning this contest, you will not only receive the extra publicity that distinguishes you from your competitors, you will also receive your preferred booth selection for next year, guaranteed. That is a tremendous marketing benefit.

There are many companies with fantastic booths at shows like the PMA Foodservice Expo. By employing your winning strategy, you are embracing the opportunity to achieve your goals and to shine above the rest.

Winning this contest is a great honor. But even if you do not take home the award, you will win with your potential customers. Take your exhibition to the next level and you will be rewarded with a richer overall experience at the event and beyond. And you won't leave feeling like there are holes in your pockets.

Tradeshows offer a tremendous opportunity to achieve numerous objectives for your company. Implementing the right plan will make your efforts pay off. If you need assistance evaluating or enhancing your current tradeshow strategy, DMA Solutions can help. Contact us for more information.



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"BEST OF SHOW" WINNER BENEFITS

First Place

- First choice of booth space for the 2009 Foodservice Produce Expo
- Engraved "Best of Show" plaque
- Announcement on the show floor
- Recognition in a PMA press release
- Recognition on PMA's Web site including pictures of the booth

Second Place

- Announcement on the show floor
- Recognition in a PMA press release
- Recognition on PMA's Web site

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