

My top 10 tips on how to be an outstanding exhibitor!



From TWA's Event Expert, Chris Powell

My top ten tips are designed to help exhibitors get the very best return on investment from their attendance at exhibitions.

1. Presence: Exhibitions can provide outstanding sales, marketing, research, branding and financial rewards for those companies who take the time to plan their exhibit effectively. Exhibitions are the only sales and marketing medium that delivers pre-qualified visitors to your company's stand, in a face-to-face selling environment. In short, they are the most cost effective way of getting in front of potential customers. Therefore plan your visit with the up most care and attention. Please remember that 80% of exhibition visitors are personally involved in buying products and services. So you must ensure your exhibition stand is stimulating and exciting, a place where your products and services are brought to life.

2. Presentation: designing your stand. Your stand is your stage; it speaks volumes about you and your products and services and therefore reflects your company's personality. Your stand needs to be striking, bright, coordinated and contain bold simple messages about who you are and what you do. As an exhibition is a live marketing experience you need to consider how you can encourage your visitors to participate, interact and involve themselves in what you do. Decide what you want to achieve by being at the exhibition. Do you want your stand visitors to talk to you, to join, to buy, to be excited by what you can do for them and or what problems of theirs you can solve?

3. Planning your visit: setting objectives. You must set clear objectives for your company's participation. These objectives provide direction for every aspect of your company's exhibition participation: your marketing strategies, branding plans, budgets, exhibit architecture, graphics, products, literature, IT support and your stand staff. Typical objectives might be to increase sales through new orders or to introduce new products or services.

4. Creating a buzz on your stand: visitor engagement strategy. You need to have an opening gambit - an open question to allow a conversation to be started. It is vital that you have a reason for visitors to come to your stand, perhaps to collect a free gift, to meet someone, to win something, to experience something! It is also important that visitors to your stand are offered the chance to interact with it; so your stand content must be interesting and relevant. Think how you can provide a real company experience, in which your visitors can get involved in. What can they try out, solve, decide and or experience?

5. People: Stand Staff. The rule of thumb for all exhibitions is that 80% of the success of your stand will come down to your stand staff. People buy from people. With this in mind you must therefore, only put your best staff on your stand. In other words the staff that are the most enthusiastic about your company and its products. All of your stand team must understand what they are there to do and be charming, confident and knowledgeable.

6. People: staff training and stand rules. As you now know how important a role your staff play, it may be necessary to provide them with some training, e.g. how to create a good impression, how to present themselves, how to sell from a stand. They only have 5 seconds to make a positive impression with visitors to your stand. The idea is that stand staff need to first sell themselves, sell the company and then sell its products or services. It will be necessary to set some stand rules e.g. no mobiles, laptops, coffee cups, no huddles etc. The idea is that your stand staff should be having a great time with your audience and not their colleagues.

7. Promotion: Once you have signed the contract and are going to exhibit, it is time to start telling people you are going to have a stand at the exhibition. Essentially, using show specials, emails, newsletters, adverts, sponsorship... you will be telling first time exhibition attendees, returning visitors, the Press, key industry persons - where your stand is located and what you are exhibiting, branding, demonstrating and or selling. It is important at this point to be realistic about the number of visitors you can expect to meet at an exhibition: usually 1 in 10 exhibition visitors have a genuine interest in your company.

8. Promotion: pre-show. Exhibition research consistently demonstrates that pre-show activity is worth the effort. 75 % of all visitors arrive at an exhibition with a predetermined agenda; who they intend to see and what they plan to evaluate and buy. You want your company to be one of them and a show offer is the best way to do that. Do bear in mind that the exhibition organiser and you are jointly responsible for getting a quality audience to the show! You must enthusiastically engage in pre-show promotion! Let all your existing customers know you are going to be there and while you are doing that contact your top 10 hottest prospects and let them know too.

9. Production: Making it happen. Exhibition managers must understand what needs to happen on the ground to ensure a successful event. Operational plans detailing all arrival times, staffing levels and roles, contractor build times, sequence of arrivals, exhibition opening times, and the purchase of essential exhibition day equipment are just some of the plans you need to have in place.

10. Post exhibition follow-up. The exhibition is over; you have your leads and now it is time to follow-up all your leads with the hottest ones, first on the list to be spoken to. It is important to know that 75% of all leads gathered at exhibition are not followed up! Hot leads go cold very quickly, so allocate as much time as necessary to ensure that you follow up your leads as quickly as possible after the show is over. All visitors to your stand should receive at least a simple thank you, a sales visit, phone call or information pack. You must devise a follow-up procedure and put it into practice immediately - hot leads go cold very quickly.