

Planning for a Virtual Enterprise Trade Show

Planning for trade shows should start at least a few months in advance. If you wish to have a significant presence at a VE Trade Show, either domestic or international, you should plan to set up a booth, either on your own or with a key partner. Booth space is limited and must be reserved in advance.

Here are some tips for getting maximum benefit from your trade show appearances.

1. Evaluate and select trade shows carefully.

Participating in a show requires a major investment of time, money, and resources. Be tough in your evaluation of a show's worthiness. Are the attendees likely customers for your organization? Exposure to a few hundred very qualified targets is better than exposure to thousands of generalists who are very unlikely to be interested in your business. Remember, these trips are not a vacation.

2. Research the trade show.

Before you do anything, contact the organizers of the show. Understand everything you need to know about the show, including a proposed or final competition schedule, registration information and forms, floor plans, exhibit specifications, invitations for potential speakers, and other important details.

3. Identify your goals.

Be specific about the things you want to accomplish as a result of your participation in the show. Do you want to increase visibility, gain exposure to a large number of customers who might be interested in your products, or check out the competition? Sell a certain amount of products or services? Concrete goals are important to determine the value of the trade show to your organization.

4. Define measurements of success.

For each goal, determine a way to measure its success. Make these measurements as specific as possible. You could plan to hand out 1000 brochures, obtain contact information for at least 200 prospects, and make \$75,000 in sales. These benchmarks will help you decide whether the show was worth the expense.

5. Put your show plan in writing.

The plan should include a workable schedule, a comprehensive list of preparation activities, and an individual assigned for each task. You cannot leave things to chance, or else Murphy's Law (**Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.**) will surely prevail!

6. Develop a key message for your booth exhibit.

Like good advertising, a good exhibit clearly communicates one major message. This draws in more prospects to your booth than an unfocused list of messages.

7. Design an open, inviting booth.

An open booth design invites attendees to come in. Your logo should be big enough to be seen from a good distance. Use interesting graphics to draw people's attention. For demos, laptops and flat-screen monitors are space-efficient. Keep in mind you may be asked to share a booth with another company for trade shows outside New York.

8. Advertise your show participation.

Use tag lines such as: "see us at Booth 152 at the Youth Business Summit" on your website and other communications leading up to the show (even if those releases are about something unrelated). You could send invitations to other firms to come visit you at booth 152.

9. Order all necessary supplies, including brochures and giveaways.

If your marketing materials (**catalogs, flyers, brochures, business cards, banner**) need to be updated or redesigned, take care of this early. You don't want to run the risk of having no brochures to hand out. Design forms for filling out customer information—clear forms eliminate guesswork. Consider giveaways to generate attention and a sense of fun. These don't have to be expensive. Pens with your web address and a catchy slogan can be very effective.

10. Design PowerPoint presentations and demos for the booth.

These will draw attendees to your booth and help them learn more about your business. Presentations will allow you to communicate information to many prospects at once.

11. Create a unique identity for your booth staff.

Decide on the dress code for your staff. Matching blazers, T-shirts, polo shirts or even boutonnieres will make your representatives easily identifiable. Make sure each employee has a name tag.

12. Train your exhibit staff before each show.

This is very important! Your staff needs to know what is expected of them. They need to be briefed on all new products, programs and initiatives that should be emphasized.

They must know how to run the demos and presentations, and they should know some basic trouble shooting. Nothing looks more unprofessional then demos that don't work.

During the Trade Show

1. Set up a rotating booth schedule for your staff.

Your staff needs breaks for lunch and relaxing as well as visiting other trade show booths. They will be more cheerful if they don't have stay at the booth all day long.

2. Remind staff to record all customer information.

Make sure you accurately record all sales data. It is important that you have a process to record your trade show sales, you may use sales books and you can also record your sales via google forms or spreadsheets. Encourage your staff to record everything they can learn about potential customers. Stress the importance of getting contact information and email addresses. (Creating an information form as suggested above will make this easier.)

3. Encourage staff to greet people warmly and smile!

Amazingly, this is often forgotten. An inviting attitude can give a valuable first impression. The staff should avoid having their backs to the entrance, or taking phone calls while on duty. A friendly greeting to passersby may encourage them to stop rather than simply walk by.

After the Trade Show

1. Send requested literature immediately.

Send requested material within 24 hours. A quick response is your second opportunity to make a favorable impression. (Your performance in the booth is the first.)

2. Include a teaser in the email subject line.

Be sure to mention your organization's name and the name of the trade show in the email subject line, so they know your email is not junk mail.

3. Help your customers take the next step.

Make sure your packages make responding easy for potential customers by including your web address and information on the opportunities available to them.

4. Keep track of your prospects.

Nothing signals the success of your trade-show effort better than having prospects purchase your products or having the media spotlight your efforts. Keep a record of the customers who found out about your products through the trade show. Use these results to demonstrate the show's return on investment.

5. Analyze "lessons learned."

After each show, evaluate what went well and what didn't. Critique each aspect of the show and ask others for comments. Pay special attention to feedback regarding communication to prospective customers. The "lessons learned" will help improve your efforts in future shows.

Trade Show Checklist

Trade Show Booth Items

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Signage for table | 8. Calculators |
| 2. Banner | 9. Pens |
| 3. Sales books / Order forms | 10. Tape, string, stapler, staples, |
| 4. Catalog / Product description
sheets / Brochures | highlighter, scissor |
| 5. Giveaways | 11. Hand sanitizer |
| 6. Decorations | 12. Business cards |
| 7. Tablecloth | 13. Name badges |
| | 14. Extension cord / Surge protectors |

Trade Show Do's & Don'ts

Do

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Dress professionally | 6. Ask open ended questions, avoid
questions that can be answered by
a yes or no |
| 2. Smile at people as they approach
your booth | 7. Ask questions that will start a
discussion |
| 3. Wear your name badge | 8. Relate questions to your industry or
products/services |
| 4. Prepare a few engaging questions
to ask potential customers | 9. Keep your booth looking clean &
professional |
| 5. Avoid questions such as – Can I help
you? | |

Don't

1. Eat in your booth, bottled water is permitted
2. Chew gum while you are in your booth
3. Don't sit down while you are in your booth
4. Ignore customers by chatting with colleagues
5. Leave the booth empty
6. Talk on your cell phone