



# Exhibitor Planning Guide

## Table of Contents

1. Setting a focused objective .....	2
2. Training your booth staff.....	5
3. Creating a winning display .....	6
4. Pre-show promotion .....	7
5. Getting the most from collateral materials .....	8
6. Be sure to utilize the power of demonstrations .....	9
7. Approaching visitors .....	10
8. Generating leads.....	11
9. Disengaging .....	13
10. Effective follow-up.....	14

# 1. Setting a focused objective

Planning an exhibit requires a myriad of decisions. The process of arriving at the right conclusion is greatly simplified by setting a focused objective. Once an objective is in place each challenge the exhibit planner faces has greater clarity. Setting a focused objective has three benefits:

1. It acts as a rudder steering all booth activities;
2. It provides the tools needed to access the success of an exhibit; and
3. It gives booth staff direction for their time at the display.

## Tips:

- Focus on one objective only. Too many objectives create confusion in the attendee's eyes as well as the exhibit planner.
- Know how your exhibit fits into your overall marketing plans. Exhibiting is a marketing activity and your objective should compliment your corporate marketing plans.
- Understand the type of objectives that are achievable. Objectives fall into two broad categories, choose one that best fits into your plans:
  - Sales related (S) – objectives lead directly to a sale. They include such things as gathering qualified leads or networking with decision makers.
  - Communication related (C) – objectives lead indirectly to increased business such as awareness, image and market research.
- Quantify your objective. Having an objective that is not quantified is creating an exhibit based on vague hopes.
- Make your objective realistic. Having an objective that is based on pipe dreams is frustrating. Having an objective that is too low does not provide a challenge. The trick is to find one that is achievable with a bit of effort.

- In many cases exhibitors are faced with long sales cycles, which means that actual sales might not be realized for 6-12-18 months after the show. Create objectives that can be achieved in the short term (number of qualified leads, number of product demonstrations etc.).

A realistic objective for my next show is:

---

---

Now quantify this objective by completing the following sentence. In order to consider this event successful, I need to leave at the end of the day with:

---

---



# Use this helpful list of 100 show objectives as a guideline.

Show Objectives fall under 2 categories - Sales related (S) or Communications related (C).  
Select the ones that apply to your specific goals for this event. Be ready to quantify your objectives.

1. Sell products and services on the show floor (S)
2. Gather qualified leads for post show company follow-up (S)
3. Introduce new products or services to a market (S)
4. Demonstrate new products or services (S)
5. Open new markets (S)
6. See buyers who are not usually accessible to sales personnel (S)
7. Find the decision makers (S)
8. Understand prospects decision-making process (S)
9. Support the decision influencers (S)
10. Be compared to the competition (S)
11. Solve customer's problems (S)
12. Find dealers, reps and agents (S)
13. Develop leads for dealers, reps and agents (S)
14. Create customer lists (S)
15. Reach your customers at a low cost per call (S)
16. Distribute product samples to your market (S)
17. Reinforce your marketing plans (S)
18. Distribute product or service information (S)
19. Introduce a new service (S)
20. Showcase new products and services (S)
21. Establish business relationships with international buyers (S)
22. Introduce new products and services (S)
23. Support dealers, reps and agents (S)
24. Influence customer attitudes (S)
25. Create high R.O.I. opportunities (S)
26. Find new business location possibilities (S)
27. Host special industry hospitality events (S)
28. Market research for future product developments (S)
29. Introduce new production methods (S)
30. Direct influence on decision makers (S)
31. Reduce sales costs (S)
32. Entertain special customers (S)
33. Distribute promotional tools (S)
34. Have a portable showroom (S)
35. Introduce product uses through audio or video programs (S)
36. Interact with a highly targeted audience (S)
37. Give your prospect an opportunity to experience your product/service (S)
38. Open doors for future sales calls (S)
39. Present live product demonstrations (S)
40. Introduce support services (S)
41. Create a three dimensional sales presentation (S)
42. Open foreign markets quickly (S)
43. Demonstrate non-portable equipment (S)
44. Shorten the buying cycle (S)
45. Relate to the competition (S)
46. Generate excitement for new products/services (S)
47. Enhance word-of-mouth market (S)
48. Find other exhibiting opportunities (S), (C)
49. Overcome unfavorable publicity (S), (C)
50. Demonstrate new usages of existing products or services (C)
51. Give your audience an opportunity to meet the experts (C)
52. Give your CEO an opportunity to meet your customers (C)
53. Meet your buyers face to face (C)
54. Learn about your competition (C)
55. Obtain feedback on new products (C)
56. Obtain feedback on existing products (C)
57. Conduct market research (C)
58. Educate dealers, reps and agents (C)
59. Find personnel (C)
60. Educate personnel (C)
61. Reinforce company image to a market (C)
62. Establish a new company image with a market (C)
63. Support your industry (C)
64. Highlight new products and services to the media (C)
65. Highlight new company initiatives to the media (C)
66. Diffuse customer complaints (C)
67. Conduct a sales meeting (C)
68. Support corporate theme programs (C)
69. Introduce a new promotional program (C)
70. Educate your customers (C)
71. Introduce new techniques (C)
72. Re-position your company in a market (C)
73. Change the perception of your company in a market (C)
74. Expose new employees to an industry (C)
75. Learn new industry trends (C)
76. Network with colleagues (C)
77. Network with industry professionals (C)
78. Demonstrate your commitment to a market (C)
79. Gather competitive intelligence (C)
80. Attend the show functions (C)
81. Develop strategic relationships (C)
82. Find new business opportunities (C)
83. Uncover joint venture opportunities (C)
84. Unveil licensing opportunities (C)
85. Determine the effectiveness of marketing and promotion campaigns (C)
86. Have company experts showcased at seminars and workshops (C)
87. Influence industry trends (C)
88. Build sales force morale (C)
89. Understand / uncover your customer attitudes (C)
90. Give the "behind the scenes" personnel a chance to meet the customer (C)
91. Introduce community awareness initiatives (C)
92. Find ways of reducing exhibiting costs (C)
93. Developing new marketing techniques (C)
94. Creating an image for your company (C)
95. Publicize company associations (C)
96. Explain the effects of corporate changes (C)
97. Bring your senior management closer to your customer (C)
98. Increase corporate profitability (C)
99. Explain new programs (C)
100. Round out corporate marketing mix (C)

## 2. Training your booth staff

Often the best sales people find themselves ill equipped to handle the pressures of a show. Working a show is different than working anywhere else and the reason is time. You simply have too many people and too little time. To help your booth staff handle the pressures of a show, conduct a pre-show briefing.

Your briefing should include the following items:

- Your objectives. Each staff member should know their corporate and personal objective.
  - The booth – A quick overview of the booth, demonstration materials, collateral materials, lead cards, etc will help make the booth a bit friendlier to work.
  - The show – Your staff should learn the layout of the show including amenities, special events and other exhibitors. You never know when an attendee will need some direction.
  - The audience – It is crucial to have a detailed description of your target customer and be able to articulate this to your booth staff. Knowing ahead of time who might be attending will keep them on their toes as they are talking to show visitors.
  - Special promotions – If you have undertaken any pre-show promotion campaigns, make sure your staff knows about them.
  - The skills – All staff whether they are seasoned professionals or neophytes need to understand the skills of approaching strangers, qualifying, making the presentation and disengaging. Without a grasp of these four skills all is lost.
  - The do's and don'ts of exhibiting. While much of these may sound like common sense, they are important reminders to your staff. Create a list that applies to your specific situation. You may want to include the following:
    - Don'ts – smoke, sit, eat (send one person at a time to get lunch), make outgoing calls, leave the booth or read.
    - Do's – Dress appropriately, be honest, keep the booth neat and attractive, treat all visitors equally, and act professionally at all times.
  - Other considerations my booth staff should be aware of are:
-

# 3. Creating a winning display

The purpose of your display is threefold

1. To attract visitors attention
2. To create an impression of your company
3. To differentiate you from the competition

The challenge is to meet these three objectives in a small space.

The following tips are designed to help you create a display that your customers will remember.

- Keep the display simple. Overcrowding the booth with excessive information adds to the confusion that show attendees already feel.
- Stay focused. Don't try to tell your audience too much. Know why you are at the show and stay focused on your objective.
- Use lighting. Lighting your display helps your booth stand out in the crowd. A simple clip-on light focused on the backdrop will suffice.
- Use a minimum amount of words. A good sign tells the audience who you are and why they should visit your booth in seven words or less.
- Add motion. Static booths do not have the same drawing power as a display that has motion. Motion can be in the form of a demonstration, a product display, video or lights.
- Stand in-front of your booth. Don't let the booth act as a barrier between you and the customer. Position yourself in-front of the display to one side so you are not blocking the display.
- Keep the display neat. It is easy to let your display get cluttered. Constant attention must be given to the tidiness of the booth.
- Have a place for office supplies. Business cards, lead sheets, brochures, staplers, pens etc are all part of doing business, however, they can be a distraction and take away from the impact of the booth. The trick is to have a dedicated place, out of sight, for these items.
- Pass the "Granny test" Once your display is finished and assembled stand back and ask your self "Would my Granny know what this display is all about in three seconds?" If the answer is yes - good job. If the answer is no - well, back to point number one.

# 4. Pre-show promotion

The CEIR reports that 76% of all show visitors arrive with an agenda. Your job is to ensure that your customers plan to stop by your booth while they are at the show. Many exhibitors will mail invitations to their current and prospective customers but few exhibitors do it well.

Here are some tips to get more from your pre-show mailings, put you on your customer's agenda and put you ahead of the competition.

## Tips:

- Obtain a past attendee list for the specific event you plan to participate in (if available). Fees for these lists vary.
- Create an invitation that tells the prospect who you are, your booth number and a reason they should visit your booth. This reason could include information about a new product or service, a special demonstration, a chance to hear a member of your organization who is a guest speaker or an opportunity to have some of their specific questions answered by a product specialist.
- Have show invitations printed.
- Send your invitation 2-3 weeks prior to the show.
- Send two additional reminders, one by fax 7 days before the show and the other by e-mail 2 days before.
- Consider enhancing your exposure at the show with sponsorship opportunities. These give your organization additional exposure to the show attendees through FBC promotions as well as visibility the day of the event.

# 5. Getting the most from collateral materials

Attendees at a show often leave overwhelmed. They are victims of too much information in too short a time span. The astute exhibitor recognizes this phenomenon and uses it to his advantage. One of the best tools at your disposal is your collateral material - product and corporate brochures, information sheets and other related documentation. The trick is to get it into the right hands and ensure it will be read.

## Tips:

- Take a minimum number of copies. Lots of material requires lots of table space as well as storage.
- Keep the materials clearly and neatly displayed. Plan to display your catalogues in freestanding or wall hung display racks. Leaving them loosely on your table can create a mess.
- On the front of each catalogue mark the words "Booth Copy". This eliminates the "Hit and Run" behavior you see at many shows where attendees take brochures and neglect to spend time talking to booth staff.
- Offer to send it later. When an attendee asks for a catalogue simply offer to send it to them after the show is over. This removes the necessity for the prospect to carry excess paper around the show and it is the beginning step to creating a qualified lead.
- If the prospect insists on taking the catalogue with them then circle a few items you want them to notice later.
- If you are promising to send a brochure later, ensure you have ample supply back at the office so these promises can be kept as quickly as possible.

## 6. Be sure to utilize the power of demonstrations

Static displays do not have the drawing power that is inherent in one that uses motion. Of all the tools at your disposal, motion is the most powerful. However, simply pointless motion, while attracting attention may be creating the wrong impression. The best, and most rewarding motion to have in the booth is the use of a product or service demonstration. The CEIR reports that the second most memorable thing from an attendee's point of view is a good product or service demonstration (after booth size).

### Tips:

For tangibles;

- In the case of a product, bring the real thing. This gives the attendees an opportunity to see, hear, touch, taste or smell your product. The more senses you appeal to the greater is their commitment.
- When your product is too big or expensive to bring to the show, a scale model or video will suffice. It still gives the sense of motion and a chance for your audience to see the product in action.
- If your product is too small then a "blown-up" version adds an element of surprise and fun to your exhibit.

For intangibles;

- Service providers who have no tangible product to display should think in terms of benefits - what does your service do for the prospect?
- Pick the most powerful and build a demonstration that clearly shows how this benefit can be achieved.
- Keep the demonstration short. A minute or two is ample to wet the prospects appetite to want to learn more in a post-show meeting.

At my next show the product this audience would be most interested in seeing demonstrated is \_\_\_\_\_.

The materials and equipment I need to conduct an effective demonstration are:

---

---

---

# 7. Approaching visitors

Every exhibitor has a choice to be either pro-active or re-active. Reactive exhibitors are those who stand at their display and wait for attendees to talk to them. Pro-active exhibitors don't wait for the attendee. They make the first move. Those who act pro-actively talk to more attendees and therefore get better results.

Approaching strangers can be an intimidating experience. Often exhibitors use time worn lines like "how are you doing today?" or "Enjoying the show?" when they don't know what else to do. The trick is to create opening questions that get the attendee into a meaningful conversation, which is one that smoothly follows through to the next step, which is Qualifying.

There are two rules to the creation of a good approach question:

1. Don't ask a question unless you want the answer. Questions that ask the attendee about their health or the weather are boring, insincere and lead to a dead end. Who wants to stand around talking about the weather when there are other prospects walking by the booth?
2. Don't ask questions unless you know what to do with the answer. Often questions such as "Have you seen our product before?" or "Do you know our company?" lead to a simple yes or no answer. The astute exhibitor knows the question may lead to information they need to qualify the visitor, is prepared for all answers and is never stuck for a reply.

Here are a few examples of good opening questions for your consideration:

"What brings you to the show this year?"

"What caught your eye in our booth?"

"Have you found what you were looking for at the show?"

Create two opening questions you can use at the next show.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

# 8. Generating leads

## Tips:

- Clearly define your target market and articulate this description to those people who will be working the show.
- Create a formal lead sheet. This is a pre-printed form where all the information gathered about each prospect is recorded. (Never rely on business cards as your sole source of information.)
- Record information on the spot. As you are talking to a prospect and asking them your qualifying questions, record the information immediately on the lead sheet.
- Gather information in six ACTION areas:

Authority - What role does this prospect play in the overall decision?

Capability - Does this person or their department have the capability of using your products or services?

Time - What is the time frame for a decision to proceed?

Identity - Record the prospect's name, title and contact information.

Obstacles - Are there any barriers to your firm conducting business with this person or their department?

Need - does this person or their department have a need for your products or services?

# Lead Card

EVENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

EVENT CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

LEAD TAKEN BY: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Authority: \_\_\_\_\_

Capability: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Obstacles: \_\_\_\_\_

Need: \_\_\_\_\_

Promised Follow - Up: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# 9. Disengaging

Every exhibitor has been faced, at one time or another, with an attendee who won't go away. When the job is done it's important to take the initiative and disengage. Disengaging is not rude or impolite but is a necessary step. Unless the exhibitor is prepared to end the conversation, time is being stolen from both the visitor and the exhibitor.

The difficulties of ending a conversation can be greatly lessened by using the booth, the show and its amenities to assist with the job. Here are some tips that will help make the job easier:

## Tips:

- Don't use catalogues, drawings or give-away as conversation openers, save them until the end.
- As soon as the job is complete in that you have whetted the visitor's appetite and ascertained some future course of action, it's time to disengage.
- Don't worry about being premature. If the attendee wants more information they will ask for it.
- If they bombard you with questions, handle it like a buying signal and ask for an appointment at a later date to discuss your product or service in detail.
- Don't be afraid to pass the prospect along to a colleague who may be better equipped to handle the questions.
- Some good disengagement lines are:
  - "Thanks for dropping by, I am going to make sure that catalogue is on your desk first thing Monday morning. I hope you enjoy the rest of the show."
  - "I am glad that we had a chance to look at your situation. There is another exhibitor down the hall who you might also want to talk to. Good luck with your project."

Create two disengaging questions you can use at the next show.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

# 10. Effective follow-up

Once the show is over the hard work has just begun. Exhibitors who ignore their post-show responsibility are missing out on the true rewards available from their exhibits. The CEIR reports that nearly 80% of all leads gathered at trade shows are mishandled. The conclusion then is that with a small bit of effort and more effective planning, any exhibitor has the opportunity of placing themselves well ahead of the competition.

## Tips:

- Planning your post-show follow-up is part of your pre-show activities. Leaving your follow-up plans until the show is over is leaving your fate in the hands of luck - sometimes it works and other times it doesn't. A more rational approach is to do it ahead of time.
- Get in touch with every visitor. Each prospect you met at the show deserves some acknowledgement. Separate your prospects into three or four major categories such as hot leads, decision makers, future leads, etc.
- Your first contact should be in writing. Letters can be prepared ahead of time and ready to go out immediately after the show. Letters can be distributed either by mail, fax or e-mail depending on what works best with the prospect.
- Assign an administrative assistant to handle the initial follow-up. With the letters written, lead sheets complete and a supply of catalogues, envelopes and postage, the job can be assigned to support staff for completion. This leaves your sales staff free to do what they do best - sell.
- Believe it or not, 18% of expo attendees report they have never received materials from show exhibitors they met. Another 43% report they received follow-up material after they had made a buying decision.
- Not everyone is going to buy your product or service now. Effective follow-up can double your show results. Government sales cycles can take longer. Make sure you are in front of potential buyers before, during and after procurement activity occurs

Here is a guideline to follow as you create your follow-up plans:

SHOW NAME:

---

**To improve the quality of your leads**

Do you have a lead card?	Yes	No
Does your staff have the necessary training to complete these lead cards?	Yes	No
Does staff training include the challenge of in-booth presentations that leave the prospect wanting to do business in the future?	Yes	No
Has the booth been designed as a lead generating environment?	Yes	No
What booth activities are scheduled to help exhibitors attract prospects?		
Literature	Yes	No
Promotional Products	Yes	No
Product Demonstrations	Yes	No
In-booth activities	Yes	No
Seminars	Yes	No
Drawing	Yes	No
Interactive Activities	Yes	No
Games	Yes	No
Attractions	Yes	No
Other	Yes	No

---

**To ensure advanced planning and effective follow-up**

Do you have the right systems in place for follow-up?	Yes	No
Do you have the right personnel for follow-up?	Yes	No
Can leads be sorted in order of priority?	Yes	No
Are follow-up letters completed in advance?	Yes	No
Are there collateral materials available?	Yes	No
Will you be able to fulfill promises made at the show?	Yes	No
Are plans in place for on-going contacts?	Yes	No

---

**Assign accountability for follow up**

Who gets the leads?	Sales	Marketing
What do they do with them?	Handle	Forward
How do they account for their activities?	Report	Sales
Who is responsible for following-up with the sales reps?	Manager	Marketing
Who is responsible for final reporting?	Sales	Marketing

# Notes

# Notes