

# Measuring Exhibit Results

By Skip Cox

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This report is one in a series of reports all geared to helping exhibiting companies achieve better results and gain value from exhibition participation. The complete series is available at: [www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org)

CEIR extends special thanks to Skip Cox.

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Exhibit programs are under increased pressure to measure results. Extensive research over the years has proven that participation in industry exhibitions is successful in accelerating the sales process, but ultimately management wants to know what was “our,” return on investment. Today’s management is focused on ROI for all functions of business, and exhibitions are no exception.

## What Is ROI?

A number of variations of the term ROI are being used to better define exhibit performance. But whether results are referred to as ROI, ROO (Return on Objectives), ROR (Return on Relationships) or RO whatever, it boils down to measuring whether the objectives management considers worth achieving for the investment they are willing to make have been achieved. If management believes that objectives as defined by **Y** will accelerate the sales process, and is willing to spend **X** to achieve **Y**, then **Y** is what is measured. If **Y** is fully achieved for the agreed upon investment of **X**, then the objectives have been achieved on a cost effective basis, and the return on investment should be considered positive.

These objectives can be marketing communications related (e.g., message conveyance, awareness building), brand enhancement (e.g., changing or enhancing perceptions) or sales related (e.g., generating leads, making sales). These are all marketing objectives that either directly or indirectly advance the sales process.

CFO’s use a stricter definition of ROI — the amount of revenue generated for the investment made. However, sales are not

always the immediate objective and generally other marketing factors influence and contribute to the sale. Measuring sales from exhibit leads is not difficult, as will be discussed later. But our sales conversion research confirms that most sales of any significant amount generated from exhibition leads are the result of a truly integrated marketing effort. Whether a new lead that ultimately turns into a sale is generated by the exhibit, or any other source, there are usually multiple customer touch points (sales calls, web site visits, collateral, advertising, other events, etc.) that will impact the final sale.

Therefore, the true ROI from exhibits cannot be measured in a vacuum, just as other elements of the marketing mix cannot stand alone in measuring their ROI. In essence, true ROI for each element of the marketing mix must be measured by examining each sale and determine the impact of each customer touch point relative to the cost for touching that customer.

## Measuring Exhibition Success Against Objectives

So if true ROI in the strictest sense of the term can not be measured in a vacuum, what is the measure of an exhibit’s success? It goes back

to measuring **Y**, the marketing objectives that are intended to move visitors along the purchasing path. The underlying assumptions include:

1. The target audience represents enough potential revenue, or value in reaching, to justify the investment required to achieve the objectives.
2. The objectives are relevant, i.e., they will advance visitors along the purchasing path.

To measure against specific objectives, they must be realistic, specific and measurable. Setting objectives that meet these criteria will insure that the investment made is in line with the intended results.

Objectives that are not specific are usually not measurable. For example, an objective such as “*We want to increase awareness of our company and enhance our image at XYZ Expo,*” is neither specific nor measurable. On the other hand, an objective such as “*To make 30% of our target audience aware of our new line of instrumentation,*” is an objective that is both specific and measurable.

To write an objective that is realistic is a product of having experience in measuring against specific objectives, and having a track record on which to reference. As exhibitors enter the disci-

pline of objective-setting, “realistic,” may need to be a best-judgment exercise; then as history of measuring objectives builds, realistic objectives can be written with growing confidence.

In short, written, measurable objectives become the focus for directing the planning and preparation of the exhibit, as well as defining the criteria for measuring success. This focus will drive the purpose of the exhibit. And, the higher the degree of effective objective-setting, the higher degree of success the exhibit will enjoy — in terms that are quantified, clearly understood, and thus usable for future planning.

### Measurement Tools for Various Exhibiting Objectives

Exhibitors usually have multiple objectives for exhibiting. Those that align most closely with overall corporate marketing objectives are listed in **Figure 1** and can be broken into two broad categories. The first is communications objectives, these are typically objectives for conveying messages, building awareness, enhancing brand or image, introducing new products or generating PR. The second category includes sales related objectives (lead generation, sales generation, influencing recommendations and/or entering new markets).

## Measurement Tools For Various Exhibiting Objectives

Objectives:	Analyze Leads	In-Booth Surveys	Post Show Surveys	Pre/Post Surveys	Sales Conversion Surveys	Lead Tracking	Press Coverage Analysis
<b>Communications</b>							
Messaging		✓	✓	✓			✓
Image/Branding/Awareness		✓	✓	✓			✓
New Product Introductions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Press							✓
<b>Sales:</b>							
Generate Leads	✓						
Generate Sales/Influence Rec. or Prescribing Habits					✓	✓	
Enter New Markets	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

FIGURE 1

Most exhibitors set multiple objectives — both communications and sales-related this complicates the measurement function because no one measurement tool is suited to measuring all types of objectives. *Figure 1* illustrates the need for multiple measurement tools if multiple objectives are set. Down the left side of the chart are typical objectives that exhibitors set. Across the top are various measurement techniques. A check mark in the matrix where an objective and a measurement tool intersect indicates a match, i.e., a tool for measuring that objective.

Following is a brief discussion of each measurement tool as it relates to measuring specific types of objectives.

### Analyzing Leads

This is generally an automatic first step of any exhibit measurement program. In addition to counting and analyzing the quality of leads, this type of analysis gives some indication of success for new product introductions (number and quality of leads for new products) and effectiveness in entering new markets (number/quality of leads in the new markets). This analysis may also give you an indication of future sales potential by qualifying visitor buying power and intentions.

### In-Booth Visitor Surveys

These types of surveys are best conducted by personal interview as visitors exit the exhibit. They are often used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific aspects of the exhibit (demos, theaters, booth staff, etc.), but as it relates to objectives they are particularly effective in measuring message recall and retention (both unaided and aided recall). This assumes that visitors have had no prior exposure to messages. If so, a pre/post-survey methodology is best (discussed later). Awareness for new product introductions, image and brand enhancement can also be measured using in-booth surveys.

### Post-Show Attendee Surveys

These surveys are the cornerstone of an effective measurement program. They provide a comprehensive profile of the show audience (for show selection, level of investment, and planning decisions) and they measure the performance of specific aspects of the exhibit compared to competitors (to improve performance).

Similar to in-booth surveys, they can be used to measure specific messaging, brand and image enhancement, and new product introduction objectives. They can also identify through analysis of audience and visitor profiles the effectiveness of the show and your exhibit in reaching new markets.

### Pre/Post Attendee Surveys

A pre- and post-survey technique is the best way to measure message, image, brand, and/or awareness objectives *if* attendees have had the potential for being exposed to your messages, products or company prior to the exhibition. The pre-show survey

conducted just prior to the show establishes a benchmark level of awareness before exposure to your exhibit, and the post-show survey measures the success of your exhibit and related activities in changing awareness, image and/or recall of the message.

### Sales Conversion Surveys

These surveys measure the dollar volume of sales resulting from leads generated by an exhibit. They are usually conducted approximately three to six months following the exhibition depending upon sales cycles of the products. They also measure purchases from competitors, the degree of influence the exhibit had on the purchases relative to other factors, and the level of follow-up received from salespeople or representatives.

### Lead Tracking Systems

The ideal and most cost-effective method for measuring sales resulting from leads is a closed loop lead management system. Sales conversion surveys are an alternative for companies that cannot institute a lead tracking system due to lack of management support, channel of distribution structure (i.e., sell exclusively through dealers or distributors), inability to get field sales to report back, etc.

Both the sales conversion survey and lead tracking system are bottom-line oriented measurement tools. That is, they measure sales objectives, but give little explanation for results. For example, if sales are poor, is the reason the show, the exhibit, the follow-up or a combination of all factors? A comprehensive post-show attendee survey will evaluate the show's potential and exhibit performance.

### Press Coverage Analysis

Obtaining press coverage is an objective for a relatively small number of exhibitors by comparison to most other objectives. To measure PR effectively requires tracking the trade, general business and/or consumer press to determine the amount of coverage that is obtained as a result of exhibiting in the show, the tone of the coverage (positive, negative, neutral) and the content of the coverage (were key messages or new products mentioned?).

## CONCLUSION

In summary, most exhibitors have multiple objectives for exhibiting that require multiple measurement tools for assessing results. Objectives need to be specific, realistic and measurable, and must be relevant to overall corporate marketing objectives. Measuring meaningful show objectives that are relevant to corporate marketing objectives is the best way to demonstrate the value and importance of exhibitions in the marketing mix.