



How to get the most out of Exhibitions and Trade Shows

Tools for effective small business marketing

Francine Pickering
Clarity Marketing Ltd

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BEFORE YOUR DECIDE TO EXHIBIT

Taking a stand at an exhibition or trade fair is a big investment, not just in terms of the financial cost of exhibiting but also in terms of the time spent. You will want to make sure that your money and time see a good return on investment.

The first thing you will need to do is to evaluate the opportunity. Think about:

- How experienced are the organisers?
- Who is the event aimed at? How well will your target audience be represented?
- How are they planning to attract their audience?
- What claims are they making about the anticipated number of delegates?
- Can they substantiate their claims?
- What else will be going on at the event?
- Will seminars and workshops support or detract from your presence?
- Is there an opportunity to get involved in these activities?
- Can you contact previous exhibitors to see how successful they have found it?
- What will you get for your money? And will there be any hidden extras such as additional charges for tables and chairs?

The answers to these questions will give you a good idea as to whether this exhibition is a good one for your business.

If you have been able to visit that exhibition previously as a delegate, that will give you a good idea of what to expect. Alternatively, visit another exhibition by that organiser and/or at the same venue to do your homework.

Make sure you will have enough time to organise everything that needs to be done. Exhibitions are hard work and need careful project management.

BEFORE THE EXHIBITION

Having decided to attend an exhibition, a little planning can go a very long way to make sure your time and money are well spent.

1. Set specific SMART goals, for example:

- Launch a new product or service
- Generate 200 sales leads
- Meet 40 qualified prospects
- Hand out 3,000 samples
- Make 30 new appointments
- Research 10 competitors

It might not be realistic to achieve everything you can think of at one event so prioritising your goals is important.

2. Plan your stand to meet your goals. Think about what activities you want to undertake. Giving out samples, for instance, will require storage and display facilities whereas qualifying prospects may require allocating space for more in-depth conversations.

How will you keep yourself organised when collecting contact details of prospects? Is a bowl to collect business cards sufficient or do you need a more structured way of collecting and qualifying information?

Make sure your stand or booth is easy to identify, strongly branded and leaves no one in any doubt about who you are and what you do. Decide whether you will be using existing display material or whether you need to commission something specific for that exhibition. Select your display graphics carefully: simple impact on a strong theme works best.

What will attract people to the stand? Something that you can demonstrate is ideal: it's interactive and gives visitors plenty to talk about.

Check that there will be sufficient power supply if you need it.

What kind of people should you have staffing the stand? Will the marketing team do the trick or do you also need technical staff to talk detail with interested visitors? Your investment in this event is too great to let it be undermined by inexperienced and unknowledgeable staff.

3. Consider the position of your stand. The ones that attract the most traffic are those on the end of a row and those near the entrance or other points of interest. They will most probably cost more than stands in less popular areas so weight up the pros and cons of spending more for more visitors. Consider these aspects:
 - **Your competitors:** How close do you want to be to your competitors? If you are near an industry leader you might benefit from the footfall that draws. If you are the industry leader you might prefer to avoid your "me too" competitors.
 - **Entrances and exits:** Positions near entrances and exits attract plenty of traffic, especially the one closest to the registration area.
 - **Refreshment areas:** Whilst these points will attract traffic, visitors could well have their minds on other things. You also risk becoming a dumping ground for plates, cups and debris. Think about the balance of benefits and disadvantages.
 - **Escalators:** A spot near the bottom of a down escalator will give people plenty of opportunity to identify your stand.
 - **Corners.** The front corners of the hall can be good but avoid the back corners which can become dead zones..
 - **Windows:** Beware of strong sunlight that could wash out your presentations and cause uncomfortable glare for visitors.

- **Seminars:** Consider where the seminar rooms are located. If visitors will be coming into the hall from the same entrance following each seminar, where can you best place yourself to be easily visible and accessible?

Areas to avoid are:

- Obstructing columns
- Low ceilings
- Dark or poorly lit areas
- Dead-end aisles
- Doors that are used for loading and unloading
- Late setup areas

These might not be marked on a floor plan, so make sure you ask about any obstructions.

Remember, the earlier you book, the more likely it is that you will get the position of your choice.

4. Tell people that you're going to be there. One of the simplest things that you can do to meet your exhibition goals is to let your own contacts know that you will be exhibiting.

Use your own lists of customers and other contacts and see whether you are able to use the organiser's list of pre-registrants. Mail or email them as appropriate and invite them to visit you at your stand. It's a good way to increase sales from existing customers or to re-activate past customers.

Make sure the event is on your website, included in your newsletter, and that you use your social media strategy to feature the exhibition. If you're going to be doing something eye-catching and memorable on your stand, how about a teaser video to get people intrigued?

Let people know which stand number you'll be at, how to spot the stand from a distance, and any "landmarks" for example, are you near the refreshment stall.

5. Make full use of the organiser's pre-show publicity. Think about:
 - Can you be featured on the event's web site?
 - Are they promoting the event in specific media? Issue your own press releases to these media too to boost awareness of a product launch.
 - Can you buddy up with exhibitors who complement you for a publicity push?
 - Are there event sponsorship opportunities that can lift your profile? Are they going to be worth the cost?
6. Choose your people for the exhibition carefully. Make sure they are fully aware of your goals and are equipped to help meet them. Could they benefit from some sales training?

AT THE EXHIBITION

1. Get there in good time; if you can set up the evening before, so much the better. Being set up from the start means you are ready for the early arrivals and have time available at the beginning of the day when you are still fresh to network with other exhibitors and perhaps gain some competitive intelligence.
2. Brief your exhibition team on the day:
 - Remind them of your objectives;
 - Make sure they're equipped with all the information and resources they need;
 - Make sure everyone knows who is responsible for what;
 - Report on progress day-on-day in achieving objectives;
 - Motivate them and keep their energy up
2. Make sure each team member can be identified as such. Corporate clothing might be appropriate, depending on your business. Alternatively, a suitable dress code and a badge for each team member with their name, your company name and their area of expertise is good.
3. Spend the optimum amount of time with your visitors. If you have set criteria for who makes a good lead, you can prioritise your time and attention accordingly. Spend sufficient time with those who are genuinely interested and are decisions makers. See if there is somewhere quiet in the venue or nearby for the more serious conversations away from the stand. Have a technique for politely moving on from conversations that are not going anywhere.
4. Keep a positive attitude at all times.
 - Use positive body language that is open and welcoming, yet professional;
 - Smiles and eye contact will encourage people to come over and talk to you;
 - Greet visitors and ask them open questions – those which require more than a “yes or no” answer;
 - Don't chat amongst yourselves – nothing could make you look less interested in talking to visitors.
5. Schedule your team so that they all have sufficient rest breaks. Exhibitions can be very tiring and you want everyone staffing your stand to be on top form while they are there.
6. Try to prioritise your leads as you go. Whilst you might benefit from refining your data after the event, having a system to follow throughout the day will save you wracking your memory to classify them later. Try this six-tier system:
 1. Hot leads: with a large order and ready to buy
 2. Warm leads: with a large order and longer decision time, or smaller order and ready to buy
 3. Luke warm leads: with a smaller order and not yet ready to buy
 4. Cool leads: with the potential to become customers but not ready yet
 5. Other “useful” contacts: media, potential associates, etc.
 6. Other: people selling to you, browser, etc.

To avoid causing offence (who wants to see themselves classified as a “6”?) try colour coding contact sheets or storage for different groups of business cards.

7. Make the most of publicity opportunities on the day.
 - Invite journalists to visit your stand;
 - If there is an event Press Office make sure it is stocked with your literature;
 - Have a newsworthy story or something exciting happening at your stand to attract the media’s attention;
 - Why not live stream the activity at your stand? Capture instant reactions to your products to act as great testimonials.
6. Take photos of your stand for publicity purposes and for reference for future exhibition planning.

AFTER THE EXHIBITION

It’s all too easy to think that once the event is over, that’s the job done. Far from it. Now begins the hard work of capitalising on efforts of the exhibition.

1. Hold a de-brief. Make sure everyone who worked at the exhibition is included and get honest feedback on what worked and where there is room for improvement. Nothing is too small to consider – often improving minor details can have a major impact.

Capture your “lessons learned” and keep them on file to feed into your planning for the next exhibition you attend.

2. Follow-up all your contacts. Refer back to your prioritisation system. Hot leads need immediate follow-up to avoid losing that large sale. Your warm leads need prompt contact too; they will have been researching alternative suppliers so make sure they know you’d value their business.

Your luke warm and cool leads – and your useful contacts – might not need such immediate intensive attention but you should follow them up within a week. Have something to send them that they couldn’t pick up on the day: some new research, a copy of the presentation you were running, or similar.

Put all leads and useful contact details into your “Keep in Touch” system.

3. If the event organisers are willing to part with their delegate list – either free or for a charge, follow these up by post. This gives you a chance to contact the people who you didn’t get to speak to.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The impact of your exhibition might not be immediately obvious, depending on the typical time it takes for a customer to make their buying decision.

It's important to ensure that any enquiries and sales that can be tracked back to the exhibition are linked in this way. This will help you to make a sound judgement about whether to attend the same exhibition in future.

Measurement helps you ascertain whether the investment was a good one and helps you refine objectives for future exhibitions.

1. Make goals SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timed and targeted

2. Goals might include:

- Sales
 - Generate sales leads
 - Make direct sales
 - Build your contact database
- Customer Relationships
 - Build relationships with current customers
 - Educate customers and prospects more about your products/services
 - Cross-sell/up-sell
 - Re-activate lapsed customers
- Market Research
 - Market test a new product
 - Research your marketing campaign
 - Test market awareness and perceptions
 - Identify new markets
- Brand building
 - Create or raise market awareness
 - Position or re-position your brand
 - Boost financial analyst/investor perceptions
- Channel Support
 - Identify and recruit new distributors or partners
 - Support your sales channel
 - Build your reputation as a partner

Every trade show and exhibition is different so this guide should be used as the basis for your decision making. It will serve you well in helping you to get the best return possible on your exhibition investment.

However, as you become more experienced in exhibitions and trade shows, you will find your own tips and techniques to fine-tune your exhibition strategy. So build on this guide to develop your own best practice guidelines that suit your business and its needs.

Clarity Marketing Ltd. provides marketing strategy services to small and medium sized businesses. If you would like some help developing your marketing strategy, contact us on 0115 964 8222 or visit www.clarity-in-communication.com.

APPENDIX 1 – USEFUL RESOURCES

Association of Event Organisers	www.aeo.org.uk
Association of Event Venues	www.aev.org.uk
Event Supplier and Services Association	www.essa.uk.com
Exhibition and Trade Show Listing	www.exhibitions.co.uk
International Expo Guide	www.expo-guide.com
Trade Show Directory	www.tsnn.com

APPENDIX 2 – COUNTDOWN TO THE EXHIBITION

12 months to go:

- Decide on your exhibition and select your location
- Set your budget
- Read contract carefully
- Book your stand

Six months to go:

- Set your objectives
- Decide who needs to be on the team
- Plan your pre-exhibition promotion
- Research and choose your suppliers
- Decide if you need a new display and brief your designer

Four months to go:

- Make travel arrangements and accommodation reservations.
- Choose display products and put safely to one side
- Plan data capture procedures
- Develop floor plan for your exhibition space
- Keep on top of all costs
- Finalise any new exhibit design
- Start exhibition-related promotion

Three months to go:

- Carefully review exhibitor guidelines and terms and conditions
- Reserve any additional meeting rooms for hospitality events, press conferences, etc.
- Plan any in-booth presentations and demonstrations
- Create list of required services, noting deadlines for early buy discounts.
- Meet deadlines for free publicity in the exhibitor guide

Two months to go:

- Finalise display
- Consider having literature designed
- Order staff badges.
- Update and liaise with other departments sharing the stand / booth.
- Create and print lead forms
- Prepare orders for shipping and storage, etc.
- Prepare packs for the pressroom
- Check hotel reservations and travel arrangements
- Develop briefing pack for stand and back-office support staff
- Schedule any exhibition/sales training



APPENDIX 3 – LEAD PRIORITISATION FORM

Event: _____ Date: _____

<input type="checkbox"/> Hot lead	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm lead	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke warm lead
<input type="checkbox"/> Cool lead	<input type="checkbox"/> Useful contact	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Name: _____ Job title: _____

Company _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____ Tel: _____

Email: _____

Product/service currently using: _____

Supplier currently using: _____

Product/service interested in: _____

Comments: _____

Lead taken by: _____
