

How to exhibit

Maximising the power of exhibitions



Exhibitions

Marketing doesn't get any more direct than this



Where unbridled supply meets naked demand.

Marketing is a peculiar discipline, often full of impenetrable jargon and needlessly complex 'strategising'.

But the more you simplify the art and science of marketing to its basic truths, the more one medium emerges as a uniquely powerful force: exhibitions.

An exhibition is the only medium that brings qualified buyers straight to your company for face-to-face interactions. It's also the only medium to harness all five senses, letting you demonstrate products, answer questions, overcome objections and - most importantly - build relationships with your customers and prospects.

Simplicity itself.

Even a company that knows nothing about exhibiting would find it difficult to come away from a busy show without generating new business. After all, the business comes to you.

But there are a few simple principles that any company can use to multiply the value of every exhibition they participate in.

This book is about making the most of exhibitions by doing a few simple things before, during and after each show. It's based on the collective experiences of dozens of marketers who have used exhibitions effectively for many years.

Preparing the ground.

What to do before the show.

Spending a little time and thought planning before an exhibition will pay big dividends when show time comes.

We'll assume you've evaluated the available exhibitions, analysed the audience profiles and chosen the right show for you (the Association of Exhibition Organisers can help here, www.exhibitionswork.co.uk). Now it's time to lay the foundations for success:

Set specific goals.

Do you want to generate 200 sales leads? Launch your new product to customers, prospects and the media? The tighter the goals, the better your chances of achieving them. How about meeting at least 25 qualified new prospects? Or finding three new dealers? Or handing out 5,000 samples? Exhibitions are incredibly versatile. But you need to focus on your most important goals. Want to demonstrate your product to 250 top buyers? Make 40 new appointments? Test a new idea? Sell products directly from your stand?

Establishing specific, measurable goals is probably the single most important thing you can do before every exhibition.

Plan the stand to meet the goals.

Your stand location, design and activities should reflect what you hope to achieve. Even if you have a company exhibition stand in storage, think about how you can tailor it to a specific audience.

The number of staff manning the stand and the mix of disciplines should also be goal-driven. Do you need technical staff to explain things in detail? Top managers to meet blue-chip decision-makers? Energetic extroverts for maximum smiling and sampling? Let your goals be your guide.

Tell people why they should visit you.

The simplest and most obvious tactic of all is also, amazingly, the least practised: tell the world what you're up to!

Recent research has shown that 83% of the most successful companies at a range of exhibitions (in terms of business generated and leads collected) were the ones that took the trouble to mail to their prospects and customers before the show. [SOURCE: CEIR]

Make the most of pre-show PR and advertising.

You can mail your own lists, buy in a list or mail to the event's list of pre-registrants (organisers often make theirs available). It's common sense: tell people what you'll be doing at the show and why they should take the time to visit you. Stress the benefits. Add some intrigue. Have a bit of fun. But never skip this vital step.

Ask the show organiser to tell you which media are doing show previews (many summarise this in the Exhibitor Manual). Get the editors' names and addresses. Make note of the deadlines and start spreading the news. Again, benefits are king. And photos help. You may also want to run your own ads in Preview issues, with a 'See us on Stand 20' flag (the organiser will provide the show logo).

Don't forget sponsorship opportunities.

Sponsorship can be an extremely cost-effective way to jump out of the pack at your next exhibition. There is usually a list of off-the-shelf packages available at most budget levels (from sponsored seminar theatres to signage to the T-shirts at the registration desk). But some of the best sponsorships are often bespoke programmes designed by the organiser and exhibitor sitting down together and brainstorming.

Talk to the organiser. Tell them your goals and your budget. The only limit is your imagination.

Train your show staff.

The first rule of exhibitions is 'The people make the stand'. Make sure yours are well trained for the job. Selling at an exhibition is different from selling in a one-to-one sales call. Your stand staff need to understand the goals of the stand and each member's specific role in achieving them.

There are many stand-staff training courses available that can help staff develop the skills they'll need. Contact the AEO or your show organiser for details.

Use the web.

Many shows have web sites to promote the event and register visitors. If you've got a web site, it's a great place to promote your presence at the show. Find out if the show site can provide links to yours.

Nivea For Men breaks new ground.

Overcoming British men's resistance to toners and moisturisers calls for product-to-face marketing. Nivea For Men used an exhibition to launch its range of grooming products under the 'for men who dare to care' theme. Pre-show mailings, tube posters and show sponsorship drove people to the dramatic stand where sampling, interactivity and a competition took over. The result? The best of all possible product launches with media coverage and thousands of free samples given out.

'You never have a better chance of getting your message across than at an exhibition. All those months of running ads and sending mailings and, suddenly, there in front of you is the customer and at last marketing has a human dimension.'

Arnold Vink,
Head of Marketing,
Xerox Engineering Systems

Lights, camera, action!

What to do at the show.

The day has arrived. You've done the groundwork. Your goals are clear. Your people are trained. The doors to the exhibition fly open and the visitors start streaming in. This is where the rubber meets the road...

Brief your stand staff each day.

The people on your stand make the difference between a good event and a great event. A highly motivated, well-informed team does more than any other factor to differentiate you from the other stands and make an impact on your market. Daily briefings are a must. Remind everyone of your goals, your key messages and the role of each team member. Report on your progress towards your goals. Make adjustments if necessary. Announce the winner of your lead-generating competition. Most importantly, keep the energy up and the attitudes positive.

Spend the optimum amount of time with visitors.

The 'AREA' system summarised in the box below describes one way to process people through your stand. The key is to find the right people and spend the right amount of time with them - not too much (there are lots more to meet) and not too little (you need to get that lead or appointment). Again, the optimum time per visitor will depend on your goals. But make sure you've planned a system that matches your needs.

This is your AREA. Four steps to generating maximum business.

John Blaskey of AEO exhibitor trainers Pinewood Consulting teaches that, for most trade shows, the goal is the appointment. Here's his system.

- 1. Attract** - Stop people in their tracks. Use colour, motion, sound, bold graphics and benefit statements.
- 2. Reject** - Politely filter out the wrong people. Ask a few qualifying questions ('Do you buy light bulbs for your company?') and if they're not prospects, move on ('Then I won't waste your time. Have a great show!').
- 3. Explain** - Get straight to the benefits. Run a short demonstration. Put your best case forward. And go for the close.
- 4. Appointment** - Once they've agreed to meet, pass them to someone who can set up the appointment (so as not to waste the salesperson's time). If you can't get the meeting, get their details for follow-up.

Speak fluent body language.

We've all seen them. The crossed-arms-and-frowns brigade. The newspaper readers. The quick lunch eaters with their backs to the aisle. The staff who are so busy chatting with each other they ignore the people on their stand. Try this. Divide the total cost of your participation in the exhibition by the number of minutes it's open. Then remind yourself and your staff how much every minute is worth. Smiles, eye contact, open questions...it may be common sense but it's not so common in practice!

Focus on your key targets.

Chances are, your key prospects are a subset of the total audience at the show. Decide who your key targets are and brief your team to focus on them. Set your goals accordingly (not just '100 leads', but '75 production directors or senior managers').

Classify all leads.

Use a lead classification system to make sure the hottest leads get the attention first. One system used grades every lead as follows:

A	Large order, ready to buy
B	Small order, ready to buy OR Large order, longer time frame
C	Small order, longer time frame
D	Send literature or add name to database
E	'Other' eg. press, salesmen...

Earn media coverage.

Invite key journalists to visit your stand - or visit theirs. Keep a good supply of bright, well-presented literature in the Show Press Office (too many exhibitors let this resource go untapped!). Work with the show organiser to steer the right journalists your way. And make sure your story is ready when they arrive.

Keep it all business.

Lots of comfy furniture encourages people to drop in and stay on your stand. Do you really want that? Current customers might expect to monopolise your time. Unless they're your main reason for attending, try to set aside specific times for customers, ideally in a hospitality area on or off the stand. Networking and social contacts are part of the appeal of an exhibition, but you'll want to keep it under control.

Sharwood's goes for taste appeal.

For Sharwood's growth is all about increasing distribution and keeping the new products in front of the trade. They rely on exhibitions to do both.

Colourful, high-impact graphics stop buyers while separate stand areas allow Sharwood's to offer free samples, conduct demonstrations, give out recipe leaflets or price lists and close the sales in a quiet meeting area.

Two hints: always bring more samples than you think you'll need and always try to give information as well as a taste.

Reap the rewards.

What to do after the show.

The visitors have all gone home. The stands are being taken down. Now is the time to follow through all of the new opportunities you've generated.

Here's where some companies squander the benefits they've worked so hard to achieve while others capitalise on them and turn them into profits.

De-brief the team.

When you get back to the office on Monday, sit down with the stand staff and key managers. Do an honest assessment of what worked and what didn't. Elicit suggestions for improving performance at future events. Your staff's insights are a valuable asset, especially while their impressions are still fresh.

Measure your results.

Remember your specific, measurable goals? Now is the time to measure your success against them. If you exceeded your goals, try to determine why, so you can replicate that success at the next show. If you fell short, figure out what you could do better.

Track the leads.

Don't just evaluate your results immediately after the event. Many companies do written lead-tracking reports three, six and even nine months after a major exhibition to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line. Only then can you truly determine the value of the exhibition for your company.

Follow up all contacts.

Every visitor to your stand should receive a timely follow-up. The degree of follow-up will depend on the classification of the contact, ranging from a simple thank-you letter to a sales visit, phone call or information pack.

To your prospects, the days and weeks following the exhibition make it clear who most wants their business and who may not be ready to handle it. Don't blow it now!

Send a mailing to all show visitors.

You may not be able to meet every visitor, but you can contact them. Most organisers make the visitor lists available in their entirety (often free, sometimes for a one-time rental fee). A quick 'Sorry we missed you but did you know...' can mop up quite a few new leads.

Follow through on all press releases.

Call all the editors you mailed your press releases to or who visited you on your stand. Ask if there's any more information they might need. Tell them of your successes at the show. A timely phone call now could mean a solid mention in a post-show review read by thousands.

Reserve a place for next year!

If you've met or exceeded your goals, now is the time to lock in a prime location at the next event. Visit the Show Sales Office, or make sure you see a floorplan so you can reserve your stand early.

How NCH Action For Children stole the Labour Party Conference.

NCH Action For Children charity had to leap out of the pack with only a 2 x 2 metre stand. They did just that with a stunning backlit graphic of children's faces, supporting the 'All Children Dream' theme.

The stand staff were trained in exhibition techniques and fully briefed to communicate key objectives. In the end, they made contact with their 'hit list' of key contacts, snapped publicity photos with visiting MPs and drove home their compelling message in style.

Sunny Delight shines through.

When Procter & Gamble launched Sunny Delight, they used their major presence at a top retailing show to get noticed and earn shelf space. Their strategy included an exciting, colourful stand, free prize draw, a comprehensive hand-out and product sampling.

Once the results were tallied, P&G had attracted 35-40% of the entire audience on to their stand (more than double their target), generating thousands of leads for sales call follow-up. No wonder Sunny Delight is now the UK's biggest selling drink!

Doing it right.

There's no doubt about it. Exhibitions work. And by planning a few simple activities before, during and after each event, they work even harder.

No other medium brings your market to you.

No other medium lets you advance so many of your goals in one bold stroke.

And no other medium helps you start and build the personal relationships that are so vital to success in today's competitive environment.

That's why so many leading companies make exhibitions an increasingly important part of their marketing plans.

Help is a phone call away.

There are two important resources that can help you make the most of your investment in exhibitions:

1. Your show organiser - A too-often untapped source of ideas, hot tips and marketing opportunities. Talk to your organiser team about your company's goals and ambitions. They can help you achieve them.

2. The Association of Exhibition Organisers - A major source of information and advice on finding the right events and using them profitably. Call the AEO on 01442 87 33 44 or visit the marketing resource centre on www.exhibitionswork.co.uk for more information.

About the AEO

The Association of Exhibition Organisers is the leading voice of the exhibition industry. Our members are committed to making exhibitions work hard for both exhibitors and visitors and to maintaining the highest standards of professional service. When you see the AEO logo on an event, it is nothing less than a seal of approval.

The AEO offers membership packages for organisers, service providers and for exhibitors. For more information call 01442 87 33 44 or visit the association web site on www.aeo.org or the exhibitors' resource site on www.exhibitionswork.co.uk

The AEO has produced a booklet on the power of exhibitions called **Exhibitions Work**. It summarises the case for using exhibitions and supports the argument with important new research.

To order your copy, call 01442 87 33 44 or visit www.exhibitionswork.co.uk



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