

# HOW TO MAXIMIZE YOUR EXHIBITION PARTICIPATION



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# EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF LIVE EVENTS

Even a company that knows nothing about exhibiting would find it easy to come away from a busy show with plenty of new business. After all, the business comes to you. But there are a few simple principles that any company can use to maximise the value of every event they participate in.

## PREPARING THE GROUND

### What to do before the show

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

Now it's time to lay the foundations for success. Setting out your goals and key considerations:

- How many sales leads do you wish to generate?
- Do you want to launch your new product to customers, prospects and the media?
- The tighter the goals, the better your chances of achieving them.
- How many new business contacts do you wish to meet?
- Or how many new dealers? Or handing out how many samples?
- Events are incredibly versatile, but you need to focus on your most important goals.
- How many top buyers do you want to demonstrate your product to?
- Make how many new appointments?
- Establishing SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and (time-bound) is probably the single most important thing you can do before every event. 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 how you can tailor it to a specific audience.

### What to do before the show

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.

This is not all about how many visitors to the show an organiser can bring. Just think, if a show organiser brings 15,000 visitors to a two day event, how many of those would you actually get to talk to. Nowhere near that figure. However, by taking advantage of all our preshow marketing you can very effectively give the visitor the opportunity to flag up your stand for a visit before the event. Thus ensuring that you maximise the potential of the event.

### 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! Research has shown that 83% of the most successful companies at a range of events (in terms of business generated and leads collected) were 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 regularly, email, direct mail and SMS. **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. Create an attraction/feature on your stand.

You may also want to run your own ads in Preview issues, with a 'See us on Stand 20 we are happy to 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 event. There is usually a list of off-the-shelf packages available at most budget levels. But some of the best sponsorships are often bespoke programmes designed by the organiser and exhibitor sitting down together and brain-storming. Talk to the organiser. Tell them your goals and your budget.

### **Train your event staff**

The first rule of events is 'The people make the stand'. Make sure yours are well trained for the job. Selling at events 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.

### **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 visitors on their stand.

THIS is so important, because the immediate impression a prospect gets is that the person on the stand is not interested in the prospect or in communicating the benefits of dealing with that company.

**Its sets a poor impression, Is lazy, even if the show is fairly quiet, you never know if that important buyer is just around the corner.** Reflects really badly upon you as the manager of the team.

### **What your staff should be doing**

Your staff need to be friendly and look interested at all times. They should engage with all who are passing your stand, ask open questions such as "Why are you here today?" Not closed questions such as "are you interested in our product?" So easy for a prospect to say no and just walk on. Be friendly ask them about their business initially, show interest in them and then work out how you can help them. Don't immediately hand them a leaflet. Engage, engage, engage!

### **Try this.**

Divide the total cost of your participation in the event 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 common practice!

Make sure that they look interested.

### **Using the web**

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

### **Social Media**

Social media is now an integral part of any PR/Marketing campaign to engage and communicate with your customers about your presence at a show.

Social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, twitter and MySpace are used increasingly by consumers and business representatives alike to communicate quickly and effectively. It is important for your senior team and business representatives to have a profile online to ensure you are connected to the right people, spread news and key messages, and drive debate about your business.



## 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 event fly open and the visitors start streaming in.

### 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 key to success 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.

### Focus on your 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').

**Qualified leads are great, however sales are better, always remember that you are face to face with a target, an unprecedented advantage over your competitors, even if they are also exhibiting. Use it!**

### Initial contact – THIS IS MOST IMPORTANT

Make sure your team are keen to engage with visitors in a positive manner, but that they also engage with every visitor who passes the stand with open questions.

They must ask open questions such as 'Hi, what do you hope to gain from being at the show?' Or, 'How much do you know about our company?' If nothing else your objective should be to ascertain if the visitor is a decision maker and if not who is and what are their contact details. Do not just hand the visitor a leaflet and hope for the best!

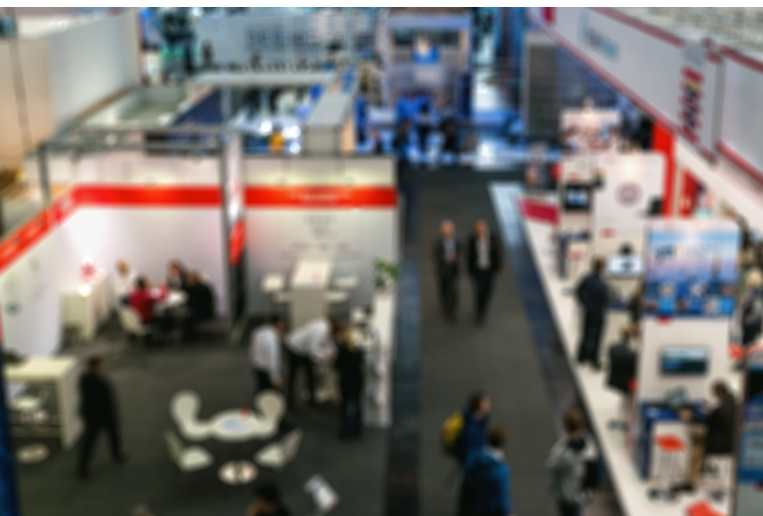
Many old hands at manning exhibition stands believe that leaflets are to be given to those that you think, after a couple of open questions, are not worth pursuing. The visitors who are worth engaging more with are the ones whose details you need to capture.

**However, one caveat to that is that a person who is not a decision maker could well be an influencer, so do at all times treat visitors to your stand with respect and try to find out as much about that as you can.**



### Exhibitions are just a flag waving exercise

Oh how we hate this phrase at RX Africa. Exhibitions should be all about sales generation, no argument. Even if you are the biggest player in the industry there is always going to be some company that would like to take your place. Every contact with a prospect should be treated as a possible major client until you qualify them with some open questions (see above). Even if they turn out to be not of immediate interest to you, treat them with respect, you never know where they may be in that company in 5 years time.



### **Collect lead information**

High or low tech – collecting business cards from the pre-screened prospects is easy, but consider light pens for capturing even more data about your visitor, plus it's quicker than data-capturing business cards. The organiser holds the data about your leads and will supply this to you in electronic format. The more information you can obtain about your potential customer, the better focused your post-show activity can be.

### **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.

### **Reap the Rewards**

#### **What to do after the show and measuring its success.**

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, 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 for 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. The following section in this guide provides a framework for developing your own approach to event measurement.



### **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 event to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line. Only then can you truly determine the value of the event 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 event make it clear who most wants their business and who may not be ready to handle it. Don't blow it now!

### **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 floor plan so you can reserve your stand early.

### **Write a final report**

Summarise the results achieved against the goals you set. Share the report with key managers from sales, marketing and top management. By the time next year's show comes up, you should all have a pretty complete idea of the value of your participation.

### **Eye to Eye Marketing**

Don't let anything get between you and your prospects.

When it comes to the total quality of marketing interaction, nothing holds a candle to events. Ever see one of your print ads turn a hardened sceptic into an evangelist? Ever see a radio spot absorb an objection and turn it into a sale?

"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 International Systems.**

### **Concentrated Marketing**

Meet a self-selected core of buyers  
Think about your hottest prospects. What is their most valuable commodity?

Their time. That's why, in business-to-business markets, it can be so hard for your sales team to get in to see them. And in consumer markets, the visitors are spending their leisure time, which is arguably even more precious. Given the value of their time, what does it say about a prospect who invests a day to visit an event? It says they're motivated. It says they have a reason to be there. It says they're serious buyers in active buying mode. This is the power of events: no other medium concentrates your efforts on the most active buyers in your markets at any given time.

## TWENTY-TWO GOALS!

Here are twenty-two specific goals that events can help you achieve:

### Sales

- Generate sales leads
- Make direct sales
- Build a contact database
- Customer Relationship
- Build relationships with current customers
- Educate customers
- Upsell and cross-sell customers
- Collect customer testimonials
- Re-sell lapsed customers

### Market Research

- Market test a new product
- Research your marketing campaign
- Test market awareness and perceptions

### Brand Building

- Create or raise market awareness
- Position or reposition your brand
- Educate by demonstrating
- Boost financial analyst and investor perceptions
- Develop new markets Channel Support
- Identify and recruit new distributors or partners
- Support your sales channels
- Build your reputation as a partner Media Relations
- Get on the 'media radar' generate coverage
- Build relationships with key editors and journalists
- Create an online social media group for the event

### Versatile Marketing

Whatever your goals, exhibitions can take you there.

Because they represent the marketplace in one place and time – bringing together suppliers, buyers, purchase influencers, consultants and the media – events are an incredibly versatile marketing medium. If you want to launch new products, generate media coverage, build brand awareness, generate leads and retain existing customers, events let you do it all in one bold stroke.

Events are effective for:

- Personal selling to potential buyers
- Building prospect databases
- Building relationships with existing customers
- Seeking new customers
- Educating the market
- Generating sales leads
- Demonstrating products or services
- Generating media awareness
- Building brand awareness
- Launching new products
- Positioning company as market leader



*"Intimate contact with travel agents and consumers is what it's all about. We use shows to stamp an image of our destination into people's minds. Exhibitions help us generate visits to the Bahamas. That's the measure of our success."*

- **Tommy Thompson**, Bahamas Tourist Board

### Cost Effective Marketing

*Events deliver measurable value The days of using events as 'flag waving exercises' are long gone. Today's best marketers expect events to deliver a significant return on investment – in measurable terms, including cost per lead and cost per sale. Many even track the value of each event over three, six and twelve months (after all, a single new customer can represent huge lifetime value to your company). "On top of generating sales leads, attending exhibitions provides a focal point for a range of marketing activities, including advertising, PR, telemarketing and web promotion."*

- **Zoe Allan**, JBA



## INTELLIGENT MARKETING

### Events make sense.

As a marketer, you've never had so many marketing media to choose from.

Some may boast 'interactivity' – but what is more interactive than a conversation between people? Others may claim to be 'direct' – but can you get any more direct than face-to-face? Still others focus on targeting – but none can put you in front of a self-selected audience of active buyers. No one would say that events should be the only medium in your marketing plan. But many would agree that events are the pinnacle of the marketing pyramid – that they deliver completely what other media can only get you a step closer to: personal interaction with real buyers. Top marketers in virtually every industry have known it for years.

The right event is the only marketing medium that:

- brings your most active prospects and customers to you
- allows you to demonstrate products, answer questions, overcome objections and meet your market face-to-face
- harnesses all five senses to drive home your messages
- allows you to further virtually all of your marketing goals at the same time

### The effective part of the marketing mix

It's true whether you sell industrial power plants or sticky puddings: the better you know your customer – and the better your customer knows you – the more likely you are to make that first sale and the increasingly profitable sales that follow. If you had to design from the ground up a marketing medium that's perfectly suited to this kind of relationship-building and customer retention, it would probably look remarkably like events, the most direct form of direct marketing ever.

### Are you using the most powerful marketing medium . . . as much as you ought to be?



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