

# Anatomy of a Trade Show

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***Definition of a Trade Show:** An exhibition for companies in a specific industry to showcase and demonstrate their new products and services. Generally*



*trade shows are not open to the public and can only be attended by invited company representatives and members of the press. Trade shows are sponsored by trade associations for specific industries, and there are thousands of associations running shows every year. Generally trade shows aren't open to the public and can only be attended by invited people from the industry. To find an appropriate show that compliments your industry, Google and find an association that supports the business field you're interested in, or look through the Encyclopedia of Associations published by Gale Research.*

To find out when the next relevant trade show will occur in your area, contact your local convention facility.

Exhibit space for such shows must be reserved well in advance, and if there's one planned during the next year, the facility manager's office will be able to give you the dates. You can also check with your local Chamber of Commerce for information about trade shows in your area. Better yet, don't forget to search the web for shows outside your area and internationally for added results.

Exhibiting at a trade show is an excellent way to find customers to help your business grow. According to a study conducted by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), 86 percent of show attendees are decision-makers or can influence a buying decision, yet 85 percent had not been called on by a salesperson before the show.

Trade shows are also an economical way of getting new sales. CEIR reports that closing a sale that begins with contact at a trade show runs about half the cost of closing a sale that doesn't have the exhibition advantage: \$550 and 1.4 sales calls compared to \$997 and 3.6 sales calls.

Trade show enable face to face communication. This form of communication is more powerful than any other, due to emotion. People buy from people they know and like.

Finally, it is easy to find a trade show that fits your industry and your company's needs. Do a Google search, and you'll find one. Then find an exhibit design firm to help you put your best foot forward and create a positive first impression. They will help you greatly through the maze of decisions to make in planning. They can also help save you money.

You'll improve your trade show experience by planning ahead. As a visitor, get a map of the exposition floor and make notes of the booths you want to visit. The most important thing about organizing any trade show is to connect buyer and sellers, the exhibitors and the attendees. Of these two, the more important are the exhibitors. You want to pick a trade show that attracts lots of exhibitors to draw attendees. Equally important, you want them to be the right kind of exhibitors. Many shows will position exhibitor spaces according to their specialty offering. This makes walking the show floor more productive for the attendees.

Exhibitors without attendees aren't of much worth. High-quality attendees are the lifeblood of any successful trade show. This is the responsibility of the show organizer. They depend on growth from one year's event to the next. Keep in mind that sheer number of attendees to a show is not a guarantee for success. A show that attracts a relatively small number of attendees, who happen to be

exactly the type of buyers you are looking for (like the College of Surgeons Show in Chicago), might easily be a more successful event when target marketing, rather than attending a bigger show (like the Housewares or Hardware Shows) where product and service specialties are broad and varied.



With advance planning, you should decide on an objective for the show- whether as an exhibitor or an attendee. For instance, you may be exhibiting to generate sales leads. You may be interested in testing or introducing a new product. Conducting demonstrations, identifying new applications, obtaining customer feedback, even studying the competition-these can all be legitimate reasons for attending or exhibiting at a trade show. And don't forget the opportunity to recruit new employees, distributors, or dealers for your company.

As an exhibitor, you should also do some booth staff training to make sure you get the most from your interactions with visiting attendees. You may go so far as to write a script for people staffing your booth to present to visitors. Qualifying is an important part of speaking to people at trade shows. You can spend a lot of time talking to the wrong people. So make sure you know who you want to talk to, whether it's a potential customer, supplier, dealer or other contact, and make sure you spend as much time as possible interacting with the target audience.

Once you're at the show, you'll have to make some important decisions about how you'll spend your limited time as a visitor investigating what may appear to be a nearly infinite spectrum of exhibits. In addition to floor plans, most shows provide booklets with descriptions of the exhibits, as well as a listing of the times, topics and featured speakers of any seminars or panel discussions, so that attendees can better plan their time. As an exhibitor, you want to get on the attendees- exhibitors 'must see' list when they are planning their show floor tour.

Don't take anything you see or hear at face value. Check references and contact the Better Business Bureau in the state where a particular company's headquarters are located. If a company has had a history of customer complaints, for instance, you can either eliminate it from consideration or ask more pointed questions later. If you

feel hesitant about asking questions, remember what's at stake: If you avoid asking a question now, you might be sorry later.

If you don't want to wait in line at a crowded booth, you can leave a business card. Most exhibitors encourage attendees to drop off their cards by leaving a box or bowl out for cards (not the best solution), and many even hold drawings, offering prizes ranging from food baskets to computer systems, but is this why you are there?

Leaving your card in a bowl is not a good way to learn about a company, best to ask to make an appointment to meet at a later date, if worth hearing more about.

Because exhibitors spend a lot of money to participate in trade shows, they want to get the most for their investment. Doing it right, and measuring results is key.

Smart exhibitors set measurable goals and ways to sort the attendee leads for follow up. Most CEO's of companies will insist that an ROI report is prepared to calculate a return on investment analysis. Why invest in something if you can't measure for a return?

Remember that all leads do not result in sales, but are still worth something. Assign that worth a dollar value.

Show lead follow up is critical. Many enthusiastic discussions between exhibitors and visitors often end on

the show floor if follow up is not done quickly. You spend all this money to meet the right prospects, and then you don't call them back? Waiting for them to call you? Most attendees do not like to feel rushed on the spot to make a decision, so set a date to meet again soon and give them a chance to digest their thoughts.

In the end, the trade show event should be viewed as an investment, and should not be viewed as a cost.

Otherwise, it will be a pretty expensive marketing party.

Everyone had fun, but nothing to show for it!

Trade Shows Mean Business if you do it right. Seek help if you cannot measure the results of your efforts.