

Success with Trade Shows

Exhibiting at a trade show can be a big project for experienced pros and first time exhibitors alike.

The good news: it gets easier with experience, and we have some great tips for you.

We compiled advice and tips on trade shows—planning, promotion, logistics, and scheduling—and we smashed them into this PDF. While we think it's great for first-time exhibitors, we think veteran exhibitors can learn a few tips, too.

PacesetterMedia.com • (813) 685-9206



Introduction

In this guide, you'll find advice on trade show promotions, logistics, planning, scheduling and working in the booth. These guidelines apply to most companies; however, for every guideline, there are exceptions and variations. We encourage you to adapt this information to your situations.

Audience(s) and Product(s)

When we refer to your *audience*, usually in the singular, it means the plural if you have more than one audience. Same goes for the words *product* and *products*. And the word *product* means whatever your company sells: products, services, knowledge.

Write it Out

A trade show is a communication project. The more people involved in your trade show project, the more it helps to write things out. Still more critical when *new* people are involved. You have to communicate with everybody, so throughout this guide, we suggest you write out answers to questions, especially if you have lots of people involved.

If you're a trade show veteran with an experienced team, it starts to become routine. You can streamline your writing "homework" to what's needed. But if you're new to trade shows, start with writing answers and keeping detailed checklists.

Ideas and Feedback

Please send us your ideas and feedback. If you get some useful information, let us know. If you think something is missing, we'd like to hear that, too. And if you have your own tips, tricks and lessons learned, please drop us a quick e-mail.

Send your ideas, feedback and tips to: tradeshows@pacesettermedia.com

Trade Shows - Goals and Audiences

When trade shows are the right fit for your business, they're great. When they're a wrong fit, they can cost more than they are worth.

First question: Should you exhibit? It depends, and a complete analysis can be complicated depending on budget, attendee demographics, business goals, and staffing. This guide is about what to do once you decide.

But there are two factors that should be part of *all* your planning, including your decision to exhibit.

The Prospectus

Most trade shows have a document that has information about past events including attendance and demographics. It might be called a Media Kit or Fact Sheet. Read it before deciding on a particular show.

Your Goal - The Purpose

A clear goal helps you make decisions while planning your exhibit, and it gives you a basis to evaluate the results. It might be to make more sales, or talk to 10 good prospects, or get 200 more prospects for your mailing list.

Your Audience

Trade shows (and conferences) are about meeting people most likely to buy from you or influence purchases from you. This is your *audience*. A profile of your audience can guide your trade show decisions. Answer these questions.

Who are they? What are their demographics?

- Consider whatever's relevant: title, industry, age, income, religion, home ownership, location, education, hobbies and any relevant demographic detail.

What are they looking for? What benefit(s) of your product do they like most?

- The answers give you some good ideas for your show signage.
- They also give you hooks for your 30-second messages.
- Use the answers as the main ideas in signage, brochures and promotions.

The 30-Second Message

At trade shows, you'll need some short introductions, answers and pitches. Have some ready. See page 8.

When will they buy?

- If they buy now, be ready to make the sale in your booth.
- If they buy later, collect contact info and follow up afterward.
- If they buy later, but you won't collect contact info, think again. Some businesses benefit from exposure (branding) at a big trade show. But it's an expensive project just for exposure.

Paperwork - The Boring (and Important) Stuff

For a big, national trade show, there are lots of details and lots of forms. For example, a national photography show in New York has a 146-page exhibitor kit.

The good news: If you have a small booth with a typical display, most of it doesn't apply. But if you want lots of options, the details are often right there in the exhibitor kit (or whatever the organizers call it). But first...

...First, there's Registration

You submit registration and a deposit by a deadline. You pay in full a few weeks or months before the show.

And The Details

Small shows have fewer options and less red tape. Bigger shows have lots of options and related paperwork. Here's a starter list of details.

Shipping: It's your responsibility to ship your stuff to the show. Then the show organizer puts it in the right place (you hope). Usually that's your booth.

Electrical, Internet, Phone, Plumbing: "Utilities" usually cost extra. You'll need to submit the forms on time and prepay for these services.

Sign Hanging: If your sign hangs above your booth, it costs extra. You start with a form you fill out and submit to the show organizer.

Decorating and Set Up: Decorating and set up services are often available. There's a form for that.

Sponsorships and Show Ads: Most shows offer advertising and sponsorships. Typical options include signs in the halls, ads in show publications and event sponsorships. It all costs extra, and there are deadlines for submitting payments and forms.

At the Show

Take copies of all your forms. You may need them. Once there, you'll get other forms to complete after the show.

Release Form: You need to submit this to the organizers or show decorators after dismantling your booth and preparing your stuff for shipping.

Shipping Form (Bill of Laden): When your stuff is ready for shipping, you complete this form listing destination, number of boxes and cartons. You submit it to the show decorators or organizers. And you contact your shipper for pickup.

Other Forms and Releases: You may have to submit a form for other services you order for your booth. Ask the show organizers or service providers.

Deadlines

Check for deadlines to register, request booth services, ship materials, and more. You can get that info from the show organizers.

Guidelines and Restrictions

Most shows have restrictions on sign size, audio, demonstrations and more. They're not all strictly enforced, but they can be. If your booth violates a restriction, have a plan in case you have to adjust at the show.

"Forms"

Forms are part of exhibiting at a trade show. As more shows use electronic forms, there's less actual paper. Whatever kind of "paperwork" you get, keep track of it and have the important stuff ready.

Fliers, Brochures, Graphic Design

Fliers, brochures, postcards, and everything you need for trade shows.

PacesetterMedia.com



Trade Show Displays and Signs

First Priority: Getting the *Right* People to Stop

If you can do only one thing with your display, do this: get the *right* people to stop.

The *right* people are your best prospects and customers. In a word, your *audience*.

Your audience needs to see that you have something for them. So highlight those words that address what your audience is looking for and the benefits of your product. Put these words high in your display in big headlines and pictures.

Other Purposes

If you have the space and the need, you can do more.

Inform

Once people stop, they probably want more information. If you're not available right away, your signs can provide more information about your product and offer. This can be on small, stand-alone signs, in brochures and on computer screens and video.

Impress

The WOW factor can be your hook, and if you're breaking into a new market, an impressive booth can get you noticed. A big booth helps, but a small, well-thought-out display can make a splash, too.

Demonstrate, Train or Entertain

This can be the hook that gets people to stop and stay, especially if you provide valuable training or entertainment. This isn't necessarily part of the sign, but your booth and perhaps your signage have to include space for it.

Simplicity

If you can, keep your signs simple. Simplicity has several advantages:

- Simplicity leaves more space for the important ideas and words. With bigger text, those important headlines are readable from farther away. With more space around those headlines, they stand out more.
- Your signs will stay up-to-date longer. With less information, there's less that could become obsolete.

Start with a simple wire-frame mock up of your signage with the most essential ideas, headlines and bullets. Then ask yourself if any more information is needed. Then ask again, is it *really* needed? Then, if you have to include more info, do so, but only if it's *needed* for your purpose.

Signs and Displays



Signs, displays and everything you need for trade shows.

PacesetterMedia.com

Trade Show Schedule

These milestones are based on big, national shows. Smaller shows have a more compressed schedule. Get deadlines from the show organizer.

One Year

Pick a booth space as early as possible. If you can arrange travel or hotel, do so.

8-6 Months

If not done, arrange booth design and production, especially for a large booth. Big displays require hired hands at the show. Arrange those details as well as hotels and travel if you can.

3 Months

Review and schedule promotional items and logo apparel. Start planning brochures and printed materials.

2 Months

Plan your promotional items and apparel because some items take four weeks or more for delivery. Finish concept and design of printed material and order the material. Test the set up of a new display (earlier for large booths). Confirm travel and shipping.

1 Month

See everything above...if you haven't done it yet, you kinda have to rush now. Get started!

3-2 Weeks

Really, get that stuff done. You have to pay rush charges to be on time. And it's time to start shipping, especially the big stuff.

1 Week

Meet with your booth staff (if any), and explain your goals and audiences. Explain your 30-second messages. Take care of any final details from above.

Day(s) Before (For small shows and simple booths, this could be early on the first day.)

Arrive early and check in at "Exhibitor Registration." Most shows have a counter for exhibitors to get name badges and other paperwork.

Confirm all your materials arrived. Sometimes materials are misplaced, and show staff has to hunt for them. Arrive early with extra time.

Then set up. Small booths take a few hours. Large booths take days.

Show Day

Arrive early, especially on the first day. Test equipment, check the important details of your exhibit, and meet with booth staff.

Last Day

When the show ends, you have to pack and ship everything back as well as complete some forms for the show organizers or service companies. Then contact your shipping company to pick up your stuff, and head home.

Budgeting for a Trade Show

Even small, local expos require a budget. Big industry trade shows can cost a bunch more.

Booth Space

The smallest is usually 10 x 10 and comes with a table and two chairs. Pipe and drape along the back and sides of your booth are usually included.

Booth Furniture and Other Stuff

Need an extra table? That's \$100 rental for two days. Need chairs? A waste basket? Renting this stuff is usually expensive at expo halls.

Electricity, Internet, Telephone

They're all extra. Ask ahead of time if you need these.

Displays, Signs, Brochures, Promotional Items, Giveaways

Maybe this one's obvious, but it's part of the budget, so here it is.

Shipping

If your materials are too big to carry, you'll have to ship them both ways. For large crates or lots of boxes, freight companies often have the best price when you ship early enough.

Drayage, Storage, Material Handling

Once you ship your material, a service company at the expo hall (often NOT the show organizer) charges extra for storage and handling. It can be crazy expensive. We've seen charges of \$2,500 to receive, store and deliver two pallets to a booth.

Even if there's no storage, "drayage" is the charge for taking your material from the loading dock to your booth. This, too, can cost more than you think...like \$200 to move a pallet 200 yards.

Travel, Hotels and Meals

Planes, trains and automobiles, and the hotels and meals along the way.

Entertainment and Social Time

A big convention is more than the trade show, where your conversations are usually short. During the off hours, it's social. You might have the chance to socialize with prospects and others at organized events or over meals and a drink. Use this time well. Budget for some wining and dining in case you get the opportunity.

Plus, Plus, Plus

Add taxes, gratuities and some surprises. Have some extra cash so you can take a cab to a store to get something you forgot. It happens. Be ready for it.

And to cover anything not in this list, here's a standard disclaimer...each situation is unique, other expenses may occur. Read the show prospectus, and if that uniquely perfect idea can make your trade show uniquely perfect, budget for it

The 30-Second Message

At a trade show, a few short answers to common questions help you go from introduction to the next step in your sales process.

Have them ready for:

Introductions - To Start the Conversation

Have a 30-second introduction when you meet people in your booth. It's the first explanation of what you do or who you are. It's your chance to get someone's attention, start a conversation or explain why someone should buy your product.

Details - Explanation of Your Product or Deals

Use one when you have to explain more about your product or offer. Sometimes companies need one message. Some need multiple answers to many questions.

Closings - Getting to the Next Step

At some point, you want to invite people to the next step in your selling process. That might be a sale. It might be scheduling a follow up call or appointment. Have a short invitation ready.



Ask Your Sales Staff

People in sales often use some introductions, answers, and short pitches in their work. They can be a great source of ideas. If you don't have a sales staff and feel stuck, ask your friends and associates who are in sales. Sales pros know how to highlight the benefits during the sales process. If you can, seek their help.

Shorter is Okay

Your message can be shorter than 30 seconds or longer. Sometimes all you need is a direct statement like "I can take your order right now. Let me get your information."

If it can be that simple, keep it that simple.

Be Flexible and Conversational

We're not suggesting you always speak in scripted sound bites; we are suggesting that you prepare what you're going to say. And we're suggesting that writing it down helps most people improve their delivery. It also helps when you want to share them your staff.

Use a scripted message when it's appropriate. Relax and keep it conversational.

Creating an Effective 30-Second Message



You're going to have at least one 30-second message. It's your introduction, what you say when somebody asks "What do you do?" But you should have others ready about your products, offers and anything that's important.

A simple formula includes three parts:

The Hook

A hook can be anything that starts a conversation or gets attention: a product name, a major benefit of your products, humor, an outrageous statement, a demonstration, a free give away, a simple "hello." There are lots of ways to break the ice. Use anything that's appropriate and works.

If you're stuck, use some words and ideas related to what your customers want. Answer these questions:

- What is your audience looking for?
- What benefits of your product interests them?

Include a few keywords from those answers in your hook.

The Message - What your customers want

The body of your message should include more about what your customers want and how you can help them. For technical questions, include the technical answer. And when you can, mention the benefits you offer: fast service, durable products, ease of use, time savings... whatever is appropriate for your product or company.

What's Next

Know what's next in your sales process, and include a question or statement that leads to that.

Often, Q & A and more conversation are next, so you could ask a question. Sometimes a sale is the right next step; when appropriate, ask for the sale. Sometimes follow up after the show is the next step, so get contact information.

Whatever the next step, ask for it.

Trade Show Tips and Tricks

Show Specials (For Really New Trade Show Rookies Only)

If you are really new to trade shows, this tip is for you. You should almost certainly offer a “Show Special”...a discount, enticement or special deal. Everybody does it. Attendees expect it. ANYBODY who’s ever attended any trade show expects it. Have a show special.

“Exclusive” Giveaways

Have a secret stash of something to give away, even if it’s just good candy or snacks. When you establish a friendly conversation with a good prospect, nonchalantly bring out the goodie. It costs little, but it’s a simple, friendly gesture. It’s not critical, just one of the small things you can do to build rapport.

Demonstrations or Training

A live demonstration or training in your booth can attract a crowd and keep them engaged. And it’s a way to highlight benefits and selling points of your product. If it fits your product, do live demonstrations or training.

Engage in Conversation

Actively engage in conversation with anybody who approaches your booth. This seems obvious, but we’ve seen booth staff ignore visitors unless somebody asked a question.

Ask Questions

When people stop at your booth, ask about the challenges or problems they face, particularly as it relates to your product. A variation is to ask what they’re looking for at the trade show. Asking question is an important part of the sales process.

Pre Show Contact

Before the show, contact people you know who will attend. You can send a postcard, letter or e-mail to customers and prospects. You can tell them about your trade show special, your booth number and an invitation to visit your booth.

After you go to a few trade shows in a given industry, you’ll get to know other exhibitors and attendees. It doesn’t hurt to stay in touch with them, too.

Follow Up

If you get contact information from booth visitors, be sure to follow up after the show. Whatever your sales process calls for (calling, mailing, sending samples), do it within days of the trade show.



Trade Show Checklist

Paperwork

Have copies of your paperwork.

- _ Contact Info for trade show organizers, decorators, staff
- _ Registration and Order Forms
- _ Receipts for Payments
- _ Confirmation E-mails and Receipts
- _ Exhibitor Guide and Schedule
- _ Shipping Tracking Numbers

Travel

- _ Transportation Tickets, Reservations and Numbers
- _ Hotel Reservation
- _ Hotel Address and Phone
- _ Trade Show Address
- _ Cash for tips, cabs, the unexpected

Hardware and Tools

You sometimes need this stuff to fix a broken sign or rig a display.

- _ Wire Ties
- _ Duck Tape or Gaffers Tape
- _ All-In-One Knife/Tool
- _ Bungee Cords
- _ Bailing Wire
- _ Extension Cords
- _ Power Strips

Sales Material

- _ Signs and Displays
- _ Business Cards
- _ Brochures, Postcards, Fliers
- _ Promotional Items
- _ Generic Business Cards (in case somebody runs out)
- _ Demonstration Materials, Computers, Samples

Office Supplies

- _ Pens, Pencils
- _ Markers
- _ Masking Tape
- _ Sticky Notes and Notepads
- _ Rubber Bands
- _ Stapler and Staples
- _ Highlighter
- _ Paper Clips
- _ Scissors
- _ Clear Tape
- _ Packing Tape

Personal and Medicine

- _ Medicine (like Advil, antacid)
- _ Hand Sanitizer
- _ Snacks
- _ Water

Solving Promotion Problems

Ideas, Delivery, Execution

Sometimes it's the creative stuff like design and media production. Sometimes it's the routine stuff like logo pens. Sometimes it's the hassle of a trade show booth. We solve those problems.



Since 1999

PacesetterMedia.com • (813) 685-9206