

Tradeshow Marketing Exhibitor's Toolkit

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What do Tradeshow and Event Managers Need in Their Toolkit?

Tradeshow marketing accounts for an average one-third of a company's annual marketing budget. Much of that money is simply flushed down the drain. Why? Because many company tradeshow and exhibit managers don't have a thorough, detailed plan for each show and often the booth staff is unaware of the reason for even being at the show, other than the general 'business-building' exercise.

Companies continue to go to tradeshows in spite of the amount of money that is spent. In fact, the event industry is on the rise. Since the recession late in the last decade, most industries and events have seen climbing attendance.

Industry statistics for tradeshow marketers are enlightening: visitors spend an average of 8.3 hours in 2.3 days on a tradeshow floor, giving exhibitors the chance to reach thousands of potential customers in a very short time (Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2008). 39% of visitors come to the same show at least two years in a row, giving exhibitors a loyal base of committed potential customers (CEIR, 2008). 50% of attendees already have a buying plan when attending shows (CEIR, 2007). And finally – decision makers love exhibitions: 87% of survey respondents state that national exhibitions are 'an extremely useful' source of needed purchasing information (CEIR, 2004).

Yet less than 4 of 5 exhibitors follow up on leads they gather at tradeshows (CEIR, 2010). That's right – around 80% of leads are left gathering dust!

Tradeshow marketing is attractive because the cost of reaching a potential customer face-to-face is \$219 with an exhibition lead, compared with \$1,039 without one (CEIR, 2009). Add to that the fact that as human beings, we relish the idea of meeting colleagues, vendors, clients and prospects face-to-face: two-thirds of visitors place a high level of importance on face-to-face interaction during the pre-purchasing stages of the buying process (CEIR, 2003). Executives cited conference and tradeshow participation returns ranging from \$4.00 to \$5.91 per dollar invested (Oxford Economics, 2009).

So what's the disconnect?

The most overlooked key to exhibiting success is to work on expanding a company's **tradeshow exhibiting knowledge base**. Often management and staffers simply don't have a full understanding of the company's goals and methods, and many aren't given proper tools or training to fill that costly gap. This report does just that in a fun, engaging and thorough way.

Many tradeshow managers were appointed to the job and don't have a good grasp on the complexity of the task confronting them: namely, spending a limited budget on a yearly tradeshow marketing plan and generate more business than the amount that is spent. Many others have formal marketing education, yet are missing hands-on tools for event and tradeshow marketing.

So how do you expand your company's exhibiting tradeshow **knowledge base**?

One way is to make sure you're asking the right questions. And once those questions are asked, you make sure you have good answers, ones that are accurate and documented as best as they can be.

That's where a tradeshow marketing analysis or **tradeshow exhibitor's toolkit** comes in. By using these tools to perform such an examination, you're taking a snapshot of where you are right now, regardless of where you've been or where you're going. If you've never done it before, it's a way to set a baseline for future audits.

How does this work?

A thorough analysis will take some time. You'll have to dig through files, ask questions and maybe annoy people (and perhaps please others with your dedication), dig deep and finally assemble it all in a report.

But it'll be worth it. You'll learn a LOT about what your company is doing at tradeshow. And what you're not.

You'll increase the prospect that the your next tradeshow appearance will perform better, and you'll get a much better sense of your company's entire marketing efforts, even those outside the tradeshow.

So here's how to approach this. First, print it up and make sure your coffee cup is full. Read the entire audit, and then grab a pencil and a blank notepad or fire up a new document on your computer. Get an understanding of the type of information you'll need to unearth. Make notes in the margins. Make a list of what you don't have close at hand. Highlight the questions you

need to discuss with others in the company. Put question marks beside the items that may not apply to your company.

If you're willing to take the time and spend the energy to complete this analysis, you're ready to work with the best. We at **Communication One Exhibits** are committed to helping you dominate your competition and making your mark!

Ready?

Set...

Begin!

Tradeshow Marketing Analysis: Where to Start

The beginning can be a moving target. As a young writer I never knew where to start a piece of fiction or article or project. Then someone said 'start anywhere, begin now' – and with that I realize that it doesn't matter where you start, as long as you DO start.

But for the sake of argument – and for the sake of having some cohesive structure to this article and the next few, we do need to start somewhere.

And that somewhere would be on determining your specific tradeshow marketing **OBJECTIVES**.

If you're already going to shows, you should spend time discussing them with colleagues and determine if they're still worth going to. A large client of ours abruptly pulled out of a large industry tradeshow after doing the math and realizing that the show was not helping their business. Instead, their main business had shifted online and it made more sense to move the tradeshow dollars towards the online area, which paid more dividends.

Another client stopped going to a major show for a few years while reassessing their tradeshow marketing objectives. They're back now, but only with a renewed commitment and specific reason or being there.

If you have not been to a specific show, you should plan to attend without exhibiting to get a feel for it. Talk to exhibitors; get feedback on their experience. Ask a lot of questions. Watch visitors and see how they interact. Research your competition and see what their booth(s) look like. Imagine how your booth would fit in side-by-side with those exhibitors.

As for what your objectives might be, how do you determine them? After all, every show is different – at least a bit. Some are drastically different: different audience, different competition at each show, different orientation (location of your booth, promotion by the organizers) and other ways that shows differ.

Some common objectives might include:

- Building your Brand
- Entering a new market
- Bringing home qualified leads
- Sales, pure and simple
- Recruiting partners
- Networking with current clientele
- Supporting vendors
- Sign contracts
- Develop RFP's
- Collecting new prospects to start drip marketing
- Public Relations
- Recruit new employees

To gauge the success of meeting those tradeshow objectives, some metrics you might measure include:

- Number of demos given
- Number of press mentions
- Number of visitors to booth
- Number of new leads
- Number of applications for positions
- Number of RFPs
- How might you measure those metrics? Staff would manually count some, and some would be counted by scanning badges at the booth.

Here are some questions to help you determine your objectives:

- What are your main show goals and objectives?
- What is your secondary objective?
- Who in your company defines your goals and objectives?
- How well do you meet those goals with your tradeshow marketing?
- Understanding that each trade show has a different target market and a different mix of attendees, how do your goals and objectives change from show to show?
- What is your target audience?
- Does this show meet that target?
- What companies are your main competitors at the show?
- How do they stack up against you in terms of Booth size and scope, presence, staffing, pre-show marketing and visibility?

There are no right or wrong objectives – only objectives that fit the needs of your organization. Once you determine those objectives, determine as well the metrics you'll use to measure the success of meeting your objectives. And don't try to do too much at a show. If you try to meet a half dozen marketing goals at a single show, your message and execution will be ill-defined. Focus on one or two main objectives and figure out how to best measure them.

Budgeting:

You can get lost in the numbers. But sometimes it's fun – and enlightening.

Here's a series of questions that you should ask yourself regarding your tradeshow marketing budget.

- What is your annual tradeshow marketing budget?
- What percentage of the company's overall marketing budget does the tradeshow division make up?
- Who determines what the annual tradeshow marketing budget is?
- How often does that assessment take place?
- Is that assessment shared throughout the company, or is it generally kept quiet?
- Is the budget increasing, decreasing or staying about the same?
- Is your current budget enough for what you plan to do? What you'd like to do?
- What's the breakdown of the budget?
 - Booth space rental (shipping, drayage, other show costs)
 - Booth upgrades, etc.
 - Travel/lodging
 - Promotion
 - Giveaways
 - Product samples/displays
 - Other
- What is the company decision-making process for creating a new tradeshow booth?
- Does the company's marketplace success directly impact your tradeshow marketing budget?

Feel free to download the COE budget spreadsheet (link):

- Booth Design and construction
- Show Services
- Personnel
- Advertising and Marketing
- Shipping

- Lead Gathering
- Post Show Sales Data
- Leads
- Cost per lead
- Number of known show sales
- Average sale
- ROI
- Miscellaneous

Even if you aren't the person who crunches all the numbers on a regular basis, if you can make yourself do this on a regular basis, not only will you understand the bigger picture much better, but you become more valuable to your company!

Pre-Show Preparation

Tradeshow pre-show preparation and marketing involves more than just a short look at how to attract visitors to your booth, or determining what graphics you'll need to update on your booth. While there are more areas in your pre-show preparation that you shake a stick at, for the purposes of this article let's take a look at just the target market and the products you're focusing on:

Who, or what, exactly is your target market? Are you trying to reach grocery store owners, food distributors, software engineers or end users of your product? Keep in mind that your target market can change from show to show, and it can also change from year to year as your company matures. For instance, one eco-friendly diaper company I've worked with for years has seen their target market shift along with their strategy for each show as their products are in more stores now than a half a decade ago. They don't need the distribution that they once yearned for. Now they need to focus more on the relationships with the clients they currently have by providing them with the best service and product updates as possible, and add new distribution channels only if appropriate.

Typically, pre-show preparation will often focus just on pre-show marketing, and there's nothing really wrong with that. If you focus exclusively on that, you may forget a few other items such as staff training or critical booth upgrades. Still, how you address your pre-show marketing will be crucial to the outcome of your show.

With pre-show marketing, here are some questions to ask:

- How will you reach them before the show?
- Email
 - How far in advance of the show do you email your group?

- How many times to you email them before the show?
 - What is your message?
 - Product
 - Service
- Social media
- What platforms do you promote your show appearance on?
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - LinkedIn
 - YouTube
 - Pinterest
 - Other
- Direct mail
- Telephone
- Other
- What is your message to the market?
- What are your top 1, 2 or 3 products/services you're focusing on for the next show?
- When do you typically roll out your pre-show marketing?
 - One week in advance of the show
 - One month in advance of the show
 - Two months in advance of the show
 - Three months of the show
 - Other
- How often do you communicate with them prior to the show?
 - 1-2 times
 - 3-5 times
 - More than 6 times

By walking through this flowchart, you can identify areas that you're strongest at, and determine what areas might need more attention. There's no wrong answer when it comes to what pre-show marketing you should do or when you should do it, or even what you should focus on. But it is important that you create a plan, make sure that everyone involved in your tradeshow marketing efforts are aware of the plan and are able to do their part.

Which Shows to Attend

One of the most pressing challenges for exhibitors is determining what shows to exhibit at on a regular basis. Just because your company has been going to the same show for twenty years doesn't mean it's the right show for you to go to. The exhibit industry changes and evolves.

Audiences and interests change. Some shows expand. Others downsize. Some vanish altogether or are folded into similar shows. All of this means that you should examine what shows you go to on a regular basis and determine the reasons for attending – or not attending.

I've seen companies that exhibit at shows for years suddenly drop out because their business model changed. One company exhibited for years at the Natural Products Expo West and one year they just didn't show up. It turns out that so much of their business moved online that it didn't make sense to put out the large amounts of cash just to keep going to a show that didn't give them the return they needed – and were clearly getting elsewhere.

Other companies have downsized or simply taken a few years off from certain shows as they re-examined their purpose in being at a particular show. So yes, it does matter that you take a look at the big picture of why you're going to show in general, and why you are exhibiting at a particular show.

In the process of determining your 'big picture' of the shows you attend, those you don't and might want to consider and your whole reason for tradeshow marketing, here are a series of questions to help you examining it.

- What shows do you exhibit at on a yearly basis?
- What shows did you used to attend but haven't for several years?
- If you listed a show(s) here, how long has it been since you exhibited?
- What shows are you considering exhibiting at but haven't done so yet?
- What is your potential audience at each show? What is your overall potential audience for the year?
- How many leads do you bring home from the each show?
- In your opinion, what are the most obvious things you're doing right?
- In your opinion, what are the most obvious things you're doing wrong?
- What's the biggest goal you have for tradeshow marketing in the next 2-3 years?
- How much money is budgeted for the year's events?
- How much money is actually spent on the year's shows?
- How much business can you directly attribute to the leads that were gathered from the shows?
- What's the ROI on the sales leads you gathered from the shows?

Can you identify other benefits of going to the shows that don't directly impact your bottom line, such as branding, earned media mentions, new distributors, strengthened ties with current distributors and more?

By knowing the answers to all of these questions – and by sharing that knowledge with your team – you'll be much better prepared to answer the question 'are my tradeshow marketing

dollars well-spent?’ As you’ve seen me mention many times, one of the best things you can do for your company is to continue to increase the knowledge base of your co-workers. By knowing the answers to all of these questions and more, that knowledge base increases. In the long-term, you’ll be better-equipped to make good choices on which shows to attend, what to focus on at the shows, and which shows you might decide are simply not worth it.

The Booth

Let’s tackle the BIGGEST part of your tradeshow strategy – at least in terms of potential cost.

The BOOTH.

We can agree that booths come in all shapes and sizes. We can also agree that they usually cost a LOT MORE than you anticipated, right?

Let’s leave the cost and size up to your particular company’s available budget, goals and marketing presence. For some companies, a 20×30 booth would be a huge investment, more than they could possibly justify. For others, a 70×100 might be smaller than they’re used to. So for now we’ll dispense with the actual size and cost and focus on other important elements.

Let’s start with the BRAND. Your booth should convey, at a glance, the look and feel of your brand. For some, that’s a natural wood look. For others, it means a high-tech look straight out of Star Trek. That doesn’t mean that a rootsy, earth-mama brand couldn’t get away with an aluminum structure with fabric graphics. Those decisions are typically made through long and detailed conversations with a 3D booth designer, the company’s marketing team and a booth fabricator. But still, the goal should be that when a visitor sees the booth and the company’s name, it evokes a FEELING that is in congruence with what the company wants the visitor to feel. If not, somebody messed up.

Secondly, your GRAPHICS MESSAGING should be planned so that a visitor’s eyeballs will follow it to its proper conclusion. Usually this means the hierarchy works like this:

1. Company Name or Logo
2. Positioning Statement or Bold Challenge
3. Supporting Statement

However, if your company is not well known, this typical hierarchy might change a bit:

1. Bold Statement or Challenging Question
2. Company Name or Logo
3. Supporting Statement

And on somewhat rare occasions, the company name might drop all the way to third place, if it's an unknown company or if the company name is really insignificant:

1. Bold Statement of Challenging Question
2. Supporting Statement
3. Company Name or Logo

If your company name is unimportant in the sense that a product or brand is important or more recognizable than the company name, that might go first:

1. Brand
2. Tagline or Positioning Statement
3. Supporting Statement

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for graphics on tradeshow booths that covers all companies or situations. Instead, your goals, products and objectives should help determine how the graphic hierarchy is displayed. The main thing to keep in mind is that visitors pass by booths quickly and they all become a blur. Imagine your booth is a freeway billboard and you have 2 – 3 seconds to catch someone's attention.

Next up: BOOTH FUNCTION.

From a 10×10 booth to the larger island booths, the function of a booth must be carefully thought out and discussed, and it will be determined largely by your show goals and objectives, the number of booth staff and how you want to interact with visitors. If you're doing product demonstrations, for example, you'll need to make sure the booth is big enough to accommodate the presenter or demonstrator and a small audience. If you're sampling edibles, perhaps all you need is an easy-to-reach sampling table.

Every booth is different, every show is different and every company's goals and objectives are different. Other questions to settle: Do you have enough storage? How many meeting areas do you need? Should the meeting areas be completely private or only semi-private? What products and/or services are you promoting at this show? Do you need video monitors, or an iPad kiosk to help visitors interact?

Take the time to address all of the functions that your booth needs. Those needs can be determined by the experience you've had at past shows as well as conversations with company staff that are involved.

No matter what functions you detail and prepare for in your booth, chances are good that once you've lived in the booth for a few days, you'll notice things that need to be changed for the next time. For example, one of our clients wanted a meeting space for their clients in a 20×30

booth, so one end of the booth – about a 10×20 space – was covered and mostly inaccessible to the casual visitor. However, after 2 – 3 times exhibiting in the booth, it became apparent that client meetings didn't happen as often as they thought, and booth staffers found it to be a quick and easy place to hide out. So the covered meeting space was removed and the space was better utilized as product display and visitor interaction.

Of course BOOTH FUNCTION also includes things such as storage, meeting areas and traffic flow. While planning a booth you'll want to take into account these three critical things. Not to say that they're often – or ever – overlooked, but it's not out of the ordinary for them to be miscalculated. For instance, traffic flow: do visitors have easy access to the booth? Or do you even want them to have easy access? Some companies design booths so that only desired visitors are allowed inside, limiting access to casual passers-by. Others want any and all visitors to step inside the line.

Storage needs to be considered: personal items (coats, purses, laptops, briefcases, etc.), products so samples can be replenished and more. Do you have enough space? Make sure you have enough, but try not to overdo it: space is at a premium at tradeshow and every cubic inch needs to be considered.

Finally: meeting areas. How many staffers will be meeting with clients or media types at the booth? How often? How many meetings are already scheduled ahead of time? How many do you anticipate to happen randomly?

Truthfully, it's quite possible that the needs of each show will shift slightly from previous shows. The best approach seems to be to pay attention to how the booth is used at each show and make adjustments as budget and goals shift.

Finally, let's touch on LOGISTICS, SET-UP AND DISMANTLE. In recent talks with a new client, they first mentioned the most important aspect of their new booth: it HAS to ship in a case small enough to go by UPS or FedEx. The large 4x4x8 wooden crates were a big NO-NO. So every possibility that came up from then on had to ultimately meet that objective.

To them, set up meant having a couple of booth staffers arrive a day or two early at the show, set it up with a minimum of fuss and tools, and avoid the double-whammy costs of pre-show staging and arrival at the advance warehouse, and having to hire show help to set up the booth.

Other companies don't mind the extra cost – they try to minimize it, of course – but it's more important to show their audience a great booth. Even if it means the booth is a 40×40 that requires a day to set up with hired help, and takes a dozen crates to ship.

Any good company will be aware of your desires in these areas, and determine what's most important.

Best Case Scenario: having a booth that a) immediately conveys your company's BRAND, 2) your GRAPHIC MESSAGING is clear and relates to this show's goals and objectives, 3) is built to FUNCTION properly with room for meetings, storage, product/service display and 4) meets your company's objectives when it comes to SET-UP and DISMANTLE.

Booth Staff

So you've got a great booth. You've done a fair amount of pre-show planning and marketing. The products are terrific. Yet at the end of the show, your results fell flat. Not sure why, you say, you just can't put your finger on it!

What about your BOOTH STAFF? Is there a chance you don't have the right people, or that you don't have people that are properly trained in working a tradeshow?

It's entirely possible that the success of your show depends on your booth staff. And if your staff is under-educated, ill informed or simply not prepared, your results will show that.

So what do you do?

First, make sure you have the right people. A booth staffer should be outgoing, intelligent, approachable, friendly, knowledgeable – and trained in exactly what the company's goals are for this show.

Which means that many of the people that you send to the show are not a good fit.

Salespeople? Well, you'd think so. But if you have a salesperson that is used to a typical sales situation, they may not be prepared for a tradeshow floor, which is by its very nature, chaotic, fast and distracting. A 'typical' sales situation may mean that the salesperson has set up an appointment, makes an office visit and the prospect has scheduled 30 minutes, an hour or more for a meeting.

That won't work on a showroom floor, and any salesperson that thinks it will work should be dissuaded of that attitude. Instead, a tradeshow booth staffer must learn to quickly qualify or disqualify a visitor and move them on to the next step in a few moments. This doesn't mean that the staffer must hurry someone along that is clearly a prospect, it's that they must learn to recognize who to spend time with (and still limit that time), who to pleasantly thank and move on from, and how to steer prospects to the right people if appropriate.

This means that every tradeshow booth staffer can probably use a good training session. A good trainer will help a staffer to ask the right questions, and do a little role-playing. It might

mean that the staffer needs to be educated more fully on the company's products and/or services.

Bottom line, it means that the staffers – as well as anyone in the company involved in the tradeshow marketing effort – must expand their KNOWLEDGE BASE. The more information that people have, the more understanding they have and the more effective they'll be on the tradeshow floor.

Another significant part of training will help inform staffers of the top no-nos in a booth: eating, talking on a cell phone, standing with arms folded (which is body language for 'don't talk to me!'), and more.

Research has been done for years in the exhibiting industry, and multiple surveys and studies show that the more 'buy-in' a staffer has, the more effective they'll be. The better-informed that all parties are, the more they're able to work outside of their normal areas, which means that when a visitor shows up at the booth, the chances go up that they'll be able to get an answer to their question, no matter what.

Is your booth staff prepared? Do they understand the products and services? Are they capable of discussing them with visitors? Do they have qualifying questions ready for visitors? Are they able to greet people with a smile?

I would wager that no matter how good your staff is, they can be better at the next show by undergoing a training session. It'll show in your bottom line.

Lead Generation

First, let's define lead generation before we get too deep into this section.

All marketing is the activity of looking for either a new lead, or a way to bring current clients or customers to new products or services. Generating leads is a must to keep your business moving forward. No leads, no business.

When it comes to tradeshows, lead generation is the specific act of capturing contact information and related follow up information from your visitors so that you can connect with them again at a not-too-distant-in-the-future date.

Lead generation is NOT the act of having a fishbowl where you invite attendees to throw their business card in for a chance to win an iPad. Nope, in this case your lead must be someone who's qualified to a) need or want your products or services and b) in the position to purchase soon.

All of your lead generation activity should spring from these two determinations. When a visitor enters your booth, they're expressing at least a modest active desire to learn more about your product. At this point, you have an opportunity to quickly learn a few things: who they are, what their interest is in your offerings, and if they are in a position to purchase soon.

If you search Google for "lead generation" you'll get hundreds of ideas for drawing a crowd at your booth and capturing their contact information.

Many of them will work well, and you'll walk away from the show with lots of potential leads. I say 'potential' leads because you'll often find that many of those business cards are from people that just stopped by to try and win an iPad or they spun a wheel, or some other fun thing. But that doesn't make them prospects.

Instead, focus on capturing the contact information from people who are in a position to buy from you, and leave all the rest to the side.

This means that you must focus on your efforts to attract those potential clients and disqualify the others.

By asking one or two questions you will determine if the visitor is qualified. If they are, you dig a little deeper. If they are not qualified, you politely disengage so that you are not wasting their time or yours.

To start, your graphic messaging can help to qualify those visitors by being laser-focused on the benefits your company offers. This might mean a specific statement or a bold claim or bold question that gets that market thinking, "hey, I need to know more!"

Look at lead generation activities as just another investment – and that it should be measured just like other investments. Are you getting good results from your investment? If not, change it up based on becoming more focused on what works and what is important to your audience.

Help them.

If you're selling a product or service, you must know what it is that keeps them up at night. What are they thinking about at 3 am that is keeping them from sleeping soundly? Dangle the bait in such a way that you address that problem. Perhaps that means a free white paper that they can get if they fill in a brief form on an iPad stationed at the front of the booth. Perhaps that means conducting proprietary research directed at that market designed to uncover exactly what bugs them.

There are hundreds of ways to catch a prospect, but they all boil down to this: are your products designed to solve their problem or satisfy a need? If so, you're on the right track and your questions will spring from those platforms.

Next, you must have a proper method of capturing the information. You can go high or low tech, it doesn't matter as long as the information is processed and passed on to the right people who are prepared to follow up in a timely manner in the way that your prospect expects.

At best, your information will include contact info (name, address, email, phone number) and will gauge their interest in your products or services. It will optimally have specific information on when they want to be contacted and their current stage of interest in your products. Beyond that, you're probably wasting their time and yours. But for a valid and proper follow up, your sales person will benefit greatly from knowing all of that information.

Again, it doesn't matter whether you're using an iPad, scanning badges or a filling in a form on a clipboard, as long as it works effectively.

Finally, you must have a foolproof method of getting the leads back to the office! I've heard too many stories of companies who have spent thousands of dollars exhibiting, sending people to the show and then sending the leads back in the crates with the booth – and they weren't able to track them down for weeks. At which point the value of prompt follow up was lost, along with thousands of dollars in potential sales.

Ideally, each day's leads should be sent back that night to the main office and put into the follow up system. At worst, they should accompany the tradeshow manager or other designated person back to the office at the end of the show. Digital leads have the advantage of being able to be sent back quickly, but even paper forms can be scanned or photographed or turned into PDFs using smartphone apps and sent digitally, as well.

While your booth staff's engagement is important (see part 5), bringing back the leads is critical to your show's success.

When you remember that nearly 80% of all tradeshow leads are NOT FOLLOWED UP ON, if you can fix this simple step you'll be ahead of 4 out of 5 of your competitors. So where would that put you?

Post-Show Follow Up

Now you're back at the office. The booth has been buttoned up and shipped, the staff are back at their desks, and you have a stack of leads that need to be follow up with, and perhaps other tasks, such as going through multi-media (photos/videos) to be used in a variety of ways.

Let's break them down:

- Sales leads
- Staff debriefing
- Logistical notes
- Photos/videos and other content creation

Sales leads would of course be handled directly by your sales follow up team. Each company's methods are their own, so as long as you know how that works, it's not my job to make that over. Just make sure it DOES work for you!

Staff Debriefing: While it's not always ideal to make it work on the show floor, you can gain a lot of insight into how your booth works, how visitors perceive your company and more by holding daily debriefings on the show floor. Even if it's only a quick 15 minute wrap, by allowing all staffers to share perspectives, offer ideas and feedback, your company will benefit.

Back at the office, another way to benefit is to spend a little more time debriefing each staffer individually. This allows you to offer more intimate feedback and encouragement, and to identify any specific areas that need improvement. It's also helpful because in a one-on-one conversation they're likely to be more candid than they might in a group on the show room floor.

Make notes on the feedback for your tradeshow file.

Logistical Notes: Any notes you have made before, during, and after the show should be reviewed. Did the set-up crew have any problems? What questions came up from visitors that you didn't expect? Did the electrical grid plan work effectively? What was missing? What surprised you at this show?

What about competitors? Did you or any of your staff get around to review your competitors booths and see what their staff and products were all about? Were any of your competitors there in bigger or smaller booths? What could you sense or what did you learn from seeing the booths and products? Were any of your competitors missing? Gather all of these notes as well, and be sure to ask your staffers and management staff what they thought.

Finally, what **photos** and **videos** did you bring back from the show? If you have an active content-creation group, you may have dozens or hundreds of photos, and perhaps a dozen or more short videos. These may be photos of visitors, other booths (competitors as well as partners), video testimonials or demonstrations. These can all be used for research, and many can be used on social media platforms to share with your audience what you were doing at the show. Without getting too deep into the use of social media for your event marketing (more on

that in the next few days), by capturing multi-media content for research and future use, you can extend your visibility at tradeshow by weeks, months or longer, and use the content to tease your audience in another 11 months when you are prepping for the show again.

Record Keeping

What records should you keep from your tradeshow appearances?

Short answer: EVERYTHING.

And since you can store records digitally, anyone can access them from anywhere at anytime its necessary.

This means photos, videos, booth layouts, drayage and set-up/dismantle orders, staff debriefing, visitor comments, lead generation – really, all of it should be captured and kept in an obvious place. Maybe you create a 3-ring binder for every show that sits on your shelf. Maybe it's a folder in a cloud that is easily accessible to every one that matters in your tradeshow marketing world.

Here's the thing: if you keep it all, you'll be surprised at how those bits and pieces will come in handy at some point in the future. Some sales person will come to you in six months and will ask if you know what that guy from Company B was interested in when he visited the booth. If you kept a copy of that lead sheet, you can pull it out (because he lost his copy) and you are now a hero.

If the marketing team comes to you and says “by the way, do you know what graphics we used at the show in January?” you can pull out a photo and show them exactly what the booth looked like and what products were on display.

If the tradeshow booth management assistant asks to see last year's electrical grid, you can pull it out in a few seconds.

While a lot of companies keep much of that information, the challenge is often trying to put their hands on it in short order. But if you create an easy system, by dating and labeling everything in a specific folder, such as “2104 Expo West” and then sub-folders with photos, videos, booth layouts, set-up and dismantle invoices, etc., it becomes ten times easier the next time around to manage the process.

Your challenge is this: archive EVERYTHING and ORGANIZE it in such a way that you and your team can access it easily.

You do that, and you'll be ahead of virtually all of your competitors.

Social Media Engagement

Since I've written and blogged about using social media engagement at events, tradeshow and conferences for years at TradeshowguyBlog.com, I would be remiss if I were to not chime in on that broad topic before this tradeshow marketing email course ran its course!

But it's big subject. Let's establish a few things:

Social media is used by many, if not most, of your competitors.

Lots of companies, however, don't use social media properly, or get lost when trying to navigate the ins and outs and don't get more than a few feet past the starting gate.

Your audience IS engaged in social media.

If you get nothing else from this lesson, remember that there is no one right way to engage in social media. Every company has a different level of knowledge and resources to throw at it. Which means that no matter where you are, your competitors will be doing both a better job and a worse job than you.

And if you're NOT using social media, may I ask: why not?

Social media and the inherent connectivity and engagement has changed the world. Why would you NOT get involved in some way? And don't say your industry is not involved. Every industry is. Don't say you're too old. Nope, that's not the case – there are people older than you who are very adept at it (you're lazy). And don't say you don't have enough time. That may be partly true, but there are people with less time than you that still find time to engage at least some.

To begin, you should have an OBJECTIVE. What do you want to gain out of social media engagement? If all you want are sales, it's likely you'll be disappointed, because sales are rarely a direct result of social media engagement.

If you are hoping to find new ways to engage with your market, find out their likes and dislikes, identify complaints, answer questions, solve problems...social media is designed just for you.

When it comes to using social media at events, some obvious ways to use it are to drive traffic to your booth, promote products and services and to make connections with fans, colleagues and your market. The key is FUN and to keep it light. Social media – for companies at least – is not a place to make heavy political statements or to slam competitors. Not that a little levity at your competitors' expense doesn't have a place, but it should be done thoughtfully.

Next, you must identify WHO is going to represent your company. Is it your marketing team? Or is it an outside agency, or a combination thereof?

Often, the combination works best. Your employees know your company culture, which is important in striking the right tone in posts and keeping important information at the forefront. An experienced agency, on the other hand, knows the pitfalls of tweeting inappropriately or responding to a sudden social media crisis.

Next, you will have to determine the best PLATFORMS to spend time and energy on. While there are several key platforms that come to mind – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc. – it often takes an experienced agency to help identify the most important platforms. You know, the ones where your audience and target market hangs out and engages the most. If you're currently involved in a handful of platforms, you probably have an intuitive understanding of the platforms your audience spends time and responds best.

Finally, you have to create CONTENT, and it must be created continuously and consistently. How many Twitter or Facebook accounts have you seen that are dormant and whose last post was over a year ago? It happens all the time. This goes back to identifying the resources you have available, either in-house or whether you have the ability to hire an agency to do the work for you.

Content comes in many faces: tweets, blog posts, short Facebook posts, photos, videos and responding to comments and questions on your platforms. When you get involved in social media you must make a commitment, and that commitment extends beyond the next month or year.

Social media is a marketing initiative, but unlike other marketing initiatives, there is no end date. An advertising campaign has a stop and start date. Social media is ongoing and the commitment is ongoing, too.

Knowing that you must be committed before jumping in with both feet shouldn't keep you from getting involved, though. If nothing else, pick a platform – Facebook is probably the obvious choice if you're not there – and create an account and start.

That's all it takes to begin. You can make adjustments and learn as you go. Like all of your competitors!

And when it comes to using social media at tradeshow, there's a LOT more to discuss. Which is why I'm giving you a PDF copy of the book: **Super Networking at Events and Tradeshow Using Social Media**. Just check elsewhere in the Tradeshow Exhibitor Toolkit for the PDF.

Overall Final Assessment

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being excellent), how successful do you judge your tradeshow marketing?

What would you like to change immediately – before your next show?

What would you like to change in the next year?

What is considered important by the company's marketing department to happen in the next 2 – 5 years regarding your tradeshow marketing endeavors?

What are the most important opportunities for improvement?

Here at COE, we're committed to helping you **dominate your competition and making your mark** at each and every tradeshow you attend. We firmly believe that as you **expand your knowledge base**, you will keep reaching higher and showing greater results. Let us assist you: from working your way through this **tradeshow marketing analysis**, to assisting you in **creating a social media presence** during the show including **content creation**, to **designing and fabricating your next awesome booth**.

Are you ready for the next step? Contact me today:

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