

# Exhibitor Institute eBook

## HOW TO SUCCEED AT TRADE OR CONSUMER SHOWS

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Version 3.0



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 HISTORY

Trade and consumer shows are probably the oldest form of marketing and selling, dating back to the camel caravans of the far east and extending to the farmer's markets of today. Although the modern day trade or consumer show may be larger in area and more sophisticated in its look and presentation, it remains essentially the same. It's a simple philosophy; motivated buyers traveling to touch, see, and experience the various goods being offered by the sellers.

The exhibit hardware of course has changed, progressing from the canvas of the tents in the Middle East to the wonderfully crafted oak and mahogany of the industrial revolution to the current extruded aluminum and plastics.

The fundamental philosophy and objectives remain unchanged: to meet potential purchasers of your products and services, to present and explain how your products and services will benefit them and to begin to build a relationship with these prospective customers (prospects).

In earlier times, exhibit marketing (where 'exhibiting' simply meant to exhibit or display your wares for public awareness and approval) was the only 'marketing' that a vendor could take part in, they arrived at the booth, stall, stand, what ever it was called and went to work meeting, greeting and selling. For centuries this was the only way to market and sell products.

As time passed, things began to change. A lot of the markets moved indoors out of what was often inclement weather etc. and vendors began to market differently. The 'marketing' objective now became to attract prospects to the individual stores. At this point the perception of exhibit marketing began to change.



### 1.2 EXHIBITING IN THE MARKETING MIX

With the appearance of what we consider to be more modern forms of marketing (printing, books, newspapers, outdoor billboards, radio, television, direct mail, database and now the Internet) exhibit marketing began to lose its appeal to many. After all it hadn't been much fun to stand in the rain or snow and sell at a farmers market. There just hadn't been any other choice. With other choices available (and they were all more exciting and easier) the effectiveness of exhibit marketing began to be questioned.



The greatest gift to mankind has been the ability to rationalize any situation to a point where it fits your objective.

We can make anything right if we analyze it long enough and from enough directions. I visit

probably two hundred shows a year. When I walk around these shows and talk to the booth personnel working the exhibits, there is one resounding message. Most of them would rather be anywhere but there. They give me all kinds of reasons that being anywhere else would be more advantageous. It's just hard for me to understand that sales-



people who spend most of their waking hours trying to get appointments with prospects for the purpose of presenting their goods and services, have managed to rationalize that being in a place where there are prospects in abundance, is somewhere they don't want to be.

Many organizations view shows as a 'special event' outside their usual marketing or sales programs. Rarely do they set objectives or targets, rationalizing that by simply showing up, the world will beat a path to their

door. History proves them wrong.

After over thirty years in the exhibit industry, my devout belief is that there is no better place for an organization to be, than on the floor of a well run trade or consumer show, face-to-face with their clients, prospects, competitors and their industry.

This 'eBook' is intended to outline the steps that are necessary for success in exhibiting. These are steps that must be implemented by your organization. When you decide to exhibit at any show, you are renting a piece of concrete floor space and a dream. It's your job to make the dream come true.

Exhibitors often like to leave their success up to someone else, their show manager, their exhibit builder, their agency, etc. No one else but your organization has the intimate knowledge of your clients, your prospects, your products and services and how they would benefit others. Therefore, the responsibility for success in exhibiting ultimately falls on your organization.

## 2.0 IS EXHIBIT MARKETING FOR YOU?

It is hard for me to imagine an organization that would not benefit from exhibit marketing. Let's look at some of the strengths of trade and consumer shows.

\* Shows provide an opportunity for buyers and sellers to meet face to face, where products can be demonstrated, handled and ultimately assessed.

\* The audience is pre-selected and is pre-disposed to learn about new products, services and ideas.

\* By being in direct contact with the client base, new buying interests can be uncovered and buyers who are normally not accessible will appear at your doorstep.

\* The normal buying cycle can be shortened because of the ability to offer solutions and overcome objections immediately.

Which components of this list don't you like? We at the Exhibitor Institute have been doing studies for years. When we talk to show visitors, regarding why they attend shows, the answer is always the same. They come to shows to find out what's new and to make buying decisions for current or future projects. Yet very often the exhibitors don't see it that way. The prospects often become an annoyance and an irritant to the process. What process? Very often the only objective an organization has is just getting through the show. In the following chapters, I will outline the steps you must implement to succeed. There are no shortcuts, just as there is no comparable marketing opportunity.

### 3.0 SELECTING THE PROPER SHOW

The process of show selection does not need to be difficult, although it is critical to your success. The simple rule is: Attend only shows where you are guaranteed to find your prospects. Sounds simple enough. Given the fact that there are no guarantees, you must take the appropriate steps to determine who will be attending the show and will your prospects be among them?

My experience is that by default many exhibitors end up in the right show only because show management has created a show to fit a given set of needs. But very often exhibitors end up in the wrong show. Why? Is it because they bought a strong sales pitch from show management? Sometimes. Is it because the show brochure was exciting and it seemed like a great opportunity? Sometimes. Could it be because we really don't understand who are prospects are? Sometimes. (This happens much more often than you would think).



My advice is this. Sit down with your sales and marketing teams (if you are a really small company this might be you and your partner or spouse) and figure out exactly who your prospects are. There may be reasons to be in totally different shows directed towards different industries. Once you have a profile of your prospect, you can now begin to fit the show profile to your prospect profile, always looking for the perfect match. This advice seems so elementary that you wouldn't think that you would need to worry about it. But I talk to many booth personnel who give me reason after reason why you would never find their prospects at the very show they are at, that I felt I had to mention it. My own experience with organizations is that about 10% end up in the totally wrong show. This isn't too bad unless you're one of the 10%.

In your quest for the perfect show, don't be afraid to question and challenge the show management representative. Make them show you audience profiles or audits and determine how these profiles match your needs. Talk to your competitors. Question other exhibitors. Ask your suppliers. It's a little easier with an existing show. There will be some track record to examine. With a new show, unless you are convinced it is right, you may wish to just visit the show the first year and make your decision to exhibit in the next show after having been there.

Generally it is to no one's best interest to have you in the wrong show. Show management reps are now typically much more consultative and understanding of your marketing needs. Many shows offer exhibitor training.

It will depend upon your market reach and future expectations whether you exhibit in an International, National, Regional, or Local show. The following is a look at the types of shows you will encounter.



### 3.1 TYPES OF SHOWS

#### **Trade Shows:**

The 'Trade Show' is typically closed to buyers or visitors of a particular 'trade' or 'industry'. In most cases the buyers wear name tags and carry some type of identification that can aid booth personnel in qualifying their needs or interests. Buyers are normally buying for a business.

#### **Consumer Shows:**

The 'Consumer' show is typically open to the public and very seldom does the buyer have any form of identification. Buyers are normally buying for their own use.

Within these two types, there are also these further segmentations.

**Vertical** - a show in which the exhibitors and visitors represent a specific segment of an industry. Vertical shows occur in both trade and consumer shows.

**Horizontal** - a show in which the exhibitors and visitors represent a broad base of business serving a particular segment of buyer. Horizontal shows occur in both trade and consumer shows.

Examples:

**Trade Vertical:** An industry specific show targeted to a narrow audience. A communications show directed at incoming call center technology.

**Trade Horizontal:** A Business Show in which a broad representation of products and services aimed at businesses exhibit together.

**Consumer Vertical:** A Financial Show in which businesses from the financial community exhibit to consumers interested in investment opportunities.

**Consumer Horizontal:** A Home Show in which a broad representation of businesses

which serve the consumers needs in the areas of home renovation, home building and decorating.

These categories break down again into Local, Regional, National and International Shows and just to compound things, there are trade shows that have consumer days and consumer shows that have trade days. Be sure you understand the kind of show you are getting into.

### 3.2 THE SIZE OF YOUR EXHIBIT SPACE

The size of the space that you finally decide upon will be based on the following options.

\* What is your budget?

\*How many qualified staff are available?

What is 'qualified staff'? We'll discuss this later. When figuring out staff availability, try to avoid scheduling the staff for long shifts (over 5 hours) after this amount of time in the booth, the staff often become a detriment rather than an asset. If you are a small organization, you'll just have to bite the bullet, work the long shifts and keep telling yourself. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be"



\*How big and bulky are your products?

You'll probably need more space for bulldozers than for ball point pens.

\* What kind of marketing position statement do you feel you want to make?

Surveys show that the larger the booth space, the more memorable it is. But do not contract for space that you can't properly staff.

\*A reasonable guide is: allow 50 sq. ft. for each staff member (two people in a 10' x 10', eight in a 20' x 20') Make allowances here for the size of your product.

### 4.0 PURCHASING OR RENTING YOUR EXHIBIT STRUCTURE

The choice in exhibit structures today is infinite. Everything from inflatable backwalls to spectacular custom creations. Unless you have knowledge of all local, regional, national and international exhibiting rules and regulations, fire codes, etc. this is not a do-it-yourself project. Exhibit designers and fabricators have a wealth of knowledge gained from years of experience. It is best to find one that you are comfortable with and put yourself in their hands. (See section 4.3 selecting an Exhibit Builder)

The important thing here is that you must fit the exhibit design to your exhibiting objectives. If your exhibit builder doesn't talk about your objectives, find another builder. They are designing a property that must be your home away from home. This is a place that reflects your organization's goals and philosophies, with the appropriate graphics and place for product. It may also have to fit in the back of your compact car

and be assembled by a 5'1" salesperson. The following is a listing of some of the most popular types of exhibit systems.

Many exhibit systems are available for rent. If you are a first time exhibitor or have specific needs for only one show, renting is a good alternative. You typically will pay about 25% of a given purchase price to rent. In addition you must buy the graphics or anything that is produced specifically for you. Many exhibit designers/builders will let you rent to own. That is, rent the exhibit for one show, see how it goes, and if you feel all was well, you can purchase the booth with a full refund of your rental price.

#### 4.1 TYPES OF EXHIBIT STRUCTURES



#### PORTABLE SYSTEMS:

The definition of a 'portable' exhibit has changed considerably over the last ten years. Nowadays a portable exhibit typically is one that collapses or folds down into a 'light-weight' (some are lighter than others) fairly manageable package in one or two cases.

Two examples of 'portable' exhibits, other than the 'table top' systems, would be the 'pop up' umbrella systems and the folding eight-panel systems.

The strengths of 'portable' systems are the ease of setup and the ease of handling. They also allow for a large 'seamless' graphic.



**Modular Panel System**

#### **MODULAR SYSTEMS:**

Modular systems are exhibits that are made up of a series of similar sized panels that connect together with some type of positive coupling device. These panels can normally support a number of surfaces (fabric, plexiglass, wood, foam-core) and can be configured into an infinite number of designs. The panel sizes can vary from 4' x 8' down to 1' x 2' or even smaller.

The strengths of these systems is the flexibility you have over the configuration of the booth. With the creative and selective use of individual panels, you can create a table-top unit from your existing booth structure. By purchasing more panels, these systems also allow you to expand your booth easily. Most disassemble fairly easily and depending upon the manufacturer can be reasonably light weight and are very easily assembled by the exhibitor.



**Profile or Extrusion System**

#### **PROFILE SYSTEMS:**

Profile systems first gained popularity in Europe and now in North America are often the choice of the large corporate exhibitor. The systems are made of long (normally eight feet) aluminum extrusions that are slotted to hold various panel materials all of which join together with a variety of locking mechanisms. By using various sizes and shapes of extrusions, an infinite number of designs can be achieved. These systems often allow the design of a 'second story'. Although some of these systems are designed to be installed and dismantled by the exhibitor many need the expertise of installers familiar with these systems.

The strengths of profile systems are their strength and their ability to achieve a 'custom' look with a system that can be reconfigured into an infinite number of designs.



### **CUSTOM EXHIBITS:**

Custom exhibits, as the name implies, are structures that are designed and constructed specifically for a particular exhibitor. This kind of structure is normally used for larger exhibits. The designs can be spectacular, as can the finishes. The shipping, storage, assembly and dismantling are not something that the exhibitor would normally do themselves.

The strengths of custom exhibits are the ability to capture exactly the desired effect. There need be no compromise because of the limitations of any given 'system' restrictions.



#### 4.2 DESIGN FOR SUCCESS

Here are some guidelines for designing the booth and here is a test to see if your booth design holds up to scrutiny. Show your booth to someone that doesn't know your company or your industry (try your grandmother) Ask them to answer two simple questions. What is my company name and what does my company do? If they can answer those two questions immediately, you're well on your way to a good booth design. If they can't, go back to the drawing board. The next time you attend a show, try this test on the exhibits that you see, it's amazing how many fail!

- \*Build your exhibit around your product.
- \*Make sure your exhibit is easy to understand
- \*Don't confuse the visitor.
- \*Demonstrate your product/service
- \*Show product applications.
- \*Give samples if possible.
- \*Encourage audience participation.
- \*Give the visitor good technical literature.



#### 4.3 SELECTING AN EXHIBIT BUILDER

Here are some questions to ask when you are trying to decide on an exhibit builder.

- \* How long have they been in business?
- Will they supply references? Call the references and ask how the company performed.
- \* Can they show you photographs of previous projects?
- \* Do they have an exhibit designer on staff or have access to one?
- \* Do they offer or have access to exhibit marketing consulting?
- \* Can the company offer a 'full-service' package including...
  - \* planning
  - \* design
  - \* construction
  - \* installation
  - \* dismantling
  - \* graphics, silkscreen, photography
  - \* storage
  - \* shipping
  - \* rental or leasing

## **5.0 DEVELOPING YOUR EXHIBIT MARKETING PROGRAM**

It is important, that as you begin to discuss your organization's exhibit involvement, that you do not fragment the different parts (such as; the booth, the show, etc.) but refer to these collectively as The Exhibit Program. To be successful, the organization must see all these items interrelating. Typically what happens in an organization is that certain groups or individuals will do the planning, others will do the booth purchase and still others will actually work in the booth. This leaves all kinds of room for criticism and buck passing. In the beginning, bring all the parties together and discuss the entire program. Involve everyone in setting the objectives. You need to develop a 'buy-in' from all areas of the organization. If you intend to have dealers or manufacturer reps assisting you in the booth, they should also take part whenever possible in the planning process. I realize that in a small company that one person might be doing everything including working in the booth.

### **5.1 SETTING OBJECTIVES**

Most organizations exhibit without having any objectives. They feel that showing up at the show is enough. To be successful, clear, quantifiable objectives must be set. Be sure that the objectives are communicated to the booth personnel. Too often we just assume they understand why they are there. Believe me, they don't! Here is a list of possible objectives to draw from.

- \*Make sales
- \*Develop a list of qualified prospects for future follow-up
- \*Introduce a new product
- \*Enhance corporate image
- \*Educate the client/prospect base
- \*Conduct market research / test products
- \*Attract new dealers/distributors
- \*Maintain contact with present clients
- \*Determine market position
- \*Recruit employees
- \*Provide support for a dealer network

All of the above objectives are valid, but the participants must recognize, that when an objective is selected, the entire exhibit program must be built around it.

From the point of view of 'time spent with a prospect' the objective of making sales will require a completely different time frame than the objective of qualifying leads. Consider the following; if your objective is to actually 'make the sale', you may

have to spend (depending upon the product) an hour with a prospect. If at the end of this hour you don't 'close' the sale, this time can be considered wasted or at best, non-productive. In that same time frame you potentially could have qualified 5 leads. Be sure you are spending your time effectively.

Each objective has its own 'ideal' implementation program. Since 75% of companies exhibit for the purpose of qualifying leads for future follow-up. We will confine our examples in this guide and build our program around that objective. This is where the discussion begins. You may have some rousing meetings trying to determine exactly why you are going to the show.



Whatever objective is selected, the participants should be advised, that the one objective that is always present, is enhancing the corporate image. Your company's image is reflected in your behavior in the booth, in the restaurants, in the parking lot etc. You are constantly being judged by your prospects.

## 5.2 DEVELOPING GOALS AND TARGETS FOR BOOTH PERFORMANCE

Once you have selected an objective, you must quantify it. The booth staff need to know what is expected of them. Typically, the staff are sent to a show with no clear picture of why they are there. Now they have been told, exactly why they are going and now we are going to hold them accountable for the results. Now that we have chosen an objective, we must QUANTIFY it.



The objectives have been selected; qualifying leads for future follow-up and enhancing the company's image. We must define exactly what a qualified lead is, prior to setting some goals for the number of leads we must qualify.

### Definition of a Qualified Lead

A qualified lead is the name of someone that the booth staff have personally questioned and uncovered some specific needs, and after doing so, have made a decision that this person is a good prospect for our company to pursue. It is NOT someone that has dropped their business card in our fish bowl

to win our contest. This is only a lead, and in most cases will not be qualified.

Conversely, if your objective is building an industry mailing list, then the contest may indeed be the way to go.

Only now that we have defined the objective, are we able to establish goals for how many qualified leads we must gather.

If your objective is qualifying leads, you should budget about six to ten minutes per contact to complete this objective. This does not appear, on the surface, to be a lot of time. When you consider what actually must be accomplished, meeting the prospect, uncovering their needs and recording their pertinent information; the six minute time frame becomes much more feasible. This does not mean that a meeting can't take 10 minutes, but it shouldn't take 45 minutes. **You must learn to budget your time.**

Given these time frames, the maximum performance would be 10 qualified leads per hour. We know that there will be some wasted time while fellow employees and management drop into the booth and existing clients stop by to chat and be updated on new products etc. As well as the fact that some visitors that you begin to talk to, will not qualify for your company, so you will not continue to talk to them. This can add up to a considerable amount of time. Once you factor in this potential non-productive time, a realistic target can be set. A good place to start would be to consider that approximately 50% of your time will be devoted to tasks other than qualifying new leads. That leaves us with a goal of 5 qualified leads per hour.



This of course will be conditional upon a few variables. First of all, is this particular show going to deliver enough traffic volume to support this kind of lead activity? It may be a conference that is extremely well targeted to your products, but has a low attendance. This does not mean that you shouldn't attend, it means that you need to adjust your expectations and your goals.

Exhibitors tend to look at the total projected attendance of a show and base a lot of their judgments and expectations on that number. You need to concentrate more on qualifying your X leads per hour and worrying less about the 50,000 attendees that you didn't see. In trade show surveys it has been shown that rarely can any one company expect that more than 10 - 15% of the audience has an interest in their particular product or service. If you can consistently qualify 5 leads per hour per salesperson, you will have achieved exhibiting success.

Another variable in achieving your goals is the ability of your booth personnel to meet, identify and qualify visitors quickly. We will be covering these skills in the next chapters. The final variable is, making the proper show selection and we have already covered that.

Remember, select achievable objectives based upon the individual show and your projected market share. Communicate these objectives clearly to the booth personnel so there is no confusion as to why they are at the show. Quantify the objectives, set goals or targets for booth performance and then work with the booth staff to achieve those goals.

## 6.0 EXHIBITOR SKILLS TRAINING

The booth personnel need to understand and appreciate how critical they are to

the success of any exhibiting endeavor and also how they need to acquire a new set of skills to be most effective.

Many exhibitors think they because they are veterans of years of doing shows there is nothing else to learn.

The ability to meet a visitor, qualify their interest in our products, uncover some other needs and at the same time build credibility and trust is not a skill that comes automatically. These skills must be learned, practiced and fine tuned.

Irreparable damage can be inflicted by booth personnel not having a good understanding of the impact that they have on visitors.

The following are the skills that are required.

## 6.1 BOOTHMANSHIP

It is my belief that most show leads are lost from 30' away. Long before we ever get to discuss pricing, experience, delivery or any of the things that we see as being important. Your prospect is judging you (and your company) from a distance. Your behaviour is critical in the building of credibility. Good boothmanship is where it all starts.



Boothmanship is the art of presenting yourself to your audience. It is attitude, it is etiquette and good boothmanship is critical to your success. To understand the impact of boothmanship, you need to put yourself in the position of the visitor. Although we know that visitors attend shows to see new things and make buying decisions, they still have the one basic fear we all have; the fear of 'being sold to' or being put under some obligation or pressure to 'buy'.

Put yourself in the role of a consumer walking into a department store to make a purchase; a sales clerk approaches, and immediately you go on the defensive.

Even before the clerk can open his/her mouth, you are forming some opinions of them, and these opinions are seldom positive. How many times have you said to yourself in this situation, Gosh, this looks like the perfect salesperson for me? Probably never. Why? Because we feel if we can (subconsciously) determine some 'negative' factors about the salesperson, we won't feel badly about either ignoring or simply dismissing them. These negative factors don't need to make sense or have any basis in truth; it's just how humans interact with other humans. Don't forget, these judgments are being made from ten feet away and before anyone has said anything.

Take this scenario a little further. You are on your way to buy a new computer. You are motivated and even exhilarated to make this purchase. You arrive at the computer department and this scene is unfolding. It's lunchtime and one of the staff has just returned with a bag from the local burger take-out. Food is being distributed and spirits are high (so far they haven't even noticed you). Soft drinks are handed out and the burgers are unwrapped. Freeze this frame. How do you feel now? Still excited? Still motivated? Probably not. Angry? Maybe. Disgusted? Maybe. Still going to buy or even ask any questions? Probably not. Are you confident in the ability of these people to under-

stand and fill your needs? You get the picture.



Now transpose this scenario to thousands of exhibit booths at shows going on today. Walk around any show and experience the disrespect that exhibitors show their prospects. Exhibitors like to rationalize (there's that word again) that because the exhibit space is not their office and exhibiting is an arduous task that visitors 'forgive' and condone all kinds of behavior. They don't! The tragedy of this situation is that sales have been lost forever and no one has even got a chance to open their mouth to talk about products or services, features or benefits.

I have included a list of do's and don'ts as part of this guide. In the end it's really quite simple, you just have to be perfect, stand in your booth and look like you want to be there. Watch your body language. As your hours in the booth wear on, your body begins to hurt and you begin to do things that look rather strange from thirty feet away (and don't forget that's where your being judged from) pacing back and forth like a caged animal, doing deep knee bends to ease the pain in your legs, practicing your golf swing, folding your arms on your chest and looking bored. You see this behavior every day.

My most recent observation was an exhibitor sitting in his booth while a room service waiter delivered lunch. Actually rolled the table into the booth, set it up, put the napkin on the exhibitor's lap, got the bill signed and left. The exhibitor was actually quite proud of this accomplishment and saw no 'wrong' in what he had done. When I questioned him about how the show was going for him, he told me that as far as he was concerned "Trade shows didn't work and he was only here because his boss insisted on it" I rest my case, here's the list.

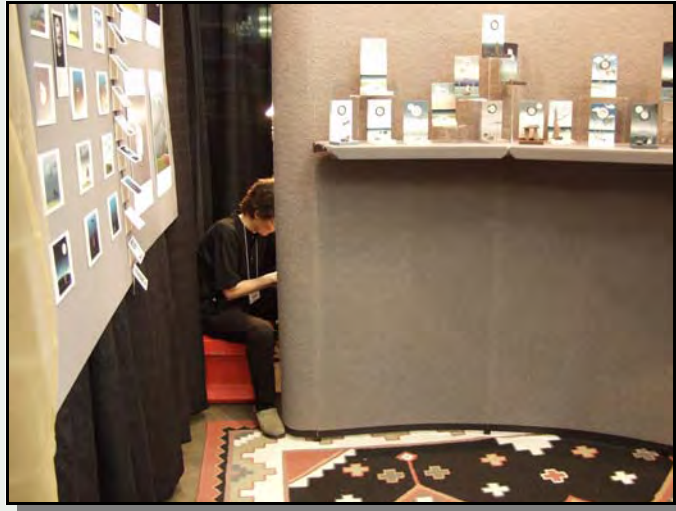
### **DO'S**

- \*Know yourself
- \*Know your product or service
- \*Know your prospects needs
- \*Relate your product to their needs
- \*Know your competition
- \*Be carefully groomed
- \*Work hard
- \*Be enthusiastic
- \*Be confident
- \*Work with all prospects, even those not from your territory
- \*Be ready to talk and demonstrate
- \*Be on the level
- \*Know the technical/educational sessions offered by show management
- \*Know the show
- \*Keep the booth clean, neat and attractive
- \*Know your way around your booth

- \*Be nice to lookers
- \*Be able to talk costs
- \*Be aware of 'negative' body language

### **DON'TS**

- \*Have bad breath
- \*Drink
- \*Smoke
- \*Sit
- \*Chat with other booth personnel
- \*Wander away
- \*Ignore a prospect
- \*Be rude
- \*Be overly aggressive
- \*Fake it
- \*Tire yourself out at night
- \*Underestimate your visitors
- \*Eat
- \*Read
- \*Sleep
- \*Use cellular phone



### **KNOW WHAT YOUR VISITORS WANT**

- \*Knowledgeable, alert booth personnel
- \*Technically qualified personnel
- \*Less high pressure
- \*More information, benefits, applications
- \*Better literature
- \*Highlights of 'What's New'

### **6.2 SALES TECHNIQUES**

We now have to learn the skills required to engage a visitor in conversation, qualify them as a prospect for our organization, uncover some of their needs, record this information and dismiss them courteously all within approximately six minutes.

The sales techniques revealed here are based on one basic rule:

**'THE PERSON THAT ASKS THE FIRST QUESTION STAYS IN CONTROL OF ANY CONVERSATION'.**

Control is the key word in this method of interacting. It will not be possible to complete the objective of qualifying a lead in six minutes, if we don't have complete control of the conversation. Most salespeople, working in the exhibit environment, have seen their role in the booth as a passive one, waiting until someone entered the booth, asked a question, and then responding to that question.

We are now going to ask the salespeople to take a 'pro-active' role and ask the first question. If a prospect asks a question (and they will) the salesperson must ask a question in return, to regain control. We begin with the Introduction.

### **6.3 INTRODUCTION**

For the introduction, we need to be totally prepared; we have to watch our boothmanship, meaning we have to be perfect, standing in the booth looking like we

want to be there. Our body language is under control and we are scanning the aisles looking for a friendly face. We find that congenial face, make fleeting eye contact and smile. Glance back at the visitor and read their body language. Many will look through you, many will turn away to avoid your return glance and some will return your smile.



It seems to be human nature (especially when we get tired, to try to chase the visitors that want most to avoid us). Don't give in to this temptation. If you find that no one seems to respond to you, analyze your approach. Are you being too aggressive in your stance? If possible have a co-worker observe you and see what might be revealed. Are you trying to 'force feed' brochures on visitors? This isn't the time for that. Remember, they are wary of being 'sold' to; your role is to lower the wall between you and them.

Presuming you will eventually find someone that relates to you, proceed like this. Be yourself. If it is normal for you to extend your hand for a handshake, go ahead, do it. (If you are exhibiting internationally, you might want to check the protocol of 'touching' in the country where you are exhibiting) The important issue here is that you are natural and sincere. You are now ready to take control. Ask that first question.

What is the question most asked by exhibitors or for that matter most retail staff? It's "May I help you?" and what is the most usual response? "No thanks, I'm just looking" Which ends the conversation before it even begins. So let's avoid that one.

Always start with an open ended question. One that can't be answered with a direct 'yes or no'. These questions usually begin with: how, what, when or where. Find one that is comfortable for you, and if you have several sales people, don't all use the same question... Remember you are trying to engage the visitors in conversation, never make this question sales or product related. Here are some examples.

#### Potential Opening Questions:

Often preceded by; "Hi, How are you....."

"How are you enjoying the show?"

"How long have you been here?"

"How's the weather out there?"

"Where are you from?"

"When did you get in?"





"What do you think of the conference program?"

With this type of question being asked the visitor will quite readily respond. When they do, you can quickly take them to the next component, Qualifying.

#### 6.4 QUALIFYING

Every company has a different set of criteria for those who qualify to do business with them. It may be territorial, geographical, it may be financial, the need for your product or service or it may be a particular level of management in a company that you are looking for.

You should have already gone through this exercise when you are deciding what show to go in. If you didn't do it then do it now. Develop a profile of your perfect prospect. There might even be several perfect prospects. Some from different parts of an industry, some from different industries entirely. Once the `qualifiers' have been listed, you can then `prioritize' them.

This exercise should result in a clear picture of exactly the type of prospect that your company is looking for.

Let's run through one potential scenario: We have developed our list of `qualifiers' and have come up with the profile of our prospect. Now you make a list of what you need to know about a visitor before you can actually decide that they are a prospect. Now structure your questions. Here's what you may need to know.

\*What is the visitor's name?

\*Where the visitor from?

- \*What industry is the visitor involved in?
- \*What company does the visitor work for?
- \*What is the visitor's position in that company?
- \*What is the visitor's ability to influence an actual sale?
- \*What is the proposed time frame of the purchase?
- \*How could the visitor use our information/products/services ?

We can now structure a set of questions designed to extract that information, and by asking the questions we stay in control. Here is a potential scenario.

**IF YOU INTEND TO USE THE SCRIPTS CONTAINED IN THIS GUIDE AS EXAMPLES FOR YOUR OWN STAFF, CUSTOMIZE THE SCRIPTS USING YOUR OWN PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND INDUSTRY LANGUAGE.**



Salesperson:  
"Hi, How are doing, How are you enjoying the show?"

Prospect:  
"It's just great"

Salesperson:  
"My name is Bill.....and yours?"

Prospect:  
"Steve"

Salesperson:  
"Where are you from Steve?"

Prospect:  
"Atlanta"

Salesperson:  
"What do you do there in Atlanta, Steve?"

Prospect:  
"I'm Vice-President of Marketing at Acme International"

Salesperson:  
"What does Acme do?"

Prospect:  
"We're primarily in Widget manufacturing"



You have asked the questions designed to get you the information you need. At any point in this conversation, if you feel that this person does not qualify, YOU can terminate the conversation.

Let's say your company cannot service Atlanta.....after the answer to "Where are you from", you can simply say, "It's been great to meet you Steve, hope you enjoy the rest of the show". Which means you can exit a conversation whenever the qualifying criteria doesn't fit. If the criteria fits, then you have a prospect. You have asked the questions designed to get you the information you need.

At any point in this conversation, YOU decide whether to continue or not. This is the 'key' use of the 'control' strategy.

One of the most asked questions at my seminars is "How do you dismiss a visitor that just won't go away?" First of all this tells me one thing. The visitor is in control. Once the visitor begins to ask questions and gets us into that answering mode, it is extremely difficult to dismiss them without appearing rude. When you are in control and asking the questions, you decide when to dismiss. This is much easier said than done. It is in our nature as salespeople to respond to questions with answers rather than questions. It takes practice to reverse the control. Your success in exhibiting will depend upon the ability of the booth staff to perform this function.

#### **NOTE SPECIFICALLY FOR TRADE SHOW EXHIBITORS.**

In many shows, a lot of the information you are seeking is contained on the badge the visitors wear. Don't forget the visitor is still very wary. Your first objective is to begin to remove the walls and allow them to feel comfortable with you. Peering at someone's chest a few seconds after you meet them isn't going to do that. It simply says you are only interested in the sale.

Ask the necessary questions, this leads to building a better rapport with the prospect. The badge should be used only for its color coding aspect. Find out from show management what the different colors of badges signify. The different colors will distinguish between buyers, exhibitors, spouses, guests, press, etc. Be sure everyone in the booth understands the color coding system.

Determine your criteria, ask the appropriate questions, listen to the answers..... if the prospect qualifies (this is a decision only the booth attendant can make) then go ahead with the next step.

## 6.5 PRODUCT/SERVICE PRESENTATION AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

Once the prospect is qualified, the objective of the product presentation/needs analysis is to uncover some specific needs that the prospect might have. This allows the salesperson to marry up the needs of the prospect with specific products and services. The ultimate goal here is to uncover and record pertinent information that can be referenced in the follow-up call. In many larger companies the follow-up calls are not always made by the same person that qualified the lead, so it is essential that good information about the prospect and their needs is available allowing the salesperson to make an informed, educated follow-up. The product presentation also provides a good opportunity to build credibility for the company.

The presentation, if possible, should involve your products, and this is the time when a demonstration is most appropriate. If the qualification has been thorough, you should be able to select a product or service that is 'right' for this prospect.

When you have selected a product or service to start with, you will then go into a strategy of presenting, that will keep you in control (by asking questions) and provide you with the information you need to do a proper follow-up.

This system of presenting is called the:

### F. B. R. SYSTEM

F. B. R. stands for:  
FEATURES / BENEFITS / RESPONSES

The basic philosophy here is, never assume a prospect understands what your products or services are, or what they do. If you have qualified thoroughly, you will be able to present directly to a prospect's needs.



This system of presenting will ensure that your prospect will experience your product/service in a context they can relate to. When you have selected the product/service to start the presentation with, you present in this way.

### STATE A PRODUCT FEATURE

Features are the things that make salespeople love their products. Things like color, size, speed, price, strength etc.

So you, state a product/service feature, then:

### STATE THE BENEFIT OF THAT FEATURE

Benefits are why the prospect will love our products (what a feature will do for them)

**NOTE: YOU WILL FIND THAT EACH PRODUCT/SERVICE FEATURE HAS MULTIPLE BENEFITS. THE BENEFIT WILL DEPEND ON THE INDIVIDUAL PROSPECTS NEEDS. THIS IS WHY IT IS CRITICAL THAT IN THE QUALIFYING STAGE, YOU LEARN AS MUCH ABOUT THE PROSPECT'S NEEDS AS POSSIBLE**



**NOW ASK FOR A RESPONSE:** You are now asking the prospect to comment on what was just discussed.

Let's run through a potential scenario: (We'll continue the script from the qualifying scenario)

Salesperson:

"Widgets, we have a terrific line of widget transporters, as a matter of fact (state a feature) this one right here has four wheel steering (state the benefit) which means of course that you can park it on a dime, and save all

kinds of space. (Ask for the response) How would that fit with your warehousing needs?"

Now listen for the response!

Prospect:

- a) "It's not something that we ever considered, but it would sure solve our space problem"
- b) "I really don't think we need something that sophisticated"

By listening to the prospect's responses, you can learn which way to take the conversation. Keep probing until you get a connection! A poor salesperson talks, talks, talks, a good salesperson LISTENS and adapts. You only need to spend three or four minutes to uncover a lot of information.

This system is effective only when the booth personnel have a thorough knowledge of the features and benefits of all the products and services. It is a good idea to meet well before the show and go over the features and (perhaps multiple) benefits. Hopefully your own company product training has covered this, but it never hurts to check.

**NOTE: WHEN VISITORS FROM ALL INDUSTRIES ARE QUESTIONED ABOUT WHAT ANNOYS THEM MOST ABOUT THE EXHIBITORS, THE #1 ANSWER IS "LACK OF PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE"**

## 6.6 CLOSING THE SALE

The 'Close' is the step where you complete your objective. In the case of 'qualifying a lead' it means the recording of all the pertinent information that was uncovered during the product presentation.

The important step now, is to be sure that the information is properly recorded, with all the information that you (or someone else) will need to know to make that proper follow-up. At many shows, lead sheets are provided as part of the exhibitor package and often you can rent the hardware to `run' a prospect's registration card through the imprinter. Be sure that the information you record reflects the unique needs of this prospect.

To do this properly, it may be advisable to design and print your own lead forms, which will reflect the unique situations that your company may have. This is a most critical stage in the selling process and should not be left up to business cards crumpled up in a jacket pocket. Your lead sheet



(probably better called a 'customer evaluation form') should probably be a two or three part form. This allows a copy of the lead to remain with a sales manager, allowing them to monitor the activity regarding the lead, a copy of the lead to be given to the sales person that will be following up and a copy may go to marketing perhaps to develop a 'house' mailing list.

It's important that the salesperson 'signs' the lead form. This way you can keep track of how many leads each person qualified and relate this information back to your objective of 5 qualified leads per hour. It also allows you to track sales through your organization and uncover who your top booth salespeople are.

Here's how a 'close' might be delivered.

Salesperson:

"Steve, in talking to you for the past few minutes, I am sure that our company can help you with the re-design of that floor space and provide the transporters as well. If you'll give me your business card, I'll pass this information along to Gayle Fisher, in our Atlanta office and she'll be calling you to follow-up".

The prospect now knows that you listened to his/her needs and have already started to think about them.

In a large company, the process will fail if ALL the booth personnel across the country have not had the same training. It is important that a system of qualifying, presenting and following up is developed and carried out by the entire staff. This will ensure continuity throughout the system and also establish an appreciation of the importance of a well qualified show lead.

## 6.7 FOLLOW-UP

To maximize the return, follow-ups should be done within 10 working days

Note: This does not mean that you have to be face to face with the prospect within 10 days (although it's best if you can). It means that you have to respond (or the salesperson from the appropriate territory) and acknowledge that you met the prospect. It may be by letter or a phone call, but it must be done quickly.

There is one revealing statistic from the exhibition industry:



### 70% OF EXHIBITORS NEVER FOLLOW-UP

Most salespeople never follow-up because they have no faith that show leads are worth pursuing. This is because, most often the leads are not properly qualified by the booth personnel, and so they are fairly invalid. A salesperson, following up a lot of poorly qualified leads, becomes quickly frustrated.

When the leads are properly qualified and the follow-up call is expected by the prospect, the salesperson will quickly see the merit in shows. Not only that, but when the leads are properly qualified, there are less of them, so the numbers go down, the quality goes up and so does the Return On Investment.

A Follow-up script might go as follows:

Salesperson:

"Steve, Hi this is Gayle Fisher from Widget Transporter International here in Atlanta. You were talking to Bill Masters at the Trade Show. He was telling me that you are re-designing your warehouse and were interested in our Dual Steering Widget Transporter. I'd love to come over and get a look at your warehouse and see how we could help you. I'll be in your area on Monday and Tuesday, which day would be better to pop in?"

If you constantly find that the prospect doesn't want to see you, then something is wrong with the way the lead was qualified or in the way you are approaching the follow-up.

You may also want to implement a system of 'grading' leads into specific categories where perhaps an 'A' lead gets a personal sales follow-up, a 'B' lead has specific information sent and a 'C' lead goes on the mailing list.

## 7.0 PRE SHOW MARKETING

The first rule of any pre-show campaign is:

### IT'S YOUR JOB TO GET YOUR PROSPECTS TO YOUR BOOTH

Many exhibitors feel that it is the job of show management to march your prospects right up to your booth. Unfortunately it just doesn't work that way. Show management will do their best to get your prospects to the exhibit hall. They don't have the intimate knowledge of your business to know exactly who these people are and even if they did get them to the hall, they certainly couldn't guarantee to get them to your booth. No one knows your customer/prospect base the way your salespeople do....some of the more traditional ways to encourage them to attend and visit your booth are as follows:

- \*Advertise in trade magazines and journals
- \*Advertise in the 'show guide'
- \*Send promotional flyers out with statements and invoices
- \*Develop a creative direct mail campaign to target markets
- \*Present seminars at the show or conference
- \*Use promotional stickers on correspondence
- \*Use promotional items on-site (hot air balloons etc.)
- \*If you have a significant topic, hold a press conference
- \*Develop press kits and news releases regarding new products
- \*Stage a special event designed to draw attention to your presence
- \*Promote your show presence on your Web Site
- \* Develop an eMarketing Program
- \* Utilize Audio Email

These pre-show programs all work in their own way and they all have a budget figure to attach to them. The most effective form of pre-show marketing that I have my clients implement has very little cost attached to it and establishes a personal relationship with a prospect immediately.

Have each of your salespeople call their 10 best prospects and personally invite them to visit your booth at the show. They are able to target the 'right' prospect and deliver exactly the right message. After you phone and invite them, send a letter, detailing how they can find your booth, send a floor plan if you have to, let them know when you will be on duty and if they are available, include a few free passes to the

show. Remember, the visitor may be trying to locate you in the midst of hundreds of other exhibitors.....give them all the help you can.

This is one area where you can really shorten the sales cycle, when these visitors arrive at the booth there is no need for a cat and mouse game. They are pre-qualified. You can get right to work uncovering needs. Perhaps you have already uncovered some needs during that pre-show phone call. Here's a possible script for that pre-show call.



Salesperson:

Hi Greg, This is Steve Masters from International Widget Transporters..... Greg, we haven't met or done business before, but I just wanted to let you know that we're exhibiting our complete line of Widget Transporters at the Trade Show next month. I'd really like to hear what you think of our new Dual Steering Widget Transporter. Are you going to the show?

Prospect:

"I've been considering it."

Salesperson:

"Well, I'd love to talk with you. We know we have a real winner here and I'll be interested in your comments. I'll be there every day from 1:00 - 6:00, I'll drop a couple of free passes in the mail to you".

Prospect:

"Thanks"

Salesperson:

"By the way, our Vice-President, Larry Williams, is presenting a seminar on the Monday morning on 'Maximizing of Warehouse Space' in the widget industry, you would probably find that interesting. I look forward to seeing you there".

You can see how this kind of a call would be more effective than a sticker on an invoice or an ad in a trade magazine.

You have asked twice for their opinion or comments. This begins to involve their ego and is extremely effective in its results.

Plan the call well and don't make the first call on your best prospect. Get your delivery smoothed out first. You may find someone in your office has an extremely good 'phone' manner. They might be able to make a lot of these calls.

This strategy works incredibly well. You will be amazed when the prospects begin to show up. When they do arrive, have a plan of how to deal with them. You might be busy when someone shows up and asks for you by name. Be sure all the booth staff understand how to deal with this.

## **8.0 POST SHOW EVALUATION**

When the show is over, it is a good idea to evaluate the results based on the criteria set down in this guide.

Too many companies simply keep on exhibiting in show after show, never getting anything out of them and finally in frustration, just pulling out of shows altogether. Shows offer the finest opportunities for marketing and sales, but it does require a comprehensive program.

The key element in the Exhibit Program are the staff that work in the booth. It is a good idea to involve them in any post show evaluation process. These are the people that were on the show floor, face to face with the prospects, the clients and the industry. They have some valuable input for the exhibit program, yet are very often ignored as soon as the show is over.

It is vital to the success of the program that you involve the staff. Put together a questionnaire (a sample has been included) that let's them input their thoughts about the booth, the show, show management, anything that you need advice on. They do not have to sign this form. Let them be anonymous, you may be more likely to get their real feelings.

## **8.1 SHOW EVALUATION FORM**

Name of Show:

Location:

City:

State/Province

Date Held:

Approximate attendance at show:

What was the quality of the attendees?

How would you rate this show, as part of our marketing/sales program?

What competitors of ours were exhibiting at the show?

Was any information gathered from these competitors? Brochures? Prices? Information?

Which of our products received greatest interest?

Evaluate our exhibit booth.

Should we participate in this show again? Yes No Why?

How can we improve our exhibit program?

## **9.0 IMPORTANCE OF BOOTH PERSONNEL**

85% of your hope of success at any show is dependent upon your booth personnel. Involve them every opportunity you can in the planning process. Listen to them, they know your client/prospect base better than anyone. Make sure they understand how important they are; train them well, they are going to carry the ball across the goal line.

If you have the luxury of selecting staff. Pick the people that are comfortable in this kind of an environment: Outgoing people that like meeting other people; People that have superior product knowledge; People that are consultative by nature; Problem solvers. This is not a place for rookies if you can avoid it.

Hold briefing sessions each morning prior to show opening. Monitor performance on an ongoing basis. Keep focusing on the objectives.

To staff the booth, you may have had to draw from a variety of job categories from within your company: sales, marketing, technical, service, support, clerical, and management. Make sure that regardless of their day-to-day position with the organiza-

tion, when they are on booth duty they are an extension and reflection of the company's ideals and philosophies. They are constantly being judged by visitors.

They need to understand, appreciate and be trained for their role.

## **10.0 EXHIBIT INDUSTRY RESOURCES**

### **10.1 PUBLICATIONS**

As the tradeshow industry's premiere source of coverage and information, Tradeshow Week® delivers timely, insightful market intelligence. With an award-winning editorial staff and over 30 years of publishing experience, the entire industry turns to Tradeshow Week® as the resource for accurate data and analysis

Tradeshow Week  
12233 W. Olympic Blvd. Suite 236  
Los Angeles, CA USA 90064-9956  
[www.tradeshowweek.com](http://www.tradeshowweek.com)

Exhibit Builder  
P.O Box 4144  
Woodland Hills, CA USA 91365  
[www.exhibitbuilder.net](http://www.exhibitbuilder.net)

Exhibitor Magazine  
745 Marquette Bank Bldg.  
Rochester MN USA 55904  
[www.exhibitor.net](http://www.exhibitor.net)

### **10.2 ASSOCIATIONS**

Trade Show Exhibitors Association  
5501 Backlick Rd., Suite 102  
Springfield, VA 22151  
Ph: 703-941-3725  
Fax: 703-941-8275  
Web Site: <http://www.tsea.org>

International Association of Exposition Management  
P.O. Box 80245  
Dallas, Texas 75380  
Ph: 214-458-8002  
Fax: 214-458-8119

### **10.3 EXHIBITOR SKILLS TRAINING**

Exhibitor Institute  
59 Adelaide St. E  
Toronto' Ontario, Canada  
613-799-5586  
[www.exhibitorinstitute.com](http://www.exhibitorinstitute.com)

## **A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

I hope you have benefited from this eBook, 'How to Succeed at Trade or Consumer Shows'. I plan to revise this publication many times. If you feel that my explanation was insufficient on any subject, or if you think I missed an important topic, please let me know. If you know of any other important resources I should point my readers to, let me know about them as well. Send me a message at [fredfox@exhibitorinstitute.com](mailto:fredfox@exhibitorinstitute.com)

-Fred Fox

## **ABOUT THE EXHIBITOR INSTITUTE**

The Exhibitor Institute was formed to research, develop and deliver training programs and products to those companies seeking to increase their market share using three dimensional marketing. The Exhibitor Institute provides programs and information which when properly applied, produce measurable returns on your exhibit investment.

We are dedicated to the success of organizations which exhibit at trade or consumer shows, trade fairs, conferences, show rooms, road shows or any other events that place their target audience in face-to-face contact with their goods, services and company representatives.

In order to ensure that our programs contain the most current information and most effective training techniques, our researchers, writers, consultants and trainers work continuously with show producers, exhibit designers and builders, public and private sector exhibitors, as well as other academic institutions.

The membership of the Institute is comprised of a cross section of trade and consumer show exhibitors representing many industries. An important component in our membership are those from the support and service side of the exhibit industry. The show managers, producers, exhibit builders and designers, installation and dismantle companies, as well as those from transportation, brokerage and show services. All of these people have a keen interest in the education and the ultimate success of the exhibitor.

The Institute is supported by exhibitor training seminars, membership programs and the marketing of exhibitor products and services.

**For complete information on our exhibitor training programs and services  
please visit our website at: [www.exhibitorinstitute.com](http://www.exhibitorinstitute.com)**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Fred Fox is an exhibit marketing consultant, trainer and founder of the Exhibitor Institute. He has been presenting exhibitor skills training seminars throughout North America, the U.K. and Western Europe since 1980. He is a frequent contributor to many exhibit industry publications and Internet mailing lists and forums. He has produced several exhibitor training videos and DVD's, including: Power Selling for Exhibitors, Xtreme Xhibitor, Trade Show Gold, audio cassettes and printed materials.