

What can you learn if you have had a poor trade show?

I was thinking about some event disasters I have seen in my career (fortunately not many experienced personally), and thought, what should an exhibitor do, in the case of a bad show? Of course there is probably some embarrassment from the point of view of the person that selected the event, but how do you recover, both in terms of getting something out of the poor event and how to adjust your strategy so you don't have a similar experience with another show?

Part may involve re-thinking your event strategy, and so I invite you to refer again to my previous article here:

<http://www.cwallengroup.com/newsletters/september07/HowToSelectTheRightEvent.pdf>). Have you followed the tried and true formula I mentioned last month?

Let's assume that you have, and for whatever reason, the show didn't pan out. The key to moving forward at this point is to honestly figure out where the responsibility for the poor show sits. Ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Did other exhibitors have higher traffic than you?
- 2) What was the level of quality of the leads you did have?
- 3) Did you complete all of your pre-show marketing, and was it done on time?

These questions may enable to improve your own performance next time. Usually a poor show performance is a result of a combination of exhibitor and organizer issues, so how does you move forward?

This article is organized into two sections: how to work with the organizer of the poorly performing event, and how to learn from the experience to improve future events.

1) Try to get something of value from the tradeshow organizer.

Engage the organizer and tell them you had a poor show. How they react is important to your future participation in their events, so many will be willing to help you maximize your show return. Things you can discuss include:

- A) Free access to a email or postal mailing list;
- B) Free advertising on the event website;
- C) Discount of future events(if you decide to go back)

The poor performing show may be due to a new show launch, so you may want to consider exhibiting there again, if you can get assurance that the show will meet your expectations in terms of demographics, number of attendees, etc. It is always the sign of a good show when it provides a third party audit.

2) Revamping your future strategy

This section involves taking a hard look at what you did (and didn't) do in the preparation for the show. Take a look at the following and decide what you can improve.

A) Are you a new exhibitor? Does the market know who you are? If you are new, then the traditional rule of thumb that I have heard is that you need to exhibit at the same show three times before getting your ROI in terms of leads and sales. Therefore you need to decide as to whether to come out 'bigger' or to take a more gradual (less expensive) approach to tradeshow. If you are a new exhibitor, you will have to work harder at getting your name noticed (especially at a bigger event) so work with the organizer to get low cost ideas to increase your prominence.

In a larger event, the location of your booth is key, and a prominent center booth means you are important.

B) Change your metrics from just focused on leads to an Return of Objective (ROO) which includes leads, networking, and branding. This is harder and will require a discussion with upper management, but may be a truer representation of both your short term (leads) and long term (company growth and standing in the industry) goals.

C) Take every free promotional opportunity which is handed to you, consider additional paid one if the ROI can be demonstrated, and make sure your contact information is correct and prominent in all event directories and websites.

D) Review the look and feel of your booth -make it interesting and appealing (and different from your competitors)!

Ultimately, having a poor performing show is a bitter pill to swallow. You can, if you know what 'mistakes' were made, maximize your future performance, so don't lose heart and may your next event be a great one!

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