

Five quick tips to improve your tradeshow

Earlier this year I spoke with Sam Lippman, the president and founder of Integrated Show Management & Marketing (ISM), which provides executive level consulting for the exhibition and convention industry and producer of ECEF and the Large Show Roundtable. Prior to starting ISM, he produced international exhibitions (CES, GRAPH EXPO and PRINT) and conventions (National Computer Conference). When I googled Sam for this article, it said that there were over 200,000 entries, so it's clear that Sam is well known in the business.

When we spoke I wanted to tap into Sam's knowledge in a broader way than I usually do in these columns, so I asked him for tips that could make an organizer more successful in a number of different areas. When I say 'quick', I mean to say that a change of perspective is the quick part although the work that follows may not be as quick but very impactful.

What does Sam suggest?

1) Invest in research.

This may be obvious, but I find that many companies don't really know their audience or do more than roll out the same or similar plan for their events from year to year. Here are the elements of this strategy:

A) Research your marketplace annually. What are the key trends in the marketplace? Which topics does your audience have an interest in? Are there new audiences you need to address? This research will reestablish the need for the event. The outcome of this research might be a white paper, presented to everyone who attends the event;

B) Get feedback from customers to confirm whether you are providing them with what they need. Focus groups, onsite surveys, Zoomerang, or picking up the phone and asking your customers are ways of getting such feedback.

2) Segment your audience by age..

A) Baby Boomers- most attendees this age have gone to many shows and meetings. How can you continue to delight them while reducing their hassle factor?

- a) Provide guided tours of the expo floor based upon their preferences;
- b) Provide your attendees with technology that records which exhibitors they visited so they can follow up with them after the show.

B) Gen X and Y- are tech savvy and expect your event to be easy to navigate. When they travel to shows they demand to stay connected with their work and home – not be isolated at your show so:

- a) Provide them seamless solutions-no extraneous forms to fill out onsite;
- b) Give them their data- allow them to connect with others of similar interest (exhibitors, attendees, speakers) and keep their agenda up to date.

3) Provide exhibitor education. I consult with several large shows and I know how hard and time consuming it is for exhibitors' marketing departments to promote their participation in shows because there are too many of them and we make it too complex. Plus, many staff haven't been trained in how to be successful exhibitors. Here are ways to help your exhibitors:

A) Online-Before your show present webcasts to show your exhibitors how to set measurable objectives, select and train booth staff, attract buyers and prospects to their booth, and save money on logistics. These topic specific webcasts will help your exhibitors get better returns on their investment and return of their objectives;

B) Face to Face- before your show, at your show, or during sales calls, helping your customers become better face to face marketers can be a key way of differentiating your value to your exhibitors.

Sam mentions that Diversified Communications does a wonderful job providing exhibitor education, and I can testify that Mary Larkin knows her stuff, especially with international events.

4) Treat your top exhibitors differently. Many show organizers don't give their top sponsors and exhibitors top treatment. Sam recommends giving "Concierge level service" to your ten most important exhibitors which would include:

A) Visit them on their premises and don't sell them anything. Have your top executives participate in these meetings to share strategic plans and explore ways your show and these companies can work closer together to meet mutual objectives;

B) Additional Exposure: tell your Communications staff to promote these companies whenever they are pitching stories to the media. Also include these companies executives in appropriate conference sessions and press conferences;

C) Provide "VIP" Service onsite. Special account reps and hot lines for these companies; expedited registration and reserved parking. Even a little thing like a thank you letter and a gift basket in their hotel room makes a BIG difference.

5) Build close partnerships with cities. Another one of those ideas which is obvious but not done often enough.

Here are some of Sam's examples:

Chicago has helped with telemarketing potential attendees.

Las Vegas has arranged trips for non-competing event organizers for Las Vegas based shows to key cities in China, India and Brazil where they set up meetings and press conferences to promote the value of exhibiting in and attending shows in Las Vegas.

These are a few of the many ways you can really differentiate your offering from your competition. Sam clearly has a grip on the necessary 'extra' you need to help you keep an edge in a tough market!

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