



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TRADE SHOW EXPERIENCE

Trade shows are an essential part of your business' marketing, publicity and strategy. If you're looking at them solely as a means to generate additional profit for your business, you're looking at them from the wrong angle. The truth is, few companies actually make money directly at trade shows. You can, however, use them to boost your business from top to bottom.

Conferences, conventions and shows are an outstanding marketing tool which can improve your client relations with existing customers, and can be used to generate new leads and new clients after the show ends. They also shouldn't be viewed as a hit to your profits; while they are a business expense, many trade show expenses are a tax write off at the end of the year. Even if they weren't, however, the potential boost to your sales is worth the expense.

Getting the most out of your trade show experience, however, requires taking all the right steps and preparation before and during the show as well as the right follow-up after. Learn the steps you need to take in order to get the most from a trade show, how to prepare and conduct yourself at the show, and follow-up after.



PRE-SHOW PREPARATION

★ ONE YEAR PRIOR ★



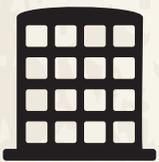
PRE-SHOW PREP: ONE YEAR PRIOR



To get the most from a trade show, your **preparation begins** a full year in advance. This is partially because most trade shows require registration 12 months ahead, and you'll need to square away your hotel stay that soon, but also, you'll want to start planning your trip. Sit down and determine the purpose of the show. This will help inform the rest of your **decisions and preparation.**



Next, if you haven't already reserved it, select your ideal space at the show. Study the setup, the traffic patterns, the makeup of the audience and the services the show will be offering, and determine where the most advantageous location for your booth will be. Ideally, you're looking for a spot that will give you the highest foot traffic as well as in an area where people will be inclined to stop and look at the booths rather than simply rush through.



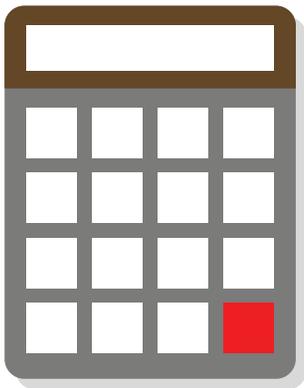
Before you sign the contract, read it over carefully to be sure you understand the rules, the schedule for payments, and the means by which the trade show will assign space, whether it's seniority, membership, product type, etc., and do what you can to ensure you get the best choice. Feel free to have your attorney look at the contract as well. Then, sign the contract and return it with your first payment.





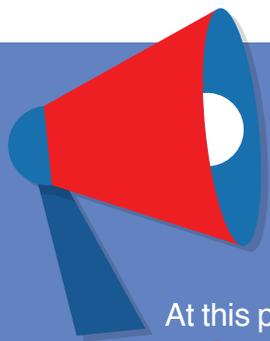
SIX MONTHS PRIOR

Six months prior to the convention, you'll want to have your budget preparation well under way so you know exactly how much money you'll have, and where you want to direct your funds. You'll need to plan your objectives for the exhibit and decide if you can recycle and upgrade an existing one, or whether you need a new booth design. **Upgrading your appearance** is always a good idea; it will attract new customers and your existing ones will stop in to check out the new digs.



In addition, if you haven't yet, you'll want to be sure that you register for housing as soon as possible. One of the critical mistakes people make is overlooking a hotel room, and then discovering that the housing block is sold out. There are few things worse than having to drive back and forth for an hour every day to your hotel when you're exhausted after a day at the show!

You'll also now want to plan your marketing, if you haven't started to already



PLANNING YOUR MARKETING

At this point, six months before the show, you also need to plan and begin your **advertising and marketing campaign**. Never count on people to assume you will be at a convention or trade show. It may well be a good idea to consider hiring a PR firm to handle your pre-show marketing; these firms will be experts in researching the convention and helping you get the word out there.

Ask the show for an attendee list so you can identify where your efforts should be focused, and if you are working with a PR group, give them the list as well. This will enable you to set up demos at your booth on a good schedule. It will also enable you to prepare swag, giveaways and the like for your booth. You may even want to plan a party or gathering for preferred clients, and giveaway invites to select potential customers at the show.



4 MONTHS



FOUR MONTHS PRIOR

Four months prior, your preparation is really going to start ramping up. You'll want to square away which staff you'll be taking to the show. Make sure that you've got at least one winning staff member who's an expert in each area you'll need to represent. If you offer multiple services and products, you'll want the staff who are the most well-versed in each.



Secure any tickets or reservations for transportation you need, if you haven't already. Also, go over your exhibit booth plans again and update them for any changes that have happened in the past couple of months, or any new ideas you might have. Choose the products you want to highlight, develop your floor plan and finalize your design.



Reach out to communicate with the exhibit and any shipping, installation or other services you need. Finally, make sure that you're on top of any and all deadlines you need to meet regarding your presence. These should be outlined in your exhibitor packet or guide. If you haven't received one, contact the trade show and request one. Missing deadlines is the kiss of death for your presence.

Send another e-mail blast to attendees advertising your plans for the show.



3 MONTHS

THREE MONTHS PRIOR

The show is looming at this point! Revisit all the things you've done so far. Begin finalizing your plans for your floor plan, your service requirements, your staff and demonstrations. Sit down with your staff and go over your plans. Make sure that your events are properly scheduled and planned, and any rooms you need for press conferences, hospitality events and the like are scheduled.

If you're having catering events, square away your menus and catering services. Make sure that you have submitted any authorization forms you need for the exhibitor.





TWO MONTHS PRIOR

At this point it's not a bad idea to do a mockup of your exhibit. Get a good idea what it will look like, where your staff will be stationed, where your exhibits will be situated and the like. This will allow you to identify potential problems with your setup and address them in advance. Make sure you've got any materials ordered and in place, such as new banners, business cards, brochures, and such.

You'll also want to ensure that you've got a way to track visitors to your booth. Some trade shows will provide badge scanners; otherwise you'll want to set some process up, whether it's an online mailing list, or an old-fashioned pen-and-paper setup.

Another email is in order at this point to remind attendees that you'll be there, the events you're offering and the products you're demoing. If you haven't already, hit the Internet hard. Post on all social media platforms, on discussion forums, and on your website. Blog about it, and get others talking. Anywhere you can think of to announce your presence, do it!



THE LEAD-UP MONTH

Now the show is just around the corner. You'll want to go back over every plan you've made so far, and finalize your entire appearance. Confirm all of your reservations, from hotel to travel to your exhibitor space to any outside services you're using, and absolutely, confirm any meetings with clients or collaborators that you are scheduled to take at the conference. Make any necessary changes. Follow up with vendors about any deadlines you still have to meet.

Have another meeting with your booth staffers and distribute a briefing packet outlining everyone's responsibilities and the activities you'll be hosting, where and when. Provide everyone with a detailed itinerary. Send a follow-up to your upper management, and set up a time to engage in regular briefings with staff at the trade show (immediately after the hall closes each afternoon is usually best).

Collect the following vital pieces of information and keep them in a safe place:

- Phone numbers and contact info of important people
- Credit cards, travelers checks and other funding
- Copies of all contracts, invoices and receipts
- Exhibitor's packet with booth confirmation
- Confirmation of any reservations
- Additional badge forms
- Shipping labels, manifests and information
- Forms for additional staff badges

Arriving AT The Show

The day of the show has arrived! Upon arrival, check to be sure that all of your freight is on schedule and deal with any hiccups that may have come up. Check into your hotel, then head to the trade show to get badges, gain access to the exhibitor hall, supervise the setup of your booth, confirm that everything you need is ready to go. Get your staff together and have a pre-show briefing where you finalize all of your plans and address any last-minute changes.

Maximizing Your Trade Show Appearance

During the show you'll want to be meticulous in maintaining your plan of action. First impressions mean everything at these kinds of shows. You've got two to three seconds to draw in a potential client walking past, and that's generous. Many people form an opinion within a tenth of a second.

This means you want to have the most creative, stunning and attractive trade show setup possible. Think about your brand, your product and services, and set up a booth that's specifically customized to deliver your message directly in line with those products and services. Be as creative as possible, but also straightforward and make sure people know that it's your company they're viewing every step of the way.

If interaction is not as possible as you'd like, turn your booth into an experience. Create activities to engage visitors that can push your services and demonstrate how your products can help solve their needs.

Drawing People In

Make your booth as **interactive as possible**, and ensure that you've always got staff present who are excellent at engaging with passers-by. The more you're able to draw people in, the more people will organically wander in. **Crowds draw crowds; it's a simple psychological fact. When people see others who are engaged, they are then more likely to become engaged.**

Make it a friendly competition among your staff — offer rewards, benefits and bonuses to those who can generate the most leads or sales. Make it fun for them, and they'll be more likely to be enthusiastic about their presence, which will convert to potential new customers.

Trade Leads and Contacts



One of the most effective tricks of the trade at conventions and shows is to trade leads and contacts with other exhibitors. You can potentially double your leads and opportunities by doing this. However, you'll want to avoid your direct competition, but partner with other brands whose products and services complement your own.

Get Your Best Clients There



Do whatever you can to invite and ensure that your best clients make the show. Word of mouth is the best tool you have, even in the Internet age. Consider buying tickets for your best customers and financing their trip. There's no better way to get them to talk you up than by treating them to a convention!

Show Interest in Your Visitors



Once again, remember that your show is not about instant profit. It's about return on investment. Have a process in place to measure visitors to your booth, and track all visitors and potential leads. Moreover, show interest in your clients. It's not about making a sale right off the bat — it's about consumer engagement. Once a visitor to your booth shows interest, then you can try to cement a sale.

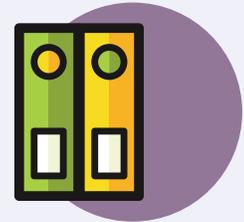
Before that happens, be as hospitable as possible. Warmly welcome everyone into your booth. Ask questions about who they are, what brings them to the show, and who their favorite vendors are. By asking them questions, you're engaging their interests and eventually, they'll start asking questions back. That's your opportunity.

Identify the Best Leads



As you track visitors to your booth, have a means in place to identify the most promising leads. This will be vital to increasing your return on investment. Whether it's an online method of sorting potential customers or a check box on your old-fashioned mailing list, you need some way of denoting which leads are the most likely to convert when contacted later.

After the Show



The first thing you want to do as the show ends is to make sure you've got all of the information you've gathered together in one place where it will be easy to collate and process. Then, consider reserving a space for next year's show, which will save you future prep time.

Supervise your booth's dismantling, debrief your staff, and head home for a well-deserved rest. But don't rest too long; your journey isn't over yet!

Follow Up and Follow Through



Now the final stage in your efforts to get the most from a trade show begins. It's time to **follow up and follow through**. The more prompt you are with your responses to potential new clients, the better off you'll be. Have your campaign prepared and ready to go so you can launch the follow-up instantly.

Data Cleaning



First, clean up your data. No matter how good of a job you've done tracking leads and identifying the most potential, there's still likely a lot of collating and clean-up work to do. Identify duplicate names, both from booth visits and in your existing database, and identify missing or conflicting information. Consider third-party tools like Zoominfo, SalesPredict and the like to complete those missing records.

Offer Multiple Opportunities



When you contact leads, offer a wealth of opportunities for them to further engage. Whether it's downloading white papers or articles, demo requests, surveys, or any other means to uncover a potential lead, the more options you have, the better your chances of converting.

Customize Contacts



Don't use form emails. Identify the exact show for which you are following up, both in the subject of the email and in the first paragraph, at least. The more you can talk about the show itself, the more likely your mail is to be read.



Nurture Your Clients

Certainly, remind potential clients of who you are and what announcements you made, but don't overdo it. Also, make sure that you have a plan to continue nurturing clients. Don't simply send one email and hope it converts. **Targeted programs** that send several emails out over a period of several weeks or months are a great way to continue to engage.



CALL NOW!

Get Creative

Again, creativity is key. The more charming, vibrant and creative your follow-up message is while still staying directly on task, the better off you'll be. Personalize every email, and make it about the client. Mention things about them that made an impact on you and focus on how your product can help them. Remind them of the parts of your booth that seemed to make the most impact on them and help them to remember their experience with you.

A call to action is critical; make sure that you ask them to follow up with you and ask you for further information, place an order, or contact you with questions. Creativity, personalization, and follow-up: that's the key.



Creating the Best Trade Show Space

Of course, as you may have seen, your trade show space makes or breaks your presence at the conference. To get the most from a trade show, you need to make your booth the centerpiece of your presence. Xibit Solutions is an award-winning trade show custom design firm that offers cost-effective solutions for businesses of all sizes.

Our exhibit services range from trade show logistics to installation and dismantling of booth space, to custom graphics and design. Whatever your needs might be for taking your trade show presence to the next level and really making a statement about your company, we're ready to help. Check out our **booth design and trade show services**, and get in touch with us for more information today!