

TRADE SHOW

MARKETING PLAYBOOK

- A Blueprint From Start to Finish



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In this E-Book you will find some guidelines to:

- How to pick the right show
- Evaluating and choosing the right type of trade show display
- Lessons for pre-, at, and post-show marketing
- Post show reviews and planning

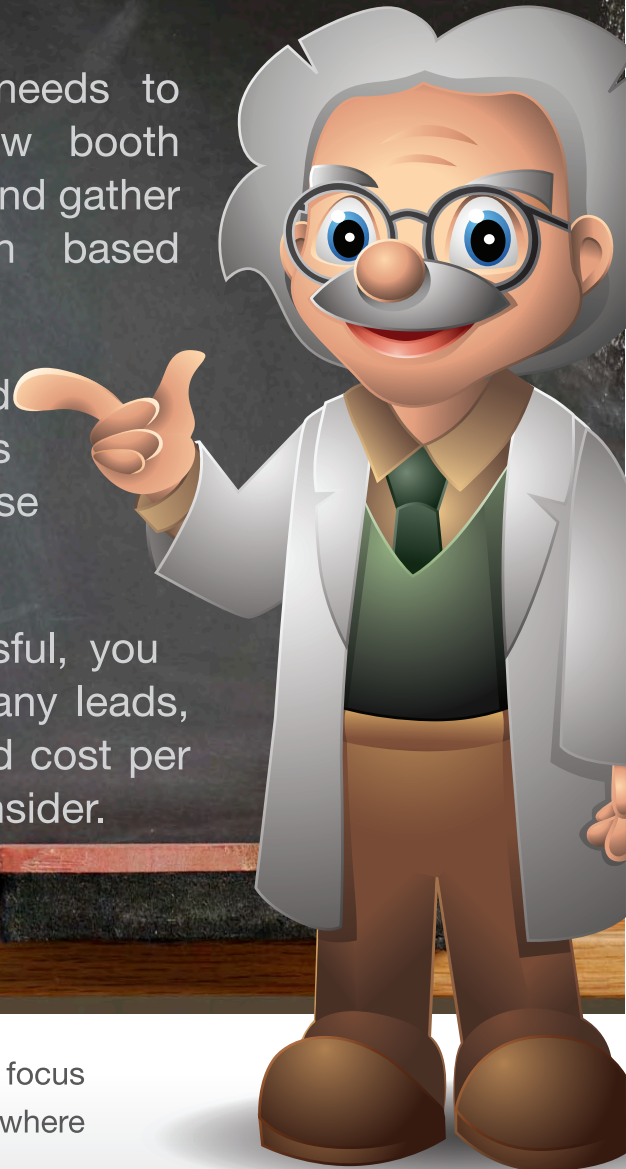
Why Participate In Trade Shows

Trade show marketing can be an incredibly effective tool for creating success in any industry. Humanity has been using trade shows – also known as street fairs, farmer’s markets, bazaars, etc – for centuries, to bring together buyers and sellers.

Successful marketing at a trade show doesn’t require a college degree in Behavioral Neuroscience – just a little uncommon sense and some strategic planning. You can’t buy a trade show booth and expect to become an overnight success, anymore than you can buy an airplane and expect to fly yourself on a world tour the following week!

Trade shows are not a one-time event:

- Trade shows need to be preceded by planning, goal setting, budgeting, training, & advertising.
- During the trade show, the marketing needs to continue. Your properly trained trade show booth personnel need to interact with the attendees and gather contact information for future permission based marketing.
- Immediately after the trade show, a planned series of follow up interactions with attendees needs to take place - if you don't nourish these leads, they will wither on the vine.
- To prove that the trade show was successful, you need to accumulate some statistics - how many leads, how many sale conversions, cost per lead and cost per conversion are a few important statistics to consider.



In the following pages, we’ll discuss the areas your team should focus on throughout the entire trade show process -- and point out where many trade show exhibitors often go wrong.

Choosing What Trade Shows To Attend

As a wise man once said, “There are very few unsuccessful shows, but there are lots of unsuccessful exhibitors.”

Mel White of Classic Exhibits, Inc further comments, “Trade shows do not make sense for every business. For some companies, attending rather than participating makes far more sense.”

Exhibit marketing allows the opportunity to:

- Sell products
- Promote your brand
- Introduce new products and services
- Network with key industry contacts
- Learn more about (or even spy on) your competitors
- Spend valuable time strengthening relationships with customers and suppliers

Far too many companies attend trade shows with few or no expectations and truly vague reasons for being there at all. Maybe they have always gone to this show? Or their competition always goes to the show?

Our experience is that less than half of the businesses that exhibit at trade shows bother to create formalized, measurable goals. Here’s a few questions you need to ask yourself:

1) What products and/or services does your company want to sell?

Be specific about the intended outcome of the trade show.

2) What is the company trying to accomplish?

3) What is the overall corporate message?

4) How many leads should the team walk away with?

Obtaining a certain amount of qualified leads is an example of a great goal, but the team must create a system for following up on those leads.



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After assessing your goals, only then can you select the proper trade shows to attend. You can search for upcoming trade shows and filter by your particular industry, geographical area, number of attendees, and/or number of exhibitors. Or if you want to keep it simple, just ask your 10 biggest customers which shows they go to.

There are several different trade show specific search engines available on the Internet. The Trade Show News Network (www.tsnn.com), Events Eye (<http://eventseye.com>) are just a few of the ones out there.



Trade Show Budgeting

Once you've selected a show, it's time to start planning. The first big question is, "What's your budget?" Companies should determine a reasonable exhibit marketing budget, including all related costs - pre and post-show marketing, travel costs, lodging, and entertainment. Also factor in freight, drayage, show labor, carpeting, and electricity expenses. Many of these costs are laid out in the show guidelines and part of the exhibit space rental.

The trade show display is often the largest initial cost. However, it usually surprises trade show newbies to find out that, over the next two or three years, the recurring expenses related to using the trade show booths usually surpass the purchase cost of the display stand, often significantly.

When building your budget, be sure to consider these recurring costs - freight, labor for install/dismantle, and drayage. Keeping these in the analysis will help you select between trade show displays that might be the same size and same relative cost - if one sets up much easier, it will save labor costs. If one is much lighter or packs up smaller, it will save freight and shipping costs. If one comes with a lifetime hardware warranty, you'll save on repair costs. Over the longer term, these differences can pack a real punch.

Once you have a reasonable budget, you need to determine what size booth space you need and can afford. Which would be the best location for your booth?



We all want to think we're the BIG dog on the Block, But many of us are not. If you're new to trade show marketing, start small and Build up.



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Many companies attend several trade shows every year – it might make sense to have a couple of smaller booths for the regional shows, and then combine them into a larger booth at your biggest show. Typically, smaller trade show booths get less traffic than larger ones. Most of the reason for this is that the bigger trade show displays are centrally located, closer to the entrance, and along the main aisles – they’ve got the best location.

However, that doesn't mean they take the show. Your smaller booth can still have a huge impact with some strategic planning. Accessories, swag, add-ons, and accurately chosen graphics and color schemes can still stop the show no matter the size or location.

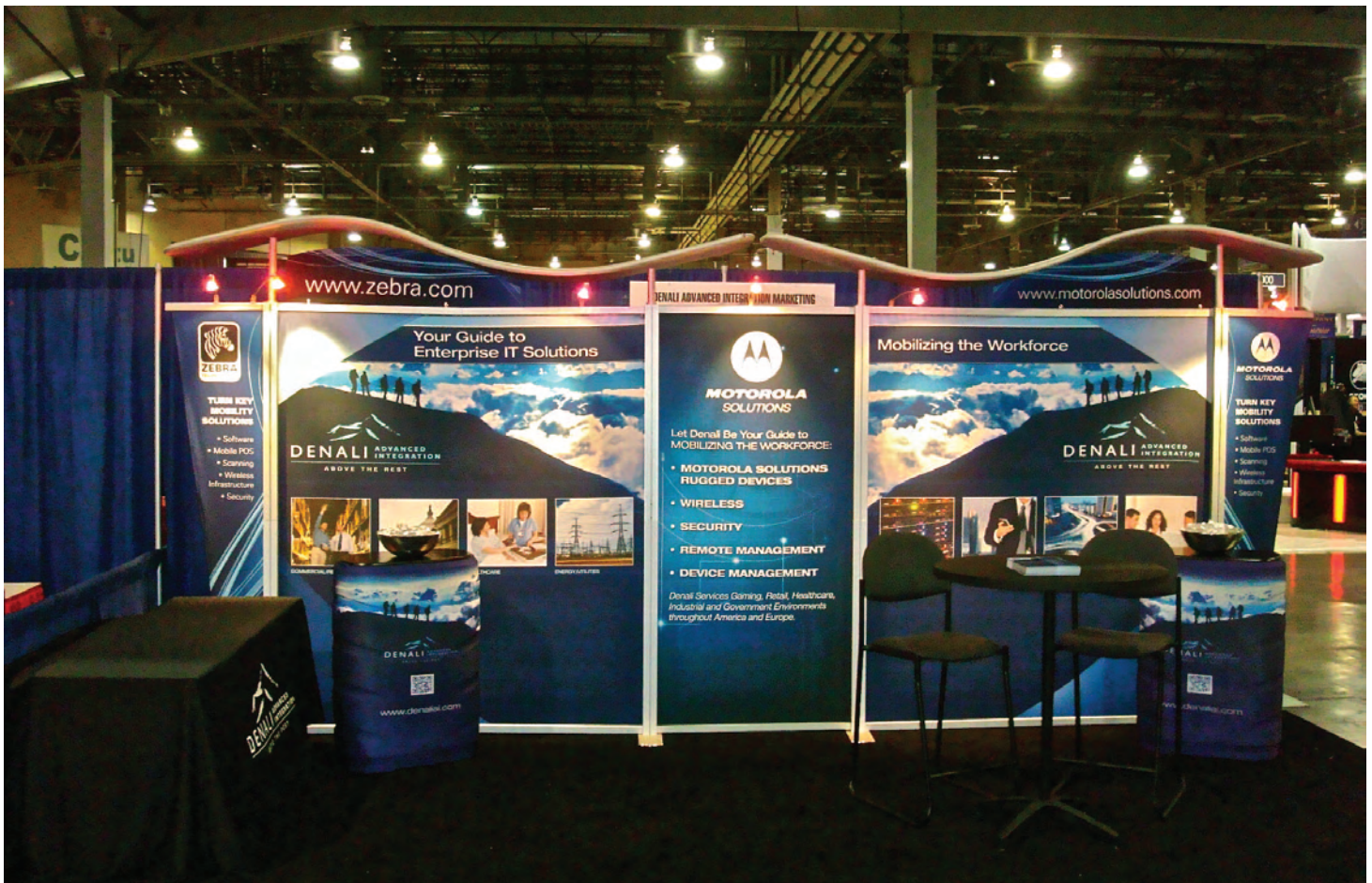


Understanding Your Target Audience

Review the important show deadlines, especially pay attention to being listed in the show marketing materials and on the show guide. Do you want to make a presentation at one of the training sessions, or sponsor some of the training? There may be an opportunity for that.

The planning process must include understanding your target audience. Many attendees visit trade shows for the training sessions and networking opportunities, and only rarely visit the trade show floor. However, other attendees are looking for opportunities to find new vendors and new products -- and may not attend the training sessions at all. And of course, some attendees only cruise through the trade show floor to pick up freebies.

Understand which type(s) of traffic you can expect at any specific show and plan for it. If your target prospects will be cruising the floor, then plan an eye catching booth, as well as some pre-show marketing, to make sure they stop to visit. If the majority of those you'd like to reach will only be in the training sessions, then you should see if your company can make one or more of those presentations, or sponsor a session in some way – get in front of your target audience!



Defining Booth Functional Requirements

Trade shows are huge warehouses of information. As everyone who's ever been to one knows, the irritation of stimuli becomes overwhelming. If you don't stand out in the crowd of displays - and more importantly, make it out of the crowd and into people's long-term memories - you're aiming too low! The goal isn't just to be there, but to be remembered.

Once you know what you need to accomplish in your booth, then you can sort out what type of trade show display you need.

Think about the types of activities that are going to take place inside the booth and ensure that the booth design will aid those activities.

- Are you going to provide food and beverages?
- Areas for conversation?
- Product displays?
- Be sure to choose a display stand that supports the planned activities instead of interfering with them.



"I knew I should have started planning a week sooner..."

Remember that trade show booth suppliers don't know your budget unless you share it with them.

Be certain of your needs, your vision, and your budget before starting to shop, and then explain all of these requirements. If you are well prepared, you're much more likely to get the display stand that best fits your exhibition needs.

Be sure to start the trade show booth design process early. As many have said, "You can have it fast, cheap, or good. Pick any two." This of course refers to the difficulty of creating a high quality product or service, and also doing it quickly AND inexpensively. It is easy to cut corners and sacrifice quality in the rush to get the job done. Or to use lower quality components or workers in order to drive cost down.

It can't be emphasized enough; a few days can be the difference between flawless trade show displays and a sloppy mess at your next trade show. Waiting until the last minute to prepare results in panic, chaos and leaves you paying extra for rush shipping – and also makes you exposed and vulnerable to shipping mistakes and weather delays. Even rushing your graphics at the last minute can lead to typographical errors, forgotten parts and other blunders - plan ahead!

There are many different trade show booth construction methods and types of booths, including truss displays, popup displays, panel displays, and hybrid displays.

Selecting the best fit trade show display can be a daunting process. There are literally thousands of different choices. And to the uninitiated, it can be difficult to discern the trade-offs.

If your signage is too small or the graphics on your pop-up displays are too hard to understand, no one's going to be able to tell who you are or what you do. And, if people don't have any idea what kind of products and services you offer, they're never going to stop and chat.

Arousing curiosity and making your trade show booth approachable is paramount. You only have a few seconds to grab attention as people walk by. This can be accomplished in several ways:

To Rent Or To Purchase

There are times when it may seem more logical to rent a display than to purchase one. If you are double-booked at two conventions, it may be better to rent one display rather than purchase two complete displays. If you will be attending your first trade show, you may choose to rent rather than purchase a display so that you can test the waters at the trade show and see if exhibiting is something that will be beneficial to your organization before investing in the expense of a display.

The general rule of thumb for exhibitors is that if you need the trade show booth or accessory more than three times per year, it will be less expensive to purchase it; otherwise, rent it.



9 TIPS FOR AN ATTENTION GRABBING TRADE SHOW BOOTH

- 1) *Size does matter. The largest display at the event will be noticed.*
- 2) *Defining your space with sidewalls, flooring, and overhead banners can help prevent your visitors from being distracted by nearby sights and activities.*
- 3) *Interesting design and quality materials in your custom trade show displays will go a long way toward inducing people to stop by and make small talk.*
- 4) *Flashy lighting, bold imagery, catchy phrases, and video presentations can make that first impression and spark interest that your staff can further encourage.*
- 5) *Consider traffic flow and storage requirements*
- 6) *Ensure a consistent approach to branding all graphics and show materials.*
- 7) *The color scheme you select for your trade show booth is critical. it affects our perceptions of a space, so when planning your booth, choose your colors carefully.*
- 8) *Artful use of lighting can suggest almost any mood you wish and bring as an added emotional component to your booth.*
- 9) *Don't skimp on Graphic Design - Stunning graphics will grab people's attention. A rich, colorful image will make people stop and take notice.*

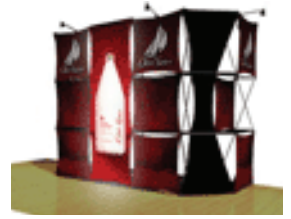


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Overview of Trade Show Display Structures

A brief overview of the available trade show display options includes these choices:

Pop Up Displays – These display stands use expandable accordion frames, that can come with two major types of coverings – the first is a “carpet” like fabric that is hook and loop receptive, for attaching separate graphics. The other main category is to place printed graphics on the frame; these may be printed fabric or laminated mural panels. These graphic choices can attach in several different



ways including hooks, magnetic strips, velcro strips, and simple button holders. The graphic choices offer trade-offs in pricing, features, easy removability, and weight (shipping/drayage ramifications).

Panel Displays - The panels used in panel displays started out made from plywood, but these days are primarily made from aluminum composites, Dibond, or other composite materials, typically based on a very lightweight honeycomb interior of some sort, covered by two very thin, rigid aluminum sheets.



On the outside faces, panel displays can be covered with variety of finishes – the most common for trade shows is Velcro receptive fabric, but paint, printed graphics, 1,000s of different laminates, slat and grid wall, and a variety of other exterior surfaces are available.

Newer panel systems include plastic panels covered with laminates and printed graphics, as well as collapsible aluminum frames covered with magnetic graphic panels. The many different choices again involve trade-offs in setup time, shipping weight, and ease of graphic changes.

The largest benefit of panel displays is its ease of assembly and transportability. They are light-weight, compact, and easy to assemble. If convenience is of high importance with your trade show booth, a panel display is the way to go.

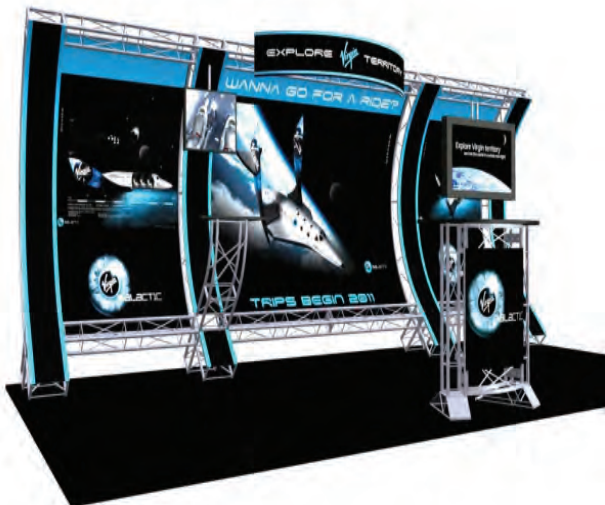


Portable Hybrid Displays – this is a new category, developed over the last decade. These are primarily made with aluminum extrusions and large, wide format graphics. To the untrained eye, the extrusions for portable hybrid displays look similar, but the best require no tools for assembly. The graphics are normally printed tension fabric (pulled taut to remove wrinkles), but can also include rollable mural graphics or rigid graphics.

Some of the hybrid kits allow full customization, others are offered on a take it or leave it basis, with no engineering or manufacturing capability for modifications. Ditto with the accessories, some kits offer a few choices, other designs offer anything you can imagine. And finally, some come with a 1 year warranty, others with a lifetime warranty.



Truss Displays are made up of light weight, metal or composite bars that crisscross one another. This allows for a light, yet sturdy support system for anything you want to hang and display. Higher end lighting equipment is a common addition to trade show truss systems, as bright lights have a way of making even the best products look better.



Trade show truss displays are tinker toys, built from various lengths of straight and curved pieces, along with connectors and accessories. They can be built in very different layouts every time you put them together, creating a totally new look for each show. Another advantage is that they are structural; they can hold heavy products and large monitors without a problem. They can also be built into two-story displays, given the right parts and budget, allowing for truly significant impact at your shows.

Truss displays are easy to set up, but can take several hours, just due to the number of parts. Truss is heavy, typically shipping in large tubs by freight (not UPS/FedEx). Composite truss was introduced a few years ago, and comes a little less expensive and about ½ the weight. It is almost as strong as metal truss, and should be considered if a truss display is in your future.



Pre-show And At-show Marketing

Okay, you made it through the maze, selected a show, created a budget, and worked with a great trade show design house to pick the best fit trade show booth and graphics. You got it all done in time and shipped to the show. You even scheduled install/dismantle services and travel and accommodations for your staff – you're all set, right?

Well, no, not if you want to optimize your results.

There's still plenty more to do, before and at the show. In order to succeed, you need to give people a reason to come by your booth. This means you need to make sure they already know you're there (pre-show advertising and invitations), or that they notice you at the show (attention catching booth and graphics, live performers, great freebies, etc.).

Some exhibitors utilize a substantial giveaway, which helps pull in booth traffic and collect business cards. Be careful if you go this route, there have been some funny mistakes over the years. Try to be sure to have a quick chat to qualify everyone that is grabbing that expensive bauble.



According to the Event Marketing Institute, some 70% of visitors go to exhibition displays for the swag, so it's a great marketing strategy. However, make sure those freebies are:

- Something useful to the consumer they won't immediately lose or forget about
- Something that directly relates to your business

Other companies will offer a free consultation or product demo for stopping by their trade show booth. Some exhibitors broadcast a big sporting event to draw a crowd, or hire circus jugglers or mimes. Whichever route you choose, try to make it unique, valuable, and memorable.

Booth staff selection and training is critical – some people have open friendly personalities, and strike up conversations with strangers immediately. Other folks are more withdrawn, or even dour, and one glance at them is enough to make your prospect suddenly remember an errand at the other end of the show. Bring people with the right personality, who are knowledgeable about the products and services. Have some training sessions before the show, to practice qualifying prospects quickly.

During the show, have them dress appropriately, take notes, and leave the chewing gum and cell phones away while on the job. You can't have great trade show exhibit without great people staffing them!

Go out of your way, before and at the show to invite prospects to visit with you. Get creative – it's the key to your trade show success.



For example, an article in Exhibitor Magazine last year discussed an exhibitor with a very innovative approach – this exhibitor, realizing the convention center and nearby hotels were 30 – 50 minutes from the airport, offered to provide free rides from the airport to the hotels of specific targeted leads – ensuring a happy client and some 30 minutes to chat with them. This same exhibitor provided a cell phone charging station in their booth space during the trade show, alongside a small bar offering imported beers.

During the show, do as much networking as possible. Go to the event parties, awards ceremonies, luncheons, dinners, and meet people. Get your hands on the attendee list and training session lists to reach out to people both before the show and afterwards. Invite them to your booth for a demo, tell them about your newest product. Invite your top prospects to a private dinner or happy hour.

When the show is over, be sure to reward your hard-working staff for their efforts. You can take the team out for lunch or hold an office party. Be sure to make everyone feel appreciated.



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After The Show

FOLLOW UP on those leads - there is no more important part of your trade show presentation than the follow-up. Do it immediately! Don't put it off. Thank them for stopping by, remind them about your products and services, ask them to visit your website or follow on social media. Continue to nurture your leads until they're ready to buy.

You've heard the phrase, *"The devil's in the details"?* Well, *the dollars are there, too.*

Start your planning process six to nine months before the next trade show season. Ordering services from the show early can save you hundreds of dollars. Shipping your graphics and displays well ahead of schedule will save lots too. Deadlines are your friends, not your enemies. Don't ignore them.

Trade shows are very effective marketing tools. They can be expensive, but the trade off is that you're reaching a very large, targeted audience, which offers the opportunity for a great ROI. Once you make the decision to attend a particular show, start the planning process - identify what needs to be done and when it needs to be done. Track everything.

That old business school adage with the 5 "P's" still works - Perfect Planning Prevents Poor Performance.



Ready to take the next step in making your tradeshow a success?

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