



how to
deliver
sales with
your
exhibition
strategy

Targeted marketing

Exhibitions allow your company to interact with your target audience face-to-face in a very specific environment.

The only problem is, your competitors are probably also there competing for attention.

So, how do you stand out?

What's more, how do you get the best return from your marketing spend by exhibiting, or is it simply a PR exercise?

Exhibition marketing strategy

Although you cannot guarantee the quality of any exhibition, you can, like all marketing activities, control how you choose to take advantage of the opportunity.

With appropriate planning and goal setting, you will not only establish specific targets, you will be able to identify your prospects, sell relevant benefits and increase your return.

Planning

Set specific goals

Many companies approach an exhibition with no other goal than to raise their profile.

By analysing your target audience, you will know how to message your exhibition stand and who to approach before, during and after your exhibition.

The more specific and realistic your goals, the more likely you will achieve them. But, make sure you delve deeper when identifying your prospects:

- Do you want to generate 200 sales leads?
Or, more specifically;
- 50 sales leads of people looking to spend in the next six months? Or;
- Meet 25 qualified new prospects at senior purchasing level in IT for companies with 500+ seats?

Despite being industry specific, exhibitions do attract a range of visitors so keep your targets as specific as possible. This will drive your exhibition presence and allow you to focus.

Attract your target market

The theme of your exhibition campaign should be targeted towards your specific target market.

The messaging in this is very important, ie. financial directors will have different priorities when assessing your product or service compared to a sales director.

You have your brand and brand guidelines, but your exhibition theme needs to engage your specific audience.

This includes the design of your exhibition stand, the imagery and words you use and your handouts; even the type of person manning your stand and their sales pitch will need to be appropriate.

Cohesive branding

Once you have established your target market, you can begin to understand what will engage them.

You can also utilise your current sales process. What questions and credentials are asked of you when you do a sales pitch? Can these be created into collateral to pass out, pre-qualifying your company to a lead?

Establish what you need well in advance of your exhibition - don't leave it to the last minute.

Production time guidelines

Conceptual design, development and artworking is as easy as you make it. With a clear brief, your design agency has more chance of delivering concepts that target your requirements.

Allow for at least two weeks of initial creative. Then you will also need time for development and artwork creation - anywhere between 1 and 3 weeks depending on how you drive the project, client-side, and how reactive your agency is. Then follows production times:

- Stand build takes about 2-3 weeks, depending on complexity.
- Allow 2 weeks for the production of a pop-up stand or banner stand.
- Simple brochures or leaflets can be produced in a matter of days, a more complex piece may take a couple of weeks to print and produce.
- The same goes for promotional gifts and clothing. Allow 2-4 weeks production time.

Organise backwards and leave extra time. You book your stand well in advance, why not start production early?

Prepare your exhibition staff

People like people like people, and exhibitions are a great way of connecting directly with a prospect.

The staff manning your exhibition stand need to understand the specific goals of the event, potential questions that may arise from a visitor and who to target.

Maximise the effectiveness of results by pin-pointing strengths and weaknesses of your team and applying roles in the process. If you incentivize your staff, do so in a way to encourage teamwork, rather than aggressive, competing sales people. It's about company performance, not individual commissions.

Market your attendance

Use your existing marketing databases to let contacts know that you are attending an event.

Telephone calls, e-mails, or general client mailings not only act as a call-to-arms, in terms of your company profile, but give you an excuse to remind your client-base about your company in general.

Contact local and trade press with releases about your appearance. Is there anything you can utilise to add more appeal, such as a new product launch?

Up-front incentives

Can you create a reason to motivate people to visit your stand? A competition or prize draw can achieve this, but does it fit in with your brand values and target market?

Is there a better way of achieving the same thing?

Stock up and organise

Make sure you prepare for different eventualities.

Do you have enough stock? Top up on hand-outs, refreshments, and any other items you may need, including spares leads and batteries... what's the worst that can happen? Plan for it.

Also, on your feet for most of the day, you may welcome areas for rest, away from the glare of the delegates on your stand. How will this be planned?

You don't want resting staff sitting with their feet up, eating a chocolate bar, when a top prospect may pass at any time.

The Event

The day of the exhibition has arrived and you have a great exhibition stand that should attract the right prospects. The messaging is spot-on, your objectives are clear; your staff know their goals and are motivated.

It's now down to the people on your stand.

Get the most from your people

You need to keep the initial positive feeling as the day wears on. You may get tired, get a few knock-backs, but you need to ensure there is support for the whole team.

A highly motivated, well-informed team differentiates you from other exhibitors. Regular briefings and teamwork are a must.

Remind everyone of your goals, your key messages and the role of each team member.

Share goal progress and feedback from interactions to help refine your sales process.

Keep the energy up and the attitudes positive.

Optimise your attention

You need to ensure that you maximise sales opportunities. To do this you will need to identify your prospects and spend the appropriate time to filter these as genuine sales leads (or whatever your goals are). Always remember your goals.

Attract and engage

Your appropriate sales messages should filter out casual visitors and draw relevant people in, but **you do need to attract people yourself.**

You can use an outgoing member of your team to leave your stand and approach people all over the exhibition. Use the strengths of your team to bring people in to your space.

Don't be scared to reject visitors if they are not relevant. You are there to sell, not advise people who do what you do. Politely filter out wrong fit visitors. They still have the power of word-of-mouth and you don't want them doing this negatively.

Focus on the benefits your product or service has to offer the prospect directly. You should have demonstrations and marketing material that answers the questions of your prospects, based on your targeted sales pitch.

successful exhibition strategies

If you end up with an interested prospect, close in on them gently, taking appropriate contact details.

Ensure you take good notes that you will remember when you get back to the office. Remember a few off-topic details so your follow-up is more personal.

If you need to ask a question again to make sure you have the details correctly, do so. It shows you are interested as you focus on your prospect.

People like people

Firstly, you need to make sure you are approachable. If your team are huddled negatively discussing a recent visitor to your stand, your stand won't exactly be inviting.

Also, remember that not every person clicks personally and rapport during sales is essential. Establish between your team who works best with which kind of person.

If you make contact with a prospect on your stand and your discussions aren't going well, don't be afraid to bring in a more relevant colleague.

Earn media coverage

Pre-invite key journalists to visit your stand and encourage your marketing team to the event to help market your company on-site.

Keep a good supply of your literature in the show press office and work with the show organiser to improve your profile.

And, when the press visit your site, make sure someone is available to speak to them.

Keep it all business

A friendly environment on your exhibition stand may encourage people to drop in and stay chatting. Do you really want that?

Current customers might expect your undivided attention if they appear, but unless they're your main reason for attending, try to set aside specific times for them, ideally in a hospitality area on or off the stand.

Networking with existing contacts is part of the appeal of an exhibition, but you'll want to keep it under control.

Focus on your key goals

Remember, you are at the exhibition to achieve specific business goals and not every visitor is the right-fit.

Keep your eye on the prize, your strategy in focus and you will engage with the right people.

Don't get involved in any hype that sometimes overshadows an exhibition. Create awareness, stick to your plan and remember why you and your team are there.

After the exhibition

Away from the glare of the lights and the buzz of the event, it's back down to business.

Now is the time to follow through all of the new opportunities you've generated.

This is where some companies squander the benefits they've worked so hard to achieve while others **capitalise on them and turn them into profits.**

De-brief the team

When you get back to the office, sit down with the stand staff, your marketing team and key managers.

Do an assessment of what worked and what didn't. Discuss suggestions for improving performance at future exhibitions.

Your staff's insights are a valuable asset, especially while their impressions are still fresh. Therefore, sooner rather than later with the de-brief.

Measure your results

Now is the time to measure your success against the specific, measurable goals you set yourself before the event.

Dissect the event in terms of effectiveness to help plan future events and determine future development of your techniques.

In terms of leads, don't just evaluate your results immediately after the event. Successful sales teams follow lead-tracking up to a year later to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line.

Only then can you determine the value of the exhibition for your company and whether your marketing budget was well spent.

Follow up all contacts

Every visitor to your stand should receive a timely follow-up. The degree of follow-up will depend on the classification of the contact, ranging from a simple thank-you letter to a sales visit, phone call or information pack.

To your prospects, the days and weeks following the exhibition define who most wants their business.

Send a generic mailing to all show visitors

You may not be able to meet every visitor at an exhibition, but you can contact them afterwards.

Most event organisers make the visitor lists available for free or for a one-time rental fee.

A quick ‘Sorry we missed you but did you know...’ can create a few new leads and at the very least, give your business additional profile to an industry audience.

Follow through on press releases

Call all the editors you mailed your press releases to or who visited you on your exhibition stand. Ask if there’s any more information they might need.

A phone call at the right time could mean a solid mention in a post-show review in the trade press.

Reserve a place for next year (maybe)

If you met or exceeded your goals, now is the time to lock in a prime location at the next event.

Get in touch with the event organisers early and make sure you see a floor-plan so you can reserve your position early.

Over time, an event may lose its draw. Be realistic each and every year with your goals and measurement to make sure you are not trying to re-create results from successes in the distant past.

Making the most of exhibitions

Exhibitions can work and by planning a few simple activities before, during and after each event, they work even harder for you and your marketing budget.

Being able to get face-to-face with prospects in an industry setting can act as a quick route to a genuine sale.

design for exhibitions

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