

Trade Show



Discover the No-Fail Formula
for Trade Show Success

Step 1

GET STARTED NOW.

Sounds simple, but it's crucial. Starting early can save you thousands of dollars on every show.

From a financial standpoint, planning early eliminates the most expensive (and avoidable) fees: rush charges and expedited shipping rates. You get to take advantage of all of your show's "early bird" discounts, plus you also get a "first-come, first-served" opportunity for everything from your booth location to where you'll sit on the airplane. Procrastinating can end up costing you anywhere from \$500 to \$5000 in unnecessary fees and shipping costs, and who wants that?

Just as important, starting early will allow you to reap the benefits of a well-timed marketing strategy. Not everyone can be creative on demand, so allow some time for the ideas to flow.

Emotionally, waiting until the last moment to throw something together and being ill-prepared can place HUGE amounts of stress, anger, and frustration on an entire team. Your team may feel unequipped, untrained and unprepared for what they'll encounter on the showroom floor. Remember, just showing up is not enough. You have to BE THERE.

Trade Show U editor's note:

If it's already too late to start early, complete as many of these steps as you can, but start NOW for your next show! It's never too early; however, quite often, it IS too late.

Step 2

DETERMINE THE VALUE.

Decide if it's worth it (for you and your prospects).

This step tends to be a little more complex, but it's also necessary for success. What you want to determine are the total costs (financial, emotional, AND unseen potential) of doing the trade show.

Ask yourself these questions: What problem does my company solve? What will a prospect pay for us to solve this problem? Is my company's offer compelling enough to generate a response from my target prospect? Will my target prospect even be at this show? (Note: This question seems obvious, but exhibitors repeatedly fail to study show demographics and attendance reports to ensure the right prospects will even be at a particular event!) How many prospects can I connect with at this show? How many solid leads can I generate? How many of these leads can I close? What's the value of building relationships with existing customers, and what's the lifetime value of each new customer? After asking these questions, you are better prepared to determine whether you can expect to generate an acceptable return on investment at a particular show.

Many companies exhibit at a trade show just because they "always have" or because their competitors do. That rationale is old-school, and alone, not a good enough reason to exhibit. A typical trade show marketing effort starts at \$15,000. Please don't invest that much money without an in-depth understanding of a particular trade show's potential.

Step 3

BUILD YOUR BUDGET.

As defined, "budget" means the total amount of money allocated for a specific purpose during a specified period. And there it is: specific purpose.

YOUR specific purpose is to communicate who you are and what you do for people who need you. Most exhibitors skip this step and simply fly blind. I urge you not to follow the herd here. Trade show marketing gets very expensive when you don't keep costs under control. In Step 2 (above), we emphasized that you determine your potential return on investment. Use that amount as the starting point for your budget. Don't forget to factor in intangible returns, like the benefit of developing relationships with existing customers and prospects. While you don't want to undersell the value of an event, you also need to stay realistic. **Here are the major items you should budget for as you begin the planning process** ▼

- Purchase of booth space
- Show-related fees (electrical, booth cleaning, etc.)
- Display costs
- Pre & post-show marketing expenses
- Giveaways
- Shipping costs
- Sponsorships
- Travel
- Hospitality events

Step 4

CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE.

What's your USP? In other words, what sets you apart from all the rest?

What is "the thing" that your company offers that prospects can't find anywhere else? Figure it out, explain it in two sentences or less, tweet it in 140 characters or less, boil it down to basics.

Let's refer back to Step 2. The value of a particular event helps you build your budget (Step 3). In this step, you need to examine the value you offer your prospects. This is your USP (Unique Selling Proposition). Use your USP to create a compelling message for your prospects. At trade shows, your prospects are there to find answers to their problems and they're going to hear hundreds of different marketing messages. They'll only remember a few. What's "the thing" you want them to remember about you? Focus your efforts on communicating "the thing," and don't clutter it with unnecessary "noise."

Step 5

SELECT YOUR MARKETING MEDIA.

What tools will you use to make your point?

Trade shows are a very powerful marketing tool. You get invaluable "face time" with your prospects, and you've got all sorts of multi-dimensional marketing possibilities. (Think hospitality suites, social media, print and broadcast media, specialty advertising, the list goes on...)

Think of it this way: the booth is the wheel hub of your efforts to tell everyone who you are and what you can do for them. The spokes attached to the hub are all the other options for keeping that hub moving. The spokes are anything that reinforces your message: show sponsorships, meet-and-greets, giveaways, brochures, fun freebies, etc.

Another thing: spokes can be added to your hub at any time. For example, using participant listings for e-mail and direct mail are a great way to keep your name in front of everyone before and after the show. Use social media to your advantage, too! Many trade shows have an official twitter hash tag. Jump into the conversation and create a buzz around your brand.

Step 6

BRING YOUR MESSAGE TO LIFE.

Get 'em to pay attention!

You know what you want to say and how you're going to say it. Your next challenge is getting people to listen and honestly, that's going to be really tough. The competition on the trade show floor is fierce. The good news is that you've taken the time to create a great USP, and you're offering real value to your prospects. This still isn't enough to ensure success. You've got to bring your message to life, then "shout" for it to be heard. Start with your prospect. Make the message ALL ABOUT THEM!

Your message isn't for you or your staff; it's for your prospects. You've got to connect with them on a personal and emotional level. Before you can bring your message to life, you need to understand your prospects' hopes, dreams, and needs. Your message should explain how your product or service is going to benefit them personally. Prospects won't buy from you just because your company is great or your product is the best; they'll buy when they believe they will benefit. It's all about them.

The best way to begin is by creating a fictional target prospect. How old is she? What's his job title and responsibilities? Personal goals? How does she spend her spare time? These details are essential for creating a message that resonates with your prospects. Your message moves from being "what WE do here" to "how we can help YOU make your life/work better."

Make sure this customer-focused message shines through in everything you do from your booth and marketing materials to your hospitality events.

Step 7

DEFINE THE SALES PROCESS.

Know your process inside and out, and then train your team on how to make it happen.

Defining the sales process sounds very Business School 101, but you've got to figure out how you're going to find your perfect customer among a whole group of diverse people. Picture a funnel with a bunch of people at the big end, and funnel them downward to the tip... voilà - your perfect customer!

Trade show marketing is never one-size-fits-all; there will always be a diverse range of prospects, from those who have never heard of your company to those long-time, existing customers. Closing the sale will differ depending on where a certain prospect is in your sales funnel. As you might expect, buying might not be the next step for someone who has just learned about your company; they might need a demo or consultation first. Having clearly-defined "next steps" and training your team to recognize the different buying stages BEFORE you arrive on the showroom floor is a wiser plan than the one-size-fits-all method. Having a step-by-step process in place will make your face-to-face contact more memorable and relevant, and your post-show follow-up will be much simpler and more effective.

Step 8

SET YOUR GOALS.

Making "the Sale" is not always the only goal.

Have you noticed by now that each step builds on the last? It's no different with goal-setting. Once you've figured out your sales process, it's easy to set goals. Hopefully, your trade show will allow you to quickly close a lot of sales, which, of course, is a primary goal, but you can't measure trade show success by quick sales alone. Really, each "next step" in your sales process should be a goal. Reaching the "next step" is like reaching a goal, and it's not always a sale.

HERE ARE SOME SAMPLE GOALS ▼

1. Introduce ourselves to 100 people who haven't heard of us by getting them to watch our 2-minute company overview video.
2. Take 50 new prospects through a personal, 5-minute website/catalog demo.
3. Meet with 25 people in our conference room area to do an in-depth review of client needs.
4. Meet with 10 prospects in company suite to provide customized proposal.
5. Host 5 key clients during one-on-one dinners.
6. Close 3 new accounts worth \$25K each within 60 days of the event.
7. On follow-up survey, 75% of prospects could recall our USP 15 days later.

Trade show marketing needs to justify itself, but only measuring dollars generated at a particular event might be underselling the true worth of your efforts. Typically, trade shows support the sales process. Know exactly what you want your trade shows to accomplish. Set the right goals and realistic expectations, then motivate and train your team to accomplish them.

Step 9

PLAN OUT THE LOGISTICS.

AKA the "Things to Do" checklist

After 17 years in the trade show business, I've learned that the vast majority of people start the trade show planning process here, on Step #9. Remember, the logistics surrounding your trade show exist only to support the goals and objectives you've set. Nevertheless, successfully executing your logistics can mean the difference between trade show success or trade show disaster.

The best tip I can offer takes us back to Step #1, start early. If you start early, you won't pay the high costs of last-minute planning. Even the most organized marketing professionals are headed for disaster if they try to pull everything together in a few weeks' time.

WATCH OUT FOR THESE "DANGER ZONES" ▼

1. Rush charges – Don't spend one dollar more than you have to on your display or display-related shipping costs. I can't emphasize this enough: begin early so you can choose low-cost shipping methods and avoid production-related rush charges.

Step 9 continued

2. Trade show graphics – The most important element of a display is your graphics, so spend the time to get all the details just right. We see clients spending thousands extra because they waited until the last minute. Don't throw your money away!!!
3. Show-related services – You know the exhibitor's handbook that you get when you sign up for the show? Well, check it out ahead of time! Most shows offer discounts when you order show services (such as booth cleaning) by a certain date. Your show manual will have deadlines listed; don't miss out on these savings.
4. Shipping arrangements – Note: This is related to getting your display and everything else you need to the site of your show, NOT getting your display shipped to you!

Take the time to make the best shipping arrangements. Most shows allow you to ship to the show via two methods: direct-to-show or advance warehouse. Avoid shipping direct-to-show whenever you can. The direct-to-show window is usually only a day or two, which leaves no margin for error. If you plan ahead, you can ship to the advance warehouse well before your show and rest easy, knowing that everything you need will be in your booth space when you arrive. And another thing: try to make all your show shipments at one time. Most shows charge a minimum material handling fee every time you ship something to the warehouse or show site. Multiple shipments of small packages are a great way to rack up hefty handling charges.

Remember "Murphy's Law"...

When it comes to trade shows: anything that can go wrong probably will, so don't assume anything. Follow up on all your details, and always be ready with Plan B.

Step 10

MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS.

Discover your "let's do this again" and "never, EVER do that again" plans.

Great job! You've executed all the steps of our plan for trade show success! The only thing left to do is to track your progress. When you track your results and compare them with your goals, you can determine the return on your investment. You can also figure out what works and what doesn't so you can continually tweak your marketing efforts.

If you consistently measure your success, your trade show efforts will continually evolve and improve over time.



We've helped thousands achieve their desired trade show outcomes, and we're ready to help you, too. We offer the best-selling exhibit designs and accessories at great prices. You'll find the scope of our selection is unmatched by anyone in the industry. Let our customer service team at 800.207.0311 turn your next event into an extraordinary one.