

Before the Event

Planning

Objectives

Set yourself measurable objectives. Begin by thinking about the audiences that will be at the show. Which customers will be your primary concern? You might like to divide your stand to cater for different types of customer.

Remember that many existing customers may be coming along as well as potential ones. Your objectives should be specific, measurable, accurate, realistic and time constrained.

An existing customer objective might be to meet with your top ten clients, two per day, to build your existing business relationship.

A potential customer objective might be to secure 20 contracts with new customers two months after the show.

Your stand

Write a brief for your stand which clearly states your overall objectives, indicate your brand identity, any values you may hold as an organisation and your unique selling points over your competition.

Who will you need?

Ensure your company is represented well at the event. You will need executive managers to meet decision makers as well as technical staff to handle specific questions.

Think about who will be coming and what questions they may have, then organise your staff accordingly.

Having the right staff available is a key factor, so get the exhibition into their diaries as soon as you can.

Let your staff know why they are there

Ensure you make your staff aware of the objectives and the way the stand will be worked. They will need to know the key targets and the main messages you want to convey. Make sure they are aware that they will be the public face of your company and therefore must be cautious to portray the right image.

Create an overall project plan

Plan your activities in detail well in advance, draw up a schedule. Remember to include pre-show activity and actions to be carried out after the event.

Promotion

Letting your customers know you will be there is a vital element to your success and is often overlooked. Examine all your communications with potential and existing clients. There may be more opportunities than you think to alert people to the fact you will have a stand at the event. Perhaps you could even include 'See us at stand xx at xx event' as a sign off on all your emails.

Use your digital channels. Social media can be especially effective. Set up an event on Facebook or Linked In and invite your network. Then use Twitter and YouTube to relay and record your activity at the event.

Target mailings are also advisable. Mail your own database (depending on your objectives) and look into any other lists that may be available from the organiser of your exhibition.

Briefing the organiser of the event is something not everyone thinks of. Make them aware of your products and services, your objectives, what will be happening on your stand and your key messages.

Give them copies of your brochures, newsletters, or any press releases you may have. Organisers often display and use your literature, press releases and show activity to promote their event – think of them as a partner.

You might like to generate your own advertising or PR around the event. You could create a section on your website for visitors to book appointments to see you or you could invite them by email to the launch of a new product at your stand.

There are also many sponsorship opportunities open to you at an event. You could for instance sponsor a particular feature area at the event.

Check to see if there are any seminars that you could contribute to.

During the event

People

Brief your staff each day, ensure they are reminded of the overall goals, key messages and their individual roles. Remind them to turn off their mobiles and not to eat on the stand. Use open questions when speaking to potential clients.

Make sure everyone on the stand has a lead-tracking form of some description for recording important information about potential and existing clients. Capturing the highlights of conversations can be quite difficult, encourage all those manning the stand to spend a couple of minutes ensuring all the relevant information is captured and that it makes sense.

It is also very important that you classify the leads you gain from the exhibition in terms of the potential of making a sale. This way it is quite clear which clients are a priority when you set about following them up.

Keep asking yourself, "Are we meeting our objectives?" throughout the show. For example your sales staff may be spending too much time entertaining existing clients when the main objective may be to attract an ambitious number of new leads. Think through how the stand is going to work in terms of your team. You might like to adopt a filter system to ensure your key sales people are dealing with the red-hot leads.

During the show there are a few opportunities for you to build on your existing promotion. The key journalists will be at the event so it is a good idea to visit the press office or any stands they have to tell them what you're doing on your stand and as a company. Ensure you are in conversation with the show organiser, do they know your plans? Have they included your literature in the show press office?

After the event

The first step is to follow your leads immediately. Be careful to read through them paying particular attention to any special note like; "This customer is very busy at the moment, contact in a month's time". Being the first to follow up is not always a good thing.

Remember that tracking your leads does not stop when you've collated all the lead forms after the show. Leads may take several months to convert so ensure you are tracking their progress at regular intervals after the event and capturing information throughout the process.

Assess how successful the event was. What worked well? What areas could have been better and how? What have you learnt? What would you change next time round? Get all this information down while it's fresh in your mind – it is easily forgotten once you're back in the office.

Analyse the results in light of your objectives – was the event a success? Cost/benefit analysis will also give you further insight.

There are many promotional opportunities available to you after the show itself. For instance you could buy a mailing list of all show attendees from the show organiser, take out any leads you have secured, and send them all a letter highlighting your key messages and apologising for missing them at the show.

If you have any success stories from the show share them with the show organiser – this could lead to more coverage in show reviews.

If you did manage to speak to any journalists at the event, a follow up call could prove worthwhile.

Stands for the next event will typically come on a first-come first-served basis. If, after your initial evaluation, you are confident that exhibiting at next year's show is a good idea, visit the show sales office without delay. You may well be able to secure a superior position to the one that you have currently.

The Potted Guide to Exhibiting

Covering the basics at every stage: This is a tasty one-pager which wraps up key activity throughout the entire exhibiting cycle

