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Bringing Your Message to the Trade Show Floor and Maximizing Your Results

*By Michael McMahon
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For those in the hospitality industry, participation in trade shows is a key component of marketing efforts – but when attempting to influence attendees who “live and breathe” the industry it’s imperative to strike a balance between delivering your message and providing a unique experience for your audience.

A presence in the exhibit environment is critical within the hospitality trades since most prospects are often experts in the area of customer relations. You may have an exceptional new service or product that could improve attendees’ business, but more important than promoting that fresh line is paying attention to prospects’ core values in service. It comes down to a simple case of knowing your audience and preparing a clear plan for achieving a memorable exchange – and then going the distance with your message, from initial exhibit planning right on through to the behavior of staff on the trade show floor.



Communication is key

Maximizing your effort on the trade show floor ultimately involves many factors...but starts with a detailed plan that addresses what you want to accomplish. Designing a trade show exhibit that garners desired results requires planning, strategy, measurement of success and input by all participants. In the absence of clearly established evaluation standards, an excellent design can result in poor performance.

A consistent attitude when exchanging information with prospects and/or clients at a trade show is vital. Hospitality is a profession that embraces both short and long term strategies; as such successful companies develop tools to create and adjust to customer expectations in both “real time” and the long haul. The environment created and the message delivered on the show floor must be consistent with your corporate behavior. Inarguably, every customer – no matter what industry – has expectations, but when the industry itself defines the customer experience, companies selling into this market must take careful notice.

If your offering to the hospitality segment is one of several vertical markets, it may be difficult to communicate to discriminating customers precisely what makes your product or solution unique. Price is certainly a factor, but service and support typically take the lead. Testimonials and anecdotal client experiences can carry great weight when discussing business on the show floor.

New trends vs. “old school”

Technology has created new territory for exhibitors. Many companies have invested in content to communicate their offering; as such utilizing IPAD technology and large LCD monitors can have significant impact on an exhibit’s quality and “wow” factor.

Other exhibit trends exist that seem to push “experience” or “education” over more traditional product line selling. But it’s important to recognize that lifestyle marketing is at the center of most successful exhibits, within the hospitality industry and across-the-board. The corporate consumer has a long list of people to please within his/her organization, from the CFO right on down the line; therefore it’s the exhibit solution in entirety that makes for the greatest level of

success, not just the “flash” that technology can bring to an exhibit.

The exhibit provider partnership

Creating a strong partnership with your exhibit provider is where exhibit triumph begins, therefore it’s essential to find an exhibit partner not only loyal to your vision, but who provides a level of service and attention that best matches the way you like to work.

Recognize that your exhibit partnership will only be as successful as the quality of your relationship; as such you should work with a “like minded” company to ensure the effort required to follow your vision is in line with their approach to client service.

In terms of buying or renting exhibit property, that decision is unique to each company or organization. Typically, if the number of shows attended is limited, a custom turnkey rental solution should work well. Conversely, if you exhibit several times a year, a commitment to a custom property that addresses efficiencies in shipping, maintenance and modularity could be the best bet. Careful planning for a program life – whether it’s a few months or a few years – can result in dividends in budget efficiency, attendee experience and in delivering your message.

Make the most of the trade show experience

Beyond the exhibit, it’s wise to develop a relationship with the show organizer and evaluate all opportunities they provide to enhance your presence at the show, such as: new product showcase; sponsorship opportunities; speaking engagements at conference programs; press room activities.

The importance of post show communications cannot be overstated; anything worth doing is worth talking about. Inform your network about the success of the event and follow up with partners and prospects met at the show. And always solicit feedback and record that information for future trade show efforts.

Clear and honest communication of objectives, making best use of available resources and maintaining a strong partnership with your exhibit provider will lead to best results on the show floor.

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