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Selling at Trade Shows¹

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Trade shows and related events are important methods of promoting and marketing products and a company should seriously consider exhibiting its products at trade shows or related events that focus on their industry. Trade shows attract buyers from a variety of businesses and are one method of reaching a large number your product's "retail target market" in one venue. Some benefits of participating in trade shows are to:

- write orders
- generate excitement around a new product
- generate leads

Important trade show statistics²

- According to the Center for Exhibit Industry Research, nearly all attendees (90%) plan to make a purchase within the next 12 months.
- In addition to the percentage of prospective customers, the vast majority of attendees (80%) are decision makers or have some influence on the business they represent.
- In addition to being prospective customers, 30% of trade show attendees have a definite interest in your product or service.
- Over 75% of trade show attendees are looking for new suppliers and buy 1 or more products.
- One-quarter (26%) of trade show attendees purchase products at exhibitions.

¹Adapted from the American Express Small Business Services Small Business Exchange's "How to Sell at Trade Shows." (<http://www6.americanexpress.com/smallbusiness>)

²CIER's "The Power of Exhibitions: Maximize the Role of Exhibitions in Your Marketing Mix," 1997.



Effectively selling at trade shows

The following six items may help you to more effectively utilize your trade show presence to sell products:

1. Avoid soft sells
2. Be engaging and qualify prospects quickly
3. Be professional and attentive
4. Ask lots of questions
5. Developing a prospect lead cards and mailing lists

- 1. Avoiding soft sales** - A trade show may have hundreds or even thousands of exhibitors. Attendees come to trade shows to find new and unique products for their businesses. The attendees want to visit and explore as many vendors as possible. Given the sheer number of exhibitors, trade show attendees tend to have very short attention spans. You need to engage visitors as quickly as possible and inform them about your company's products and services. In the interest of time and the number of competing exhibitors, it is recommended that every visitor be engaged with one minute of their entering your display area or more than likely they are going to leave and visit another display area.
- 2. Be engaging and qualify prospects quickly** - Visitors to your display area need to be engaged immediately. When a visitor enters your display area, engage them with a direct question. You want to focus the visitor's attention on your products and services and avoid making small talk. For example, ask them what they would like to know about your product or service. By engaging the prospective customer, you are able to quickly evaluate who they are (buyer, supplier, competitor, location, etc.) and whether the visitor is a serious prospect. This will enable you to prioritize between visitors and will allow you to avoid spending valuable time with visitors who are not likely to buy your product. You can assess the potential of a visitor by reading their name tag, requesting a business card or asking key questions.
- 3. Be professional and attentive** - The manner in which you conduct yourself in your display area sends signals to visitors. You want to maintain a high degree of professionalism and show a high level of interest in potential visitors. Try to keep the area clean and uncluttered and avoid sitting down, eating, and drinking in the display area. Do not socialize in your display area. The trade show venue should be taken seriously and socializing with colleagues while visitors are in your display area conveys the message that you are uninterested in them. Visitors may perceive these activities as sloppy and unprofessional and avoid your booth. Again, the thing to remember is that you do not want to do anything that may repel a visitor. By maintaining professional mannerisms and image you are less likely to and negatively impact potential customers.
- 4. Ask lots of questions** - Engage a prospect by asking open-ended questions -- ones that require more than a yes/no answer. This will help you to evaluate their level of interest in your product and help you to determine their needs. Focus your responses on how your product or service can meet these needs. "Be sure to observe the 80/20 rule -- listen 80% of the time and talk 20% of the time." Try to avoid preparing a sales pitch as it may sound canned where as you want your sales pitch to sound tailored to the individual prospect.

- 5. Developing prospect lead cards and mailing lists** - Collecting visitor information is very important. As you talk with visitors and collect business cards and other business material develop a list. You should develop a file on each visitor, this can be as simple as recording pertinent information on a card. By collecting this important information you are generating lead cards for each visitor. This information can be used to follow-up with prospective customers following the trade show as well as in generating a mailing list for future promotions. You should collect as much and as detailed information as possible. For example, you should record: the person's name, title, business name, business address, business phone/fax number, business e-mail address, business needs/interests, budget and timing. Try and obtain a visitors business card as it contains the majority of the information you need to develop a lead card and a mailing list.

Attending trade shows can be costly and time consuming and a company should carefully choose the shows it plans to attend. In choosing a trade show, the “attendee profile” is as important as the actual number of attendees. It will be fruitless to attend a large trade show if the attendee population is not consistent with your prospective customer profile.

A company’s display or exhibit needs to project the company’s brand image. It is very important to have an attractive and “catchy” exhibit to attract the attention of potential customers. These events will have a large number of competing businesses and your company’s needs to differentiate themselves from the crowd while, projecting the company’s image.

The following is a list of trade shows and related events:

American Wholesale Marketers Association Convention

1128 16th Street NW 202-463-2124
Washington, DC 2003 Fax 202-463-6312

A trade show with exhibits on candy, chewing gum, snack foods and related items.
SemiAnnual

Association for Dressing and Sauces Annual Meeting

5775 Peachtree-Dunwoody Rd. 404-252-3663
Atlanta, GA 30342
Septembers

Atlanta Gourmet Show

AMC Trade Shows
240 Peachtree Street NW, #2200 404-220-2201
Atlanta, GA 30303 Fax 404-220-2442
Sarah Adamson, Show Manger

A trade show offering retailors over 250 exhibits of specialty food and related items, confections, beverages and snacks.
10M Attendees September

Atlanta International Wine Festival

600 W. Peachtree Street, #1500 404-873-4482
Atlanta, GA 30308 Fax 404-874-5742
Jamie Van Zandt, Show Manager

A trade show featuring wine and wine related products for restaurants and the public.
Annual

Food Dealers Association North Carolina Convention/Trade Show

P.O. Box 6066 704-334-3935
Charlotte City, NC 28204 Fax 704-334-9126
G. Everett Suddreth, Executive V.P.
August

**Food Dealers Convention Trade Exchange
Virginia**

517 West Grace Street 804-644-0731
Richmond, VA 23220 Fax 804-644-1423
Nadine Kadlubowski, Show Manager

290 booths including all products of services sold to
retail grocers and convenience stores.
2M Attendees Summer

**Food Marketing Institute Supermarket
Industry Education Exposition**

1750 K Street NW, Ste.700 202-452-8444
Washington, DC 20006
Brian Tully, Show Manger
892 booths of products, services and supplies to the
food-distribution industry.
38M Attendees May

Gourmet Products Show

George Little Management
577 Airport Blvd. 415-344-5171
Burlingame, CA 94010
Susan Corwin, Show Manager
Maria Montalvo, Asst. Show Manager

2,500 booths of cookware, cutlery and gadgets,
tabletops, storage, small electric textiles, personal care,
specialty foods and beverages.
8M Attendees October

Grocers Association Kentucky

1939 Goldsmith Lane, Ste. 134 502-459-7111
Louisville, KY 40218Fax 502-454-3210
Pat Hicks, President

A trade show displaying food products and service. 225
booths.
Annual

Grocers Association Tennessee

1838 Elm Hill Pike, Ste.316 615-889-0136
Nashville, TN 37210
Beverly King, Assistant
300 booths of food products and related equipment and
services.
9M Attendees March

**National American Wholesale Grocers
Association**

201 Park Washington Court 703-532-9400
Falls Church, VA 22046
Paul Schulz, VP Public Relations

425 booths of food products and general merchandise
sold to consumers in supermarkets.

2.7M Attendees March

National Fancy Food Show

National Association of Specialty Food Brokers
1 Central Avenue 914-332-1414
Tarrytown, NY 10591
February/March

Snack Food Association(SNAXOP)

1711 King Street, Ste.1 703-836-4500
Alexandria, VA 22314
Judy Barth, Show Manager

400 booths of exhibits of snack foods and related
products.
2M Attendees February

Wholesale Grocers Association Tennessee

2932 Foster Creighton Drive 615-254-3520
Nashville, Tn 37204
Jessica Johnson, Executive Director
Annual convention of 20 booths.
Annual

World of Food Show

1838 Elm Hill Pke. Ste.136 615-889-0136
Nashville, TN 37210

A large convention offering exhibits of food products,
supplies, equipment and services to the grocery
industry.
Annual

AmericasMart Atlanta Gift Show

Atlanta, Georgia
404-220-3300
July 11-15, 1998

AmericasMart Atlanta Gift Show

Atlanta, Georgia
404-220-3300
September 12-15, 1998

Smoky Mountain Gift Show

Gatlinburg, Tennessee
800-441-7889
November 7-12, 1998

Atlanta Gourmet Show

Atlanta Fall Gift & Accessories Market
Atlanta, Georgia
800-ATL-MART
404-220-2446
September 12-15, 1998
Temporaries: September 12-14, 1998