

Pre-Show Planning Guide

Trade shows are all about promotion. You are strategically planning to present your goods and services to a specially targeted audience, in order to meet clearly defined goals and objectives. To maximize your success, however, it is imperative to make promotional efforts above and beyond merely showing up at the next event. Begin these pre-show efforts six to eight months before your next event.

Here are the seven steps you need to take:

1. Decide on a pre-show promotional strategy.

How are you going to let your target audience know what shows you will be attending and what you will be presenting? Options include:

- Personal Invitations
- Advertising in trade publications and local media
- Direct mail
- Telemarketing
- Public Relations
- Website
- Sponsorship

2. Plan on-site promotional activities.

This will include any efforts you make to promote your presence at or around the show. Options include:

- Airport Advertising
- Billboards
- Hotel TV advertising
- Transit Advertising
- Show Daily Advertising
- Hotel Room Promotions
- Show Directory Advertising
- Sponsorship

3. Reach out to the media.

Editorial coverage is worth its weight in gold. To entice media outlets to cover your company's promotional efforts, you have to provide a newsworthy angle. Give the reporters something to write or talk about. Make this 'hook' the focus of your press kits. Press kits should be mailed before the show, be available at the show, and provided after the show to ensure maximum coverage. Two main ways to reach out to the press are:

- Press Releases
- Press Conferences

Remember to only use press conferences when you have new information to share with your target market. You will make the media very unhappy if you share old stuff.

4. Organize A Visitor Competition.

People are wildly competitive. Throw in a chance to win a prize, and you'll have crowds flocking to your booth. Planning visitor competitions requires some careful planning. Everything that happens at your exhibit must reflect your marketing goals and objectives. Competitions should be consistent with the corporate image you want to portray. For example, a game show style trivia contest may be far more appropriate than a karaoke stage. Prizes should tie in to your products and services in an effort to attract more qualified leads. Items to consider include:

- Type of competition
- Prizes to be offered
- Compliance with local rules and regulations
- Compliance with show regulations
- Staffing for the competition
- Duration of the competition
- Role competition plays in promotional efforts

5. Decide on Giveaway Items

Giveaway items or 'freebies' should be more than a trendy trinket with your corporate logo on it. Ideally, these items are something that enhance your corporate image, will be used regularly by your target audience, and keep your company logo in regular view.

- Giveaway items should reinforce your marketing message
- Make your giveaway business oriented
- Don't be trendy! It is better to be unique and cutting edge.

6. Plan Hospitality.

As more and more companies begin to do business on a global scale, marketing strategies change. Buyers from Europe and Asia expect a certain amount of hospitality at trade shows. In fact, these features are an integral part of the International business scene. Many relationships that begin in 'social' environments flower into profitable business. Consider if any of the following will work for you:

- Hospitality Suite
- Meal Style Events
- Sponsorship

7. Mind the Details.

More often than not, it is the little things that can stymie the most well-intentioned promotional efforts. Attendees will easily get frustrated and walk away if what they perceive as a minor need cannot be met – and they won't be walking away with a good impression. For that reason, make sure the following matters are attended to:

- The booth number must be clearly printed on all promotional material. People cannot visit you if they cannot find you.
- Extra supplies of literature, catalogs, and sales material should be available.
- Clear, concise, and correct information must be listed in the show guide.
- Adequate supplies of visitor tickets, free passes to hospitality suites or events, and similar items should be on hand.