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Blue Papers



Trade Show Know How

To show, or not to show

The words Trade and Show together could strike fear into the heart of even the most experienced marketing professional – the time, energy, effort and expense involved in taking a stand can be a daunting task. Gone are the days when a Trade Show was seen, by some, as a jolly excuse to get out of the office for a few days.

According to a report published in April 2011, recovery is underway for UK trade shows, ahead of consumer events which continued to decline in popularity for another year. The report called *The Facts*, compiled and written by Vivid Interface using information from 650 UK events, shows that UK trade events have almost halted their annual decline, with a decline of just 1.4 per cent in 2010 compared to 8.2 per cent in 2009. Net hall space booked at trade events showed an increase of 7.1 per cent in 2010 and the average number of exhibiting companies at trade shows increased 2 per cent year-on-year¹.

With literally thousands of websites and numerous publications dedicated to exhibiting, knowing where to start can be daunting, the aim of this Blue Paper therefore is to provide a definitive guide to Trade Show Know How.

It's all in the planning!

Before you can even begin to plan your trade show stand you have to decide which one you're going to invest your hard-worked marketing budget in. Do your homework and formulate a strategy.

Like most aspects of business, the more planning you put in at the beginning the greater your chances of a stress free and successful outcome. If you are complete newcomers to exhibiting allow yourselves up to 12 months to fully prepare.

1. Have a clear strategy

As part of your overall marketing plan you should be able to clearly identify what you want a stand at a trade show to achieve for you in terms of the audience it puts you in front of and reasons for expanding your presence beyond merely attending as a delegate.

These three questions might help you to think about the reason you're



¹ <http://www.exhibitionnews.co.uk/newsdetails/1240/uk-performance-survey-shows-trade-show-recovery-ahead-of-consumer-even>

considering taking a stand in the first place:

- Is this a general brand awareness raising exercise?
- Are you launching a new division, product or service line?
- Are you trying to develop into a different sector of the market or even a whole new industry and want to connect with a new audience?

2. Identify the right show for you

Once you have established your aims it will be easier to find the right trade show and start to get together a budget for attendance.

A great place to start is the ExpoPromoter site which combines 82,364 events from more than 8,500 event organisers. You can search by keyword, industry type, country or date with direct links to the show site, hotels and travel details where appropriate as well as a handy 'people who viewed this event, also viewed these' link².

Home or Away? If you sell overseas you may also choose to consider a show further afield, and if you do so there's plenty of help available.

For a complete beginner to the Trade Show circuit, the prospect of exhibiting at a show overseas may seem really daunting. It's worth taking a look at the advice and information on offer from UK Trade & Industry (UKTI)³ who have a wealth of information on their website as well as a team of trade advisors on hand to discuss every aspect of doing business overseas.

As the UKTI say on their Tradeshow Access Programme page: "Taking part in overseas exhibitions is an effective way for you to test markets, attract customers, appoint agents or distributors and make sales. Our Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) provides grant support for eligible SME firms to attend trade shows overseas."

"Participation is usually as part of a group, a great advantage for inexperienced businesses, and is usually led by one of our Accredited Trade Associations (ATOs). ATOs work with UKTI to raise the profile of UK groups and sectors at key exhibitions."

As with most things in life, don't choose a show based on price alone! You need to read the exhibitor pack very carefully and make sure you understand exactly what is included, what you have to provide and any rules and regulations about what you can and can't do with the space you purchase. Just because an item isn't included in the stand package doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be able to source and supply it yourself. The trade show organisers may have a deal with the venue that all stand



² <http://expopromoter.com/events/>

³ <http://www.ukti.gov.uk/export/howwehelp/tradefairsexhibitions.html>

holders hire/buy from an agreed supplier.

Consult the Exhibitor Pack to ascertain footfall and attendee demographics from previous years as well as past exhibitors. Make sure you know how the trade show is being promoted by the organisers and what marketing support they offer to stand holders pre, during and post-show. Take full advantage of their advertising, public relations and branding opportunities as they're all factored into the price you're being charged for your stand.

3. Which Stand?

Having identified the trade show, you now need to select a stand location that best suits you and your budget. Study the floor plans, traffic patterns, access to services, proximity to break out or workshop areas and any other factors that might help or hinder people from finding you.

Exhibition space is generally sold as a shell scheme (where exhibitors simply turn up, to a ready walled and carpeted space; graphics can be added to the wall panels, pop-up banners used and equipment displayed) or if the budget (and timing) allows you can rent literally just a space and contract a company to build you a fully customised stand.



Depending on what is included in the price of your space you will need to consider and cost the following:

- Stand furniture such as seating, display cabinets or literature stands
- Graphics and stand colour scheme
- Remember drapes and skirting for your stand and, if carpeting is included check the colour to make sure it doesn't clash with your corporate colours
- Installation and dismantling costs – and times when these can/must be carried out to ensure you have staff on hand if needed
- Consider flamboyant decor to stand out from the competition such as inflatables, branded flags, create high visual impact with a theme if appropriate
- Accommodation and meals
- Transportation and logistics

4. Staffing and resources

Right from the start include all the departments that will be involved – from those manning the stand itself (and remember to allow time for breaks, checking in with the office, replying to emails and walking the show), to back office support staff.

If your team includes some veteran trade show staff ask them to help train and mentor less

experienced team members. Also ensure they are able to advise and add input into the additional resources you might need on-stand to help them work efficiently.

Manning the Stand⁴ is a course designed specifically to help staff get the most out of your trade show stand and is run by The Wigwam Company who specialise in high quality, practical, fun training. Their MD, experienced sales and marketing professional Jon Howarth has spent many years organising exhibitions both in the UK and overseas. The course covers everything from understanding company objectives, dealing with visitors, how to connect in 90 seconds or less, visitor types, handing over to other staff and the follow up. As Jon Howarth says in his regular blog: "Being pounced upon or ignored are the top two pet hates of exhibition visitors, so it's ironic that these are the two extremes of stand staff behaviour that visitors often encounter".

Consider how the stand will look to visitors and make sure it is inviting as well as being a comfortable place for staff to work – most shows run for long hours and it is tiring being 'on show' for 8-10 hours in a day.

If you are a small business and perhaps do not have staff available to work on the stand for a few days, you may want to consider hiring temporary event or sales staff for a couple of days.

5. Marketing and support material

Review your existing marketing material and check that it is fit for purpose at the show. If so, do you have enough supplies or do you need to order more? If new material is needed make sure you order enough to cover the duration of the show and send out or use post-event if required.

Promotional giveaways can drive traffic to your stand and double up as a take away reminder of your presence at the show. Consider whether you need graded giveaways such as sweets, pens or other lower value items that can be given to passersby as well as higher value items such as printed USBs for existing customers or more serious prospects.

On-stand competitions can be a great attraction and, when combined with pre-show publicity create a buzz before the show even opens.

6. Publicity

Take advantage of all pre and post show publicity offered by the organisers and ensure that your entry into the Trade Show Guide focuses on the benefits to the customer of your product or services, not the features. Remember – a potential customer reading



⁴ <http://www.manningthestand.co.uk/index.html>

your material is thinking: what's in this for me?

Several months before the show begins start to include information about your attendance in your own marketing material and feature it on your website and make sure your sales team are inviting people to come along. Consider a 'show' related offer or promotional price for new business but be careful you don't give existing customers a reason to delay placing an order they'd already planned!

Make sure all customers, contacts and prospects are invited to your stand – tell them the show dates, venue, times and your stand number, including a plan if necessary to make sure they find you. Often the organisers provide postcards or flyers for exhibitors to mail out to their databases. Remember to give them a reason to come to the show and visit you – what's in it for them? According to research conducted by the Centre for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), 76% of those visiting a B2B trade show have already decided on the stands they're going to visit before they arrive at the event.

The implication for exhibitors is twofold. First of all it makes sense to invest in some pre-exhibition marketing to ensure your company is on the list of stands to be visited. Second, if you're not on that list the chances of those visitors drifting over to your stand is limited if you don't have something that grabs their attention⁵.

If the Trade Show runs a 'Best Stand Award' make sure you enter as the publicity created by taking part (and maybe winning!) can generate some great post-show marketing opportunities.

Decision made! Stand booked!

So, you've made the decision to go ahead and exhibit – here are some additional pointers to help you with the countdown to the event -

With two months to go:⁶

- Ensure all is going to plan if you are using an external company to build your stand or check your own kit and make modifications if necessary
- Ensure orders are placed for electricity points, lighting and internet connections
- Start preparing exhibition packs, review all literature and check stock levels
- Order staff badges, uniforms and promotional items if required
- Ensure everyone has enough business cards with up to date contact details
- Liaise with all departments involved to make sure all necessary staff are

⁵ <http://www.ifitsworthdoing.co.uk/2010/10/76-of-exhibition-visitors-have-an-agenda.html>

⁶ http://kdl.to/guides/exhibition_guide.htm



booked to be present when required (and arrange office cover for them if required)

- Make sure all travel arrangements are made and hotel rooms booked where necessary
- Schedule training for staff attending the show and back office teams
- Ensure all the necessary forms are available to handle on-stand enquiries and orders (or that the necessary technology is available and working)
- Submit all pre-show publicity to the organisers on time, including press releases and brochure copy

Prior to departure:

Make sure that you've got the following items before leaving for the show:

- Copies of all orders and proof of payment for services paid in advance and phone numbers for all suppliers
- Mobile phone/laptop chargers, camera with batteries and memory sticks
- A box of basics such as a stapler, double sided sticky tape, pens/markers, post-it notes
- Insurance and fire certificates if needed
- Address of hotel and copies of hotel reservations
- Petty cash and credit cards

Build day:

- Confirm your kit (or team to install your custom stand) has arrived
- Meet the exhibition organisers and familiarise yourself with the venue
- Confirm timings for electrical and telecoms installations
- Supervise stand set-up and display your products / literature
- Hold pre-show briefing for your staff

It's show time:

- Hold quick daily meetings with staff before and after the show
- Observe competitors, see what they're offering!
- Take photos to use on your website etc in future
- Ensure leads are sent back to the office at the end of each day

It's all over:

- Supervise break-down of stand
- Hold a final de-brief meeting and thank staff for efforts
- Attend after-show party!

Back at the office

Work with your show staff and office based team to devise an easy to manage system for following up every visit appropriately. At the very least you need to send them a



thank you note and literature or other material even if they took it away with them, they will have picked up hundreds of pieces of marketing material and yours might well have got left behind in a hotel room or on a train. Sending it afresh reminds them of your offering and adding them to your database will keep them up to date with your news in the future.

Keep your promises. If a team member has promised to follow up or take action for a stand visitor then they absolutely must follow through. It's easy to make rash promises to call or visit whilst on the stand and then forget when the show is over.

Evaluation

It is only once all the follow up work has been completed that a full evaluation of the show can be carried out. Go back to your original objectives and reflect on whether you feel that they've been met before you decide whether to re-book for the following year.



Final Thought

A successful show is dependent on many things; however a clear objective of what you want to achieve and ability to get yourself in front of your target audience are the most important.

Additionally a captivating stand and enthused staff will go a long way in getting leads to be followed up via a robust post-show communications plan.

Like most things in life, we get better at them with practice so, having taken all this advice into account, the best thing to do is to get out there and make an exhibition of yourself! In the nicest possible way of course. Professionalism and enthusiasm are infectious so make sure you've done everything you can on the former and everyone on the stand displays the latter and you are almost guaranteed success.

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