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How to Use Exhibitions Successfully

Trade exhibitions and events attract trade professionals relating to everything from art and antiques to household products and sports and leisure goods. If you're planning to exhibit at one, what is the best way to ensure a super successful exhibition for your own business?

As every Boy Scout will tell you, be prepared! Top exhibition business managers will tell you that the most common reason why events go wrong tends to be that not enough time is devoted to adequate planning and preparation. And many of those exhibitions that are believed to have been successful are often likely to be the result of chance rather than actual organisation.

As with all other forms of marketing, it is important to plan your exhibition properly and in good time - often as soon as the previous year's annual show has finished. Proper planning will result in a good show that will give good results.

Successful exhibition managers have a strategic marketing and tactical plan of action. They like to adopt five basic questions as their foundation before making any arrangements - where does this show fit into our corporate marketing strategy, why are we exhibiting, what are we exhibiting, who is our target audience, and what is our budget?

Taking care of detail is key to putting a tradeshow together. Creating checklists is one of the best methods of achieving this as there are hundreds of things to take into account.

Budget will play a major role in deciding what and how much promotional activity is possible. In fact, appointing an exhibition contractor is likely to be the most economical solution, especially for those on a limited budget. On the issue of cost, exhibiting start-up kits can be bought which are easily erected and dismantled, so reducing on-site costs. And as modular systems are reusable, they can be used in differing forms at different events.

Developing a meaningful theme that ties into a strategic marketing plan is extremely important. This involves knowing and understanding target audiences and planning different promotional programmes aimed at the different groups the exhibition is looking to attract. There are many different reasons to be in a trade show exhibit, such as selling more products, branding your company, or unveiling a new range. If good planning is the first step, then pre-publicity is a fundamental part of this. Send out invitations to potential customers with free

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entry tickets; post an advert on your website. Also prepare press releases and catalogue entries and place an advert in the relevant trade press.

It is also essential to have a high quality display, as there is no point in wasting resources with a stand that is not designed to sell. There are many displays that will be perfect for any trade show, and the best place to begin your search is online with plenty of helpful tips and tricks to help achieve an attractive and successful display. Moving exhibits or displays attract attention.

If you have a static display create movement with the use of light and audio visual effects. Be careful not to make it too cluttered with information as it needs to be clear and precise.

If you have had to reduce the amount of space you usually take up at exhibitions, there are still ways of achieving the same big impact. These include going tall to give the feeling that your stand is larger than it is, incorporating mirrors to create the illusion of space, adopting lighter colours to create a brighter impression, and, where possible, add hanging graphics from the ceiling above.

Appoint someone to take overall charge of your exhibition stand who should be effective efficient, diplomatic and flexible. Also, ensure that exhibition staff are fully trained and briefed. Make sure that each member of staff understands his or her role on the stand.

Create the correct balance between sales and technical staff as buyers attend exhibitions with specific questions about products performance, price and delivery. It is important to remember that you only have once chance to impress potential new customers. Keep a log of visitors to the exhibition stand and create a clear and precise enquiry form. A successful trade show will help a company to build its business and generate a good amount of sales. So, to help achieve this be sure to include giveaways, and always include your business card with every sale. This is going to help keep your company fresh in their minds.

Brochures are expensive to produce, so it is not a good idea to leave them on the stand for anyone to pick up. Produce a concise sales leaflet or postcard and keep the glossies back for those with genuine interest to support your goals. And when the event is over, waste no time in following up leads immediately after the show, as well as finding out how the exhibition could have been even more successful. Create a system to evaluate results, such as asking exhibition stand visitors and staff for their feedback. Find out what they liked about the display stands and general show participation, and what would they like to see improved.