

Denver Business Journal - December 12, 2005

<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2005/12/12/smallb4.html>

# DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, December 9, 2005

## How to maximize your returns from trade shows

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Companies participate in trade shows every year to market their products and services, and to reach hard-to-see decision-makers.

Trade shows can be expensive when considering all the costs for booth fees, travel, entertainment, lost productivity and promotional materials, so return on investment is important. You can generate greater returns from trade show participation if you follow these simple guidelines:

- Outline specific objectives and goals for the show.
- Pre-planning prevents post-show doubts and misgivings.
- Sharpen your booth etiquette.
- Prioritize and qualify visitors.
- Use literature wisely.
- Stop talking and listen more closely.
- Follow up.

One of the most common trade show mistakes is to spend too much time and effort on the display and booth materials instead of defining and committing to specific objectives and goals.

Is your trade show objective to sell, gather leads, introduce a new product or service, or show support to a particular group?

Prioritizing your objectives will help you clarify your plans and next steps. Some exhibitors' primary goal is to generate leads, and others focus on writing orders. Each requires different strategies.

Pre-show planning ensures a good return on the company's investment. Before the show, invite hard-to-see decision-makers to visit your booth, or invite them to a private lunch, dinner or even a short meeting.

Make sure you have all your meal or room reservations in place well before the show. Trying to

book a popular restaurant during the show can be downright frustrating, if not impossible.

If part of your plan is to send a gift or enticement to visit your booth, make sure it's in the decision-makers' hands well before the event. At large shows, let attendees know where they can find your booth via a note, voice message or bellman-delivered map.

Make sure your booth staff is skilled in trade show etiquette. While exhibitors rely upon eye-catching displays, drawings, contests and demonstrations to get people to stop, remember: People do business with people. Staff must communicate effectively and quickly, and avoid discouraging visitors by looking like vultures awaiting prey.

As a booth staffer, don't use cell phones or PDAs, and don't sit behind your booth. Be conscious of first impressions, body language and personal space. Smile and make eye contact. Use a comfortable greeting and avoid the retail conversation stopper, "Can I help you?"

Prepare three to six engaging questions before the show to use as a conversation starter. It might be as simple as asking, "Why are you attending this show?" or "What has been most useful to you so far at this show?" Start with general situation questions and follow with specific problem questions.

By far, the greatest mistake at trade shows is not qualifying booth visitors.

Far too many exhibitors believe they have to tell everybody their entire story. Not every person has an interest in your product or service, nor does everyone qualify or even deserve to hear your pitch.

Worse, spending too much time with one visitor means dozens or even hundreds of other potential leads are lost as they pass by.

Bring literature for display and distribute it only to a small percentage of your booth attendees. Mail the rest out to interested prospects after the show.

This is more effective because 60 percent to 85 percent of the literature collected at a trade show never leaves with the recipient.

Convey the value of literature and giveaways by keeping only a few visible and personally handing them out to those who are qualified.

The perceived value increases if it appears there's a limited supply versus dozens for the taking. Print the convention logo on your promotional pieces so that recipients quickly identify the piece as show-related.

Use the 80/20 Rule -- 80 percent listening, 20 percent talking -- and never talk more than one to two minutes consecutively. Remember, qualifying leads at trade shows is about getting information, not giving it.

When the trade show ends, the real work begins to get a return on the investment.

Some representatives who send thank-you letters, literature, gifts or other items often fail to

make that person-to-person contact after the show.

Make it easier by obtaining the proper information from booth visitors at the show. Ask prospects for contact information, when the best times are to reach them, and how to ensure their assistant will put your call through.

Most importantly, ask them what you will need to say so they will remember you when you do call.

*Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or [garry@leadershipconnections.com](mailto:garry@leadershipconnections.com).*

*All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.*