

Trade Show Tips

From Susan Ward - Your Guide to Small Business: Canada.



Part 1: Before You Attend That Trade Show

Trade shows can be an incredibly effective promotion and sales tool for small businesses. Whether you're a trade show tyro, or an experienced trade show participant, these tips will help you get the best return on investment from any trade show you attend.

1) Set clear goals for your trade show participation.

What do you want to get out of it? Do you expect to sell a particular amount of inventory at the trade show, or expect to become known to a certain number of wholesale suppliers? Are you focusing on promotion or hoping to launch a new product?

You can have more than one goal, of course, but the point is that you need to be clear about what your participation in the trade show is going to achieve.

2) Do your research.

You need to choose the trade shows that will give your business the best ROI in terms of your goals. If your goal is on-site sales, having a booth at that big splashy trade show where your booth is one of a dozen that sell similar products may not be the best choice.

You want to choose a trade show that best targets the audience that you want to reach, and best suits your participation goals. Find out what the particular trade show's objectives are, and investigate and evaluate the show's audience.

3) Once you've chosen a particular trade show to attend, plan your budget and book your space.

Find out everything you can about your space, including where it is on the floor, what kind of other exhibits will be around it, whether it's a high traffic or low traffic area, and the physical conditions of the booth space, such as lighting.

4) Plan your exhibit in terms of your audience.

Who is it that you're targeting with your trade show display? Retail customers? Wholesale buyers? Other businesses in your industry? Different audiences "shop" trade shows differently, and have different needs.

5) Advertise in advance.

Put the word out that you're participating in a particular trade show, by inviting your clients, customers, suppliers, and other contacts to attend the show. (Be sure you give them all the details, such as your booth number.) If you have one, be sure to advertise your coming trade show attendance on your Web site as well.

So now you're ready to attend that trade show - almost. On the next page are tips for putting together a trade show display that will wow your audience and some tips for making sure that your trade show booth is one of the ones that draws a crowd.

Part 2: Trade Show Display Tips

Your trade show display is one of the most important aspects of your trade show presentation. Just being there isn't enough to make attending a trade show worthwhile. You need to have a trade show booth that's going to draw and engage potential customers and contacts and your trade show display will play a big part in determining if your trade show experience is worthwhile.

On the next page are some trade show display tips:

1) Think neatness and visibility when putting your trade show display together.

Use a display board to hang some of your products at customer eye-level to draw them into your display. Make sure your display is organized and tidy; customers will be turned off by messiness or by having to do too much searching to find what they want. Have all your prices clearly marked.

2) Build the impression of demand into your trade show display.

Customers will want your products more if they think they're in high demand. Place a strategic sold sign on one or two items. You might even leave a display spot empty, giving the impression that you've been too busy to restock.

3) Pull a crowd to your trade show booth.

Use an interactive display, such as a quiz or game on a computer, a contest draw, a scheduled demonstration; it doesn't need to be fancy to draw people's interest and get them to cluster around your trade show display rather than the others. At a gardening trade show, I once saw over 50 people crowding around to watch an exhibitor demonstrate how to turn compost!

4) Have a stock of promotion items that you can use as giveaways at your booth.

Small items that people can take away and use (while being reminded about your business) are best. Be sure you place these items in a location where people will have to walk into or through your trade show display to get them.

5) Use a prize draw or contest.

Having some kind of prize draw or contest is a great way to collect contact information from booth visitors. You can give away promotion items to encourage people to participate.

6) Make it easy for booth visitors to get information.

Use signs in your trade show display to give information about prices, minimum orders, shipping costs, or any other basic information they might need to know, to save them the trouble of having to wait to ask when you're busy with another potential customer.

7) Make sure you have plenty of promotional literature on hand.

You'll want to have a good supply of color fliers and brochures as well as order forms, price sheets and business cards that you can hand out to booth visitors so it will be easy for them to find all the information they need about your business later. You should also have a press kit prepared for the trade media.

8) Be ready to do business.

Be sure you have a good supply of order forms, pens, credit card slips, or anything else you need to conduct sales and keep track of people's orders.

9) Have your trade show booth manned at all times.

Someone has to be there to greet browsers, engage them in conversation, and take their questions. If you can't be there every minute the trade show is open, you'll need to have at least one other person help man your booth.

10) Actively engage trade booth visitors.

Give people who approach your trade show display a friendly welcome, and let them welcome their questions. Be sure your body language is friendly; don't stand there with your arms crossed over your chest, for instance. "Chat" with booth visitors, and find out what aspect of your business they're most interested in. Be prepared to offer specific solutions to their questions. The trick is to draw them in without intimidating or overwhelming them.

11) Follow up promptly.

Send out email, regular mail, or make the phone calls to follow up on the contacts and leads you made during the trade show as soon as possible. The faster you send them out, the more your business will stand out from the rest.

Trade shows can be incredible sources of contacts and customers for your business - if you choose your trade show venue carefully and plan in advance to have a successful trade show experience.