

Techniques and Tips for Effective Exhibit Performance Measurement

By Joe Federbush

As the budgetary battle for future marketing dollars intensifies, management requires event marketers to prove ROI and quantify an exhibit program's performance. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to accomplishing this task, there are some proven tips that will help create and execute a measurement plan – on time and within budget. This plan will yield actionable insights and inform a more strategic decision-making process for future events.

As a first step, it is critical to understand the corporate objectives as they relate to live event participation. Is the primary goal to improve brand awareness? Does the exhibitor want to gain competitive insights? Is the company looking to drive net new sales opportunities as a result of exhibiting? Or is the launch of a new product the main focal point? All are valid reasons for participating in trade shows, and it is possible to measure the effectiveness of an exhibit program along each of these parameters.

Typically, event marketing objectives fall into two categories: (1) marketing communications and (2) sales and ROI. Prioritizing these goals will determine the metrics and the methodology. Surveys are versatile tools, and both of these categories can be measured within one survey when done correctly.

In the following chart, the most common sales and marketing objectives are aligned with the most appropriate survey methodologies.

Align Objectives with the Right Survey and Methodology

OBJECTIVES	Analyze Leads	Post-show Survey	In-booth Exit Survey	Sales Conversion Survey
MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS				
Message Conveyance		✓	✓	
Imaging/Branding/Awareness		✓	✓	
New Product Introductions	✓	✓	✓	
SALES & ROI				
Net New Opportunities	✓	✓		✓
Enter New Markets	✓	✓		✓
Likelihood to Purchase		✓	✓	✓
Purchase Amount/timeframe	✓	✓	✓	✓

Whether a company is exhibiting to communicate particular messages, to enhance its brand image, or to introduce a new product, the key to choosing the best survey methodology will often hinge upon budgetary and other resource constraints.

Post-Show Survey

The easiest and most cost-effective way to measure an event program's success is to reach out after the show and conduct a follow-up survey among the leads collected at the exhibit. These surveys gather feedback from visitors after they have consumed the entire event, giving them time to reflect on its business impact and all the learning they acquired at the show.

Post-show surveys provide insights such as:

- A better understanding of net new opportunities;
- If visitors are more likely to purchase products as a result of their visit;
- Which specific types of products they plan to buy;
- Quantity of budget visitors plan to spend.

Conducting a post-show survey requires a survey tool, and there are several online survey tools and third-party market research firms that can help make the process smooth and painless. When planning a survey, event marketers should keep these points in mind:

- Online surveys typically yield a response rate between 8 percent and 15 percent;
- A minimum of 100 responses should be collected to have statistically reliable data and projectable results;
- The email invitation must be direct and include an effective subject line, like "Important Feedback Request from [Company name]."

Onsite Exit Survey

An onsite exit survey can be an alternative to a post-show survey, particularly when the exhibiting company is not focused on lead collection at the event. Exit surveys are essentially personal interviews that allow for a deeper dive into the visitor's journey within an exhibit. The tangible benefit of using this methodology is the real-time feedback that can enable immediate course-corrections if any problems are identified. With the advent of tablets working with survey apps for impactful reporting, this process is now less costly and much simpler to execute than in the past. For effective onsite exit survey results:

- Create a relatively short questionnaire (preferably under 20 questions);
- Offer an incentive if allowed (a \$5 coffee gift card usually works well);
- Use professional staffers to engage participants as they exit the booth for the personal interview.

Exit surveys normally work best for larger exhibits (400 square feet or greater) with a lot of traffic and booth activity. Once again, the goal should be to obtain a minimum of 100 completed surveys, and even more for significantly larger booths.

Sales Conversion Survey

Most companies today import leads into CRM systems like Salesforce.com, Microsoft Dynamics and GoldMine, allowing sales teams to follow up with leads and track pipeline opportunities by each event. These “campaigns” provide some sales reporting that management requires. It proves ROI, and brings more accountability and justification to the event marketing program.

For an exhibitor and its competitors, an alternative methodology for measuring sales resulting from trade shows is called sales conversion research. Sales conversion surveys are typically online surveys conducted several weeks or months after a trade show. (The lag time varies according to product sales cycles.) These surveys measure:

- a) What visitors bought as a result of attending a show?
- b) How much they spent in total?
- c) From which company or companies they made purchases?
- d) What other factors influenced the purchase (sales calls, advertising, social media, existing customer, etc.)?

Key Takeaways

In order to develop an effective exhibit performance measurement program:

1. Include demographic survey questions. These can offer a better understanding of the visitors. Gather information such as job title/professional position, type of industry or medical practice, size of company/practice, years in industry, age and gender.
2. Pose questions in an unbiased way, especially when using rating scales. Rating scales should always have an odd number of choices, which allows for a neutral category, not forcing the respondent to pick a side. Avoid leading questions. Instead of “How enjoyable was your overall visit to the exhibit?” ask “Please rate your overall exhibit experience.” The term “enjoyable” in the question could lead to an emotional response.
3. When planning to conduct measurement across multiple events, consistency is very important. Consistent wording of the questions and answer choices allows for better data comparisons, minimizes rework when analyzing the data, and provides better insights into the success of the event and exhibit in meeting corporate objectives.
4. How will the results be used? There is a big difference between “must-have data” and “nice-to-have-data.” The latter can have a significant impact by lengthening the survey, lowering response rates and increasing the number of survey drop-outs.
5. Respect the respondent’s time. Avoid respondent fatigue by avoiding redundant questions, posing too many rating questions (“Please rate the following 25 categories”), including too many open-ended questions, and asking questions that are difficult to answer.
6. Choosing the right methodology is the key. When asking people for feedback while they are onsite, focus the questions on experiences they may not recall a week or two after the show. Conversely, a post-show survey shouldn’t ask questions around minute details that are too difficult to answer long after the show (“Which specific areas of the exhibit did you visit?” and “How much time did you spend at each area?”).

7. Begin with the end in mind. The survey results should be clear and actionable, and this should guide the development of your questions. Once armed with the survey results, determine what changes can be made to improve performance, and measure again for continuous improvement.

*As [Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Exhibit Surveys, Inc.](#), and with over 20 years in the event marketing industry, **Joe Federbush** has been conducting research studies and measurement success stories for hundreds of exhibitions, event producers, and exhibitors all over world including Beijing, Taipei, Sao Paulo, and Moscow, in addition to North America and Western Europe. Joe brings insights on helping companies go to market and execute more strategically, and deliver greater ROI for the event marketing endeavors. Joe has a Bachelor's of Science, Business degree from Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ.*