

# **Lead Retrieval Systems for Information Gathering at a Show**

**By Barry Siskind**

The real benefit of doing a trade show is not in the compliments you receive for your great looking booth or the good times your staff had while out of town on a company credit card. The real rewards are tied into the information you bring back that will bring ongoing business opportunities.

Information gathering in an environment where there is not much time for more than crowd control is a real challenge. One of the tools available to help exhibitors is a lead retrieval system.

Anyone who has visited a trade show lately has probably seen exhibitors using one of the twelve to fifteen different versions of a lead retrieval system. They might be in the form of a bar code reader, a scanner, or simply a device to swipe a plastic identification card. Whatever the system, the bottom line is that anything that gives an exhibitor the ability to gather quality information quickly is worth looking into.

Lead retrieval systems are arranged for by show management. There is only one system available to rent at each show (although some exhibitors go to the expense of creating something that works specifically for them). The system is tied into the entire registration process. As each delegate registers, the information they record is entered into a data base. The system then gives exhibitors who take part access to some of this information. However, not all systems are created equally. Before you sign up, here are a few questions that need to be clarified.

## **What information does the system provide?**

There are certain basic bits of information beyond a name and address that exhibitors will find helpful. These could include: decision making ability, budget, timing of the purchase, previous experience with the product or your company, obstacles to advancing the conversation to the next step of the sales cycle, and whether there is a need for the product or service. The more information you have the better you will be able to conduct an effective post-show follow.

## **In what form will I receive the information?**

Manual systems where the exhibitor swipes an identification card provide only the information on the card. Additional information is added manually by the exhibitor while qualifying the prospect. With other systems, the information comes in a hard-copy print-out by the system vendor's computer or an electronic file. Knowing the form of the information once again allows you to plan properly.

### **When will I get the information?**

With a card swipe device, you get the information immediately. For other systems, there might be a twenty-four hour turn around. Pay particular attention to how fast you will receive the information collected on the last day.

### **What is the cost?**

Generally, access to the system is not cost prohibitive. Scanners and readers can be rented for a few hundred dollars. But, it's always best to check first.

### **What information does the system not give me?**

In some cases, the system might have a printout that allows you to record additional information. But if there is more that you need, then the solution is to create a manual lead card to use in conjunction with the system. This way you save time in gathering the repetitive information already in the system, and the manual card gives you what is missing. After the show, it is now a simple job to marry these two documents.

### **Is my staff comfortable with the system?**

Often, show management or the system provider will provide special training to help exhibitors develop a comfort level with the system. Find out if this is available and take advantage of the opportunity. If your staff are not comfortable with the technology, this often leads to abuse of the system.

Information gathering is more than coming back from the show with a pile of business cards for follow-up. Lead retrieval systems are there to fill the gap.

Barry Siskind, President and Founder of [ITMC](#), is a trade show consultant, trainer, speaker, and an internationally recognized expert in trade and consumer shows. Each year, he addresses numerous conferences and association meetings around the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, Barry has traveled throughout the world working with thousands of public and private sector clients in virtually all industry groups. He creates, facilitates and delivers a wide range of services to companies involved in exhibit marketing. Barry is also a best-selling author of trade show business books: *The Successful Exhibitor*, *The Power of Exhibit Marketing*, *Making Contact*, *Bumblebees Can't Fly*, *Eagles Must Soar*, and his latest book *Powerful Exhibit Marketing*.