

The Untapped Potential of your Trade Show Network

By Barry Siskind

When it comes to networking opportunities, trade shows provide one of the best venues. Here is the one place where everyone in your industry congregates for a few short days and is focused on one thing – business.

Over the last few years we have seen a significant drop in the number of people who attend shows while the quality of those who do come has risen. This is important news for an exhibitor or a visitor who wants to meet and greet those often inaccessible industry people.

These are the same people you have left countless unanswered telephone, e-mail and text messages for. These may be the same people who will ultimately decide on the purchase of your product or service. They will be the movers and shakers - people who have their finger on the pulse of your industry. All you need to do is be prepared.

Here are a few tips on preparing your networking activities for your next trade show.

1. Define your objective. Be really clear about what you want to accomplish whether it's meeting decision makers, product experts, industry guru's, forecasters or people who work for your competitors. Ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish with these people?" If you want to learn more about your industry for example, take this statement a step further and ask, "What specifically?"
2. Make a list of the people you want to meet and the most likely place to meet them. This will include such places as receptions, on the show floor, at participating hotels, during industry events such as meetings, banquets and sporting events or at a lecture.
3. Attempt to reach these people ahead of time to set up a pre-arranged meeting. This is a great idea because the people that you want to meet, just like you, are busy and have full schedules.

4. Get involved in the social network. Start your own Facebook or twitter page and actively follow others. Commenting on blogs is a good way to begin to build your credibility.
5. Develop a list of questions. Rather than leaving the meeting to chance it's always better to spend a bit of time preparing the questions ahead of time.
6. Recording information. Whether you record information electronically or manually, make sure you note down the information you are gathering and the promises you have made.
7. Bring your business cards. Its simply good business etiquette to exchange business cards during a business meeting. Having this contact's card also gives you their vital statistics so you can get in touch with them after the show in case you have additional questions or need some clarification on the information they gave you.
8. Thank them. Not only after the meeting is over but immediately after the show. It's good business practice to send an e-mail or letter thanking them for the time they spent with you and the value their information had.
9. Look for opportunities to add information of your own. During your face to face meetings you may stumble across bits of information the person you are meeting with may be looking for. Here is a great chance to give something back to the conversation. But, be careful and avoid gossip. Keep the information you are sharing factual and positive.

Sometimes we get so focused on setting up an exhibit or planning a trip we neglect the power we can cultivate with a strong network. Put these eight simple steps to work at your next show and reap the rewards that come from adding networking to your show schedule.

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