

How Audits Can Help You Select the Best Trade Shows

By Marilyn Kroner

Determining Return On Investment (ROI) and Return on Objectives (ROO) has become a way of life in the world of trade show and event marketing. Executive management has demanded better measurement of marketing initiatives and expects definitive results on specific objectives. This can be a conundrum for trade show and event marketers, especially when trying to determine whether or not to commit to a trade show where they have never exhibited or at shows where they previously exhibited, seeking to maximize investment through improved performance. Exhibit managers must rely on solid data when selecting the best trade shows for their companies.

Determining the right shows for your program begins with a thorough understanding of your company's target audience, or audiences. It's also important to understand your company's positioning and messaging within those audiences. Once that work is done, your job is to find the shows that you are confident will provide that target audience.

Gathering Information

Compile as much data as possible about the shows under consideration.

- If you've exhibited at a show before, you can simply review the data that you compiled from the year you exhibited, and that information will help influence your decision. But that isn't enough information, especially now that many shows are evolving to meet the needs of changing markets or merging with other shows and altering their direction.
- Talk to cohorts who have been to the show. If you have friends in the industry who have gone to some of the shows you're considering, their feedback can be helpful. Remember, your goals might be different from some of the other exhibitors, so keep your objectives top-of-mind when making your final recommendations.
- Talk to your vendors. Your exhibit house, PR agency, and advertising agency might have clients who have participated in the shows that you're considering. Listen to the general feedback they received.
- What are your competition and partners doing? What shows are they selecting? By no means should you simply exhibit at the same shows as your competition or partners. In fact, you can have great success at shows where none of your competitors or partners exhibit. Still, knowing what your competition and partners are doing is information you should always have at your fingertips.
- Study the conference content. Many shows include conference tracks. Scrutinize those tracks to see if any of the content matches the interests of your target audience.
- Is there an award competition at the show? If the show is giving awards for your category of product or products, you can leverage a win (or even a finalist honor) from an integrated marketing communications perspective for a long time to come.

- You can show the award in your booth at future shows. A press announcement about the award can be released, prompting future articles in trade publications. The award logo can be added to your advertising and web site. Your product will forever be defined as “award-winning.” And it ultimately helps your executive management understand the value of trade shows. That’s certainly worth considering when selecting the right shows for your company!

Certified Audits – The Key to Your Conundrum

An audit is a report by an independent and certified auditor of registration data that objectively confirms the number of exhibit only and paid conference delegates who in actuality attended an event. Often there is additional information, but the attendance figures alone are extremely valuable.

When compiling information about trade shows, it is imperative that you are able to accurately estimate the show’s basic attendance expectations. By studying the previous year’s audit, you can estimate the size of the show, and how many attendees will be within your target market. Use this information and, in cooperation with the show organizer, maximize your marketing to the target audience to ensure improved performance.

Some of you who are familiar with print advertising might have seen the audits that are common in that industry, detailing readership numbers. Virtually all major publications are independently audited. In the trade show world, this has not been the case until recently. After a tremendous amount of time and effort by the Exhibition & Event Industry Audit Council (EEIAC) that includes representatives from show management and exhibitors, consistent standards were identified and defined for all independent auditors. Beginning with 2006 show audits, if you see the EEIAC “check mark,” you can be confident that you are seeing a certified, independent audit.



The key words here are “independent” and “certified.” In the past show management might have provided numbers and some even hired a third party company to do the calculations. Often they were called “audits.” However there was no consistency between reports, so it was similar to comparing apples and oranges. Now with the EEIAC certification, when a certified auditor obtains the numbers independently, you can be assured that the results are accurate, consistent and comparable.

Ask for the Audit

The reason many show organizers do not obtain certified audits is because exhibitors don’t ask for them, and the assumption is that the information must not be important to the exhibitor. Now that you know how valuable audits are to your trade show program, remember to ask for the audit!

Don't be shy about contacting the top executives of the show management or event organizing company. They typically welcome and appreciate customer feedback. And just as importantly, remember to take the time to call these folks and thank them when they do provide a certified audit. They need and want to know that you are informed and that you care!

For more information about Trade Show Audits, please visit the [EEICA website](#).

*Highly accomplished with over 20 years of experience, **Marilyn Kroner** has managed marketing communications for a variety of technology companies, including Quantum, Storage Technology, Exabyte, and Benchmark Storage Innovations, that range in size from start-ups to Fortune 1000 companies. Under Marilyn's vision and guidance, [Kroner Communications](#) provides measurable marketing communication initiatives that are specific to the client's needs. Initiatives that let clients consistently and reliably measure the increase in their exposure to prospects and press. Marilyn will do the same for you. Marilyn is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). She is a past member of the Exhibitor Conference and Exhibitor magazine advisory boards, and is a past president of the Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA). She frequently presents on integrated marketing communications strategy, public relations and tradeshow topics at the EXHIBITORLIVE Conference.*