

## Trade Show Management 2.0

### By Christine Christman

Ten years ago I left the trade show industry to pursue a master's degree, and I returned to the industry about three years ago. When I began to do research to update my book *The Complete Handbook of Profitable Trade Show Exhibiting*, I was impressed by two things: how much the industry had changed, and how much the industry had stayed the same. So many basics of trade show marketing, like those in any other industry, are timeless. New people to the industry will always have to learn about planning, exhibit design, budgeting, lead management and measurement.

But the change that shocked me was the *way* that information is disseminated and accessed. Of course, this isn't just the trade show industry, it is a way of accessing information that has changed the way everyone does business. So now, I am very interested in teaching and learning about how to use the new tools that we have to make the job of managing trade shows more efficient. Let's look at a few major changes.

***Ordering services.*** For many, if not most shows, services are now ordered and managed online. But that means exhibit managers need a different way to organize and keep track of the services they order for shows. Yes, it is still possible to print out PDF copies of order receipts to put in a site notebook, but it makes more sense to have access to those order confirmations from a computer or smart phone. What are we doing to update our information management around show services?

***Lead management.*** I was pretty impressed when I started looking around at what is state of the art for lead management: Apps that can be uploaded to smartphones which make information gathering on the show floor and reporting relatively seamless. I understand that current "state of the art" is still the bar code scanning system, but I know of at least two registration companies who are offering information gathering with mobile devices. What is going to be critical for trade show managers is how to integrate that data with any CRM already in place at your company.

***Inventory management.*** I have also had a look at some pretty impressive inventory and ordering management software that exhibit suppliers are using to help exhibitors manage exhibits and graphics. Watch for this to evolve to mobile access.

***Information communication.*** In the same way that marketing is becoming 'inbound' rather than 'outbound' with the advent of social media, information management within your companies will start to move in that direction as well. How can you use either company intranet or social media tools to make information access smoother for those in the company with whom you need to communicate, from management to sales? Admittedly, at some companies it is still difficult to access and use social media tools. So many exhibits managers will have to get creative about how to move communication beyond emails that can get lost in the in-box.

***Education.*** How are you currently keeping your skills updated? The age-old model for ongoing job training has been formal learning and conferences. With the advent of blogs and online learning, that model has changed. Many organizations are now expecting their employees to be responsible for their training rather than creating learning for them. The new model is both collaborative and ongoing. You can access learning by using an RSS feed reader to subscribe to useful blogs, join trade show-related groups on LinkedIn and access educational seminars online.

I'm sure that all exhibits managers have a great deal to offer one-another in the collaborative learning space. This is difficult, though, when the heavily detailed demands of your jobs take up so much time and energy. The trick will be watching for ways to make learning and improvements an ongoing and integrated part of your job. It is an exciting time in the trade show industry, and I continue to look forward to hearing from exhibit managers about how you are using this new culture of information access and dissemination to improve your program and your job satisfaction.