



Key Questions to Consider

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1. What exactly is company positioning and how does it apply to trade shows?

Answer: A company positioning statement simply defines your company. A company positioning statement should not be confused with a mission statement, which is a statement of purpose. Many (but not all) mission statements start with "To be." For example, PepsiCo's mission is "To be the world's premier consumer products company focused on convenient foods and beverages." A positioning statement answers seven essential questions.

Here's an example:

"Canadian Tire continuously strives to meet the needs of its customers for total value by offering tires as a full package of location, price, service and assortment not available at Hudson's Bay stores."

1. Who? - Canadian Tire
2. What business? - tires
3. For whom (what people do you serve)? - customers - people who use tires
4. What's needed by the market served? - location, price, service, assortment
5. Against what competitor(s)? - Hudson's Bay
6. What's different about the business? - the combination of location, price, service and assortment
7. What unique benefit is derived from the product or services? - total value

The reason it's so important to understand your company's positioning is because it is the basis from which all marketing messaging is built. It keeps the messaging consistent and helps identify the benefits for each category of buyer, helping with market positioning.

Does your company have a positioning statement? If not, you might want to draft one yourself.

2. What is appropriate to negotiate with show management before signing up for booth space?

Answer: Show management typically wants to help make your exhibitor experience as positive as possible, so they are usually open to negotiating to help you achieve your objectives. Following are some suggestions:

- * Extra booth space for early sign-up

- * Booth space discount (or complimentary additional booth space) with sponsorship
- * Additional conference passes
- * Start early and try to negotiate a speaking slot or panel opportunity if there is an accompanying conference
- * Perhaps free meeting rooms for press and/or customer meetings
- * Award opportunities. No awards in your product category? Ask show management to add one. I've actually done it!
- * Be creative. Come up with your own innovative ideas and see how show management responds. At a small conference, I managed a booth with a theater theme, so I suggested a popcorn cart during conference breaks. We staffed the cart and had some good conversations that led folks to our booth.

3. I don't have a background in PR, but sometimes I'm requested to facilitate a press briefing at shows. What exactly happens during a press briefing?*

Answer: At press briefings, your job is to make sure the press representative and company executive have the information they need for a solid conversation in a quiet space. Once the meeting is scheduled, you need to make sure it goes smoothly. A basic press briefing typically follows these steps:

- a. Make introductions between company executives and the press.
- b. Give a brief introduction about the topic and what the meeting will entail.
- c. At that point, your executive will present.
- d. Take notes.
- e. Record all action items.
- f. At end of meeting, review the action items.
- g. If you plan to give the editor a gift, make sure your executive has the gift to present.

* Terri Douglas, Co-founder and Principal, Catapult PR-IR also contributed to this answer.

4. What is all of this talk about trade show audits? Who is getting audited? Me? Show management?

Answer: An audit is simply third party certification of attendance figures and demographics collected in the trade show registration process. Authentic audits are not done by show management but by a certified audit company, like BPA. Show management is responsible for choosing whether or not to purchase an audit.

Audits are census-based, meaning there is a review of the full database and verification of all statistics, so don't confuse an audit with a survey. The auditor contacts a sample database of attendees to validate attendance and demographic data.

Audits are important for the following reasons:

- * You need to be able to trust the basic attendee numbers given, and it's important to have solid, verified data you can trust.

- * They ensure confidence in the audience numbers reported by the event organizer.
- * They help you understand the "health" of the show.
- * They give a clear understanding of the geographical distribution of the attendees.
- * They help you set show objectives that are realistic and achievable.

Of approximately 13,000 U.S. shows, only about 39 are audited. Why is that? Show management says that it's because trade show exhibitors are not asking for audits. Please ask. And thank those show managers who provide audits. Just make sure that what they are calling an "audit" is truly a certified, independent audit. It's gotten easier to recognize an audit. If it has the EEIAC "check mark," then you have the real thing.

I believe it will take a grassroots effort to get more audits in our industry, so even though it might not seem like it, your help will make a big difference. I have an audit page on my web site that includes a free white paper on audits, a sample audit, and links to additional resources: <http://www.kronercommunications.com/advocacy.html>

5. What call-to-action will get attendees to my company's web site after a show?

Answer: Raffles have worked well for me. Announce the raffle at the show, but wait until after the show to announce the winners - on your web site. During the show I encourage booth visitors to check the site after the show. Send a well-worded email blast, too, with the link as soon as possible after returning from the show. Try to add a unique suffix to the URL so you can track the number of folks who come to your site after the show.

Make sure the prize is something that your target audience covets and try to tie it into your company's products, messaging, or booth theme.

6. Sometimes I get the feeling that my coworkers don't really respect event marketing as a profession. What can I do to earn their respect?

Answer: Folks who have the perception that our jobs are glamorous have never done four shows in one month or walked on our poor, tired feet. Still, there is a lot you can do to help the way you are perceived as an event marketing professional. The first thing you need to do is lots of homework. It is imperative that you know your company, including your company's positioning, business objectives, business plan, and goals. You must also know your company's products inside and out. And, as an event marketing professional, you must know marketing - and your market. How can you choose the right shows if you don't know your target market? Finally, you must learn about both the industry on which your company focuses AND the event marketing industry.

Developing relationships with key cohorts is important. Get to know the folks responsible for advertising, PR, web marketing, direct marketing, product marketing, channel marketing, and sales. Learn their objectives and how to integrate them with

yours. Show them how you can help achieve their objectives through event marketing.

The next step is managing expectations. Develop an intelligent event plan and review it with everyone who matters, including the folks mentioned above, and get their input. These are your influencers and supporters, and when you have their support, you become a united front to executive management. Communicate your plans, objectives, and results with executive management on a regular basis. The increased scrutiny on event marketers to measure results is your chance to shine.

During the show, work the booth and talk to prospects. Attend conference sessions. Keep learning - and others will notice.

Here is a short recipe for respect:

- * Know the decision makers and influencers.
- * Know the WIFT (What's In It For Them).
- * Collaborate rather than compete.
- * Select the events that will support and achieve multiple goals.
- * Set specific measurable goals tied to WIFT.
- * Outline ROO/ROI methodology.
- * Follow up/communicate throughout the year.

As Ron Smith from HealthNet said, "Success must be delivered over and over, for every event, because every event affects the bottom line."