

# Trade Show Tips and Advice

By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach

**Effective trade shows are broken down into 4 phases, each of which has equal weight in making your next event the best it can be. These four areas are:**

**① Pre-Show**

*Planning, preparation and training.*

**② Show Setup**

*Making sure all is right before customers and prospects come to see you.*

**③ At Show Activities**

*How to maximize and more importantly things not to do that can get you in trouble.*

**④ Post Show**

*The most successful shows are the ones where the employees view that they never ended.*

## Other related articles

By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach

**① Cutting Down Your Trade Show Budget**

**② Common Exhibit Marketing Mistakes: Ten Tips on How to Avoid Them**

**③ 10 Tips to Use Giveaways Effectively**

**④ Determining Visitor Types**

**⑤ At Your Service: The Ten Commandments of Great Customer Service!**

**⑥ The Power of Buzz**

## Pre Show Activities

**Below is a list of things that you can do to better prepare for your next Trade Show Event.**

1. Develop a list of goals to be accomplished at the show.
2. Develop a list of contacts, customers, and/or suppliers that you want to meet at the show. Obtaining a copy of attendees and or exhibitors before the show can be a great asset at this juncture, but not all production companies give this information out. Pre-schedule meetings at your booth for these companies and individuals you wish to meet with.
3. Mail out information to customers that you will be at the show and send them free exhibit hall passes. These are usually included with your exhibit package and many trade show producers will give you extra.
4. Determine if there are any conference sponsorship opportunities you wish to participate in.
5. Gather associated exhibit supplies, samples, brochures, and information packets. Detail a list of companies and vendors associated with these supplies in case you need emergency replacements at the show.
6. Setup trade show display at offices, if possible, to ensure there was no damage during shipment from a previous event. This is also a great time to train new employees on boothmanship and display setup.
7. Meet with all employees who will be working at the show to review event initiatives and goals. Provide a schedule for all employees to ensure the booth is manned at all times. Outline appropriate behavior for employees at show. Events can be fun as it is an opportunity to travel and treat existing customers, but you should still review what is and isn't acceptable. Detail to all employees that they should be on booth behavior 24 hours a day. (They never know who's standing beside them in a restaurant, or in the elevator.) Remind them that they should behave as if their sweet old grandmother were with them at all times.
8. Confirm all travel and shipping arrangements if needed.
9. Go and have a successful show!

## Show Setup Activities

**Below is a list of things that you can do before the show to ensure it is a successful event.**

1. Reiterate to all employees that they should act as if they have their sweet old grandmother with them at all times.
2. Confirm that everyone and everything arrived at the show safely and intact. If not, take appropriate steps to resolve any problems.
3. Locate and confirm booth location. If you're unsatisfied with the location, immediately find the sales director and discuss the possibility of moving.
4. Setup and secure booth area and review all items associated with your exhibit order. For example; carpet, Internet access, chairs, tables, lighting, etc.
5. Walk the floor after setup to locate key competitors, suppliers, and other companies you wish to meet with. If possible, go ahead and schedule meetings with individuals and companies you were unable to contact before the show. Just because the show hasn't officially started doesn't mean you can't make the most of your time...
6. Review with employees; schedules and activities for the next day.
7. Book booth space for the following year to acquire prime space at the next convention.
8. Get a good night sleep, as it will be a busy first day and you will want to start it off right.

## **At Show Activities**

**Below is a list of "dos" and "don'ts" to follow at the show to ensure it is a successful event.**

- 1.** No Smoking!
- 2.** No Chewing Gum; However, having mints for fresh breath is good for both employees and visitors.
- 3.** Stand Up Straight.
- 4.** Smile.
- 5.** Don't Gossip.
- 6.** Don't Drink or Eat.
- 7.** Don't be Offensive.
- 8.** Wash Your Hands (You can also bring hand sanitizer with you to the show to prevent the spread of germs.)
- 9.** Know your company and product. If you can't answer a question, be honest and find someone who can.
- 10.** Make Eye Contact.
- 11.** Do not use cell phones in your booth unless they are used to call your offices for a customer who is standing in front of you and the call is to help them.

## Post Show Activities

**Below is a list of things that you can do after the show to ensure it was a successful event.**

1. Getting back from the show should mean that you should immediately follow up on opportunities discovered at the show. In a sense, the show never ended and business should continue as if you were still there.
2. Discuss with employees a plan of action on follow up and things learned from the show about customers, competitors, and suppliers.
3. Discuss things you would do next year to make the show better.
4. Give feedback to the show producers on things you liked and disliked. They are your allies because the better they can make the show, the better it is for you.
5. Send a "Thank You" note to all booth visitors, as well as any additional information they may have requested.
6. Queue prospects into contact management system to further pursue opportunities.
7. Get ready for the next show... It is never too early!

## Cutting Down Your Trade Show Budget

*By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach*

Whenever a recession or volatility threatens the economy, companies immediately look at where they can cut budgets. Without much forethought, the first to hit the block is inevitably training, followed closely behind by marketing. Why? Both are viewed on the balance sheet as expenditures rather than income generators, so obviously they're hot contenders for elimination.

This is a very myopic way of thinking, especially for companies who want to remain globally competitive. Instead, at times like these when resources are under severe scrutiny, look at this as a golden opportunity to analyze your strategies. Put your activities under a microscope and closely examine what you're doing and why you're doing it. Often during times of plenty, the finance reins loosen up and some highly creative juggling takes place when budgets exceed their estimations. Obviously, we enjoy the abundant mentality and wish that it could last forever. But just as with all things in the universe there has to be a balance, and shortages add stability to plenty. Whenever highs exist, lows are inevitable.

So, instead of reacting to the highs and lows of the marketplace, what can you do to maintain a steady balance? Marketing and training are definitely keys to your success, so let's examine five benefits and how they relate to your tradeshow participation.

### 1. Analyze your weakest links.

When you take time to look, examine your operation in more detail. You often discover that many of your actions are done out of habit rather than being productive and profitable. Think about some of the shows that you attend. How do they really fit into your marketing strategy? Are you attending them just because you've always done so, or because your competition is there? These are often your weak links, the shows that utilize unnecessary time and energy. Think about doing away with the "nice-to-be-there" shows and rather opt for putting all your energy into the more profitable events that attract larger quantities of your target market. Another weak budgetary link is associated with excessive employee spending at shows, such as dining at the finest restaurants and ordering the highest priced items just because the boss is paying. Consider setting up a per diem allowance and make employees accountable for expenses. You might even reward them with the difference if they under spend their stipend.

### 2. Exhibit a global competitiveness mindset.

To be a contender in the global marketplace and establish a vanguard positioning, you have to be out there come rain or shine. And, tradeshow signify an essential marketing strategy when it comes to visibility. Exhibiting demonstrates that you're a serious player in the industry. However tough, it's important to keep tradeshow as one of your major promotional strategies. Rather consider reducing space than totally pulling out of a show (provided, of course, that it's the right show for you.) Unfortunately, if you stop exhibiting completely, the "buzz" on the show floor says publicly that you must be in financial trouble. This may be completely false, but it's people's perceptions that count. They're the reality they believe: As the old adage states, "out of sight, out of mind." And, since memorability is a key factor associated with exhibiting, if you're not seen, how can you possibly be remembered?

### 3. Focus on long-term results.

Investing both in marketing and training asserts you are interested and willing to focus on long-term results. Neither is designed to give a "quick fix," rather, using them continuously in an organized and planned manner will produce results. They're like a dripping faucet, so long as the drops constantly fall into the tub, it will fill up. However, if you maintain a "turn on, turn off" approach (that is, train and market in times of plenty but discontinue when there's a shortage), then your results are likely to mirror your actions. Look at how you can keep an operational equilibrium to avoid the highs and the lows. Develop a consistent marketing and training strategy.

### 4. Inspire loyal workers.

Often companies are reluctant to invest too much in training staff for fear that once trained, they'll leave for "greener pastures." Since there are no guarantees in life, that's always going to be a risk, but does that mean you shouldn't develop your people to be the best they can be? Absolutely not! The reasons employees leave may be many. Employees may leave because of frustration or stress. They might feel unappreciated or undervalued. It could be that they believe your company is heading for an iceberg and want to "jump ship" before it sinks. Maybe they feel that their salaries are not in line with the jobs they are performing. Or they could feel that they don't have enough authority, growth opportunities, or direction in their careers. Training is often the key to help inspire loyalty.

### 5. Improve performance.

Employees are the backbone of your company. Without them, your company cannot stay afloat. The relationship between employees and employers has to be a partnership; if they feel their needs are being ignored, they will leave you. But when both sides work on the same wavelength, share the same goals and ideas, the company will be on the right track for success. What better place than the tradeshow floor to exhibit this mentality. Your exhibit staff represents your internal customer-service team and your company ambassadors. They stand for your entire organization. These people have the awesome responsibility of making or breaking future relationships with attendees, prospects and customers. Their attitude, body language, appearance, and knowledge help to create positive or negative perceptions in the minds of visitors. Make sure that they're well trained and can do what you expect of them. Training shows that you recognize your team's importance in the company and look to develop their skills to improve performance. Exhibiting is a powerful extension of your company's marketing strategy and your people are the backbone of your company. Eliminating your marketing and training budgets during times of recession is tantamount to profitability suicide. So consider looking at other places to make those cuts!

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## Common Exhibit Marketing Mistakes: Ten Tips on How to Avoid Them

By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach

The key to great exhibiting is marketing. But, marketing is a very inexact science that leaves room for a multitude of errors to occur. The following are 10 of the most common marketing mistakes that exhibitors often make. Learn to avoid them and you will increase your chances for a successful tradeshow.

### 1. Have A Proper Exhibit Marketing Plan.

Having both a strategic exhibit marketing and tactical plan of action is a critical starting point. In order to make tradeshow a powerful dimension your company's overall marketing operation, there must be total alignment between the strategic marketing and your exhibit marketing plan. Tradeshow should not be a stand-alone venture. Know and understand exactly what you wish to achieve; increasing market share with existing users, introducing new products/services into existing markets, or introducing new products/services into new markets. This is the nucleus on which to build.

### 2. Have A Well-Defined Promotional Plan.

A significant part of your marketing includes promotion; pre-show, at-show, and post-show. Most exhibitors fail to have a plan that encompasses all three areas. Budget is naturally going to play a major role in deciding what and how much promotional activity is possible. Developing a meaningful theme or message that ties into your strategic marketing plan will then help to guide promotional decisions. Know whom you want to target and then consider having different promotional programs aimed at the different groups you are interested in attracting. Include direct mail, broadcast faxes, advertising, PR, sponsorship, and the Internet as possible ways to reach your target audience.

### 3. Use Direct Mail Effectively.

Direct mail is still one of the most popular promotional vehicles exhibitors use. From postcards to multi-piece mailings, attendees are deluged with invitations to visit booths. Many of the mailings come from show management's lists and as a result, everyone gets everything. To target the people you want visit your booth, use your own list of customers and prospects... it's the best one available! Design a piece that is totally benefit-oriented and makes an impact. Mail three pieces at regular intervals prior to the show, starting about four weeks out, to help ensure your invitation is seen. Wherever possible, use first-class mail. There's nothing worse than a mailing that arrives after the show is over.

### 4. Give Visitors Incentive To Visit Your Booth.

Whatever promotional vehicles you use, make sure that you give visitors a reason to come and visit you. With a hall overflowing with fascinating products/services combined with time constraints, people need incentive to come and visit your booth. First and foremost, their primary interest is in what's "new"! They are eager to learn about the latest technologies, new applications, or anything that will help save them time and/or money. Even if you don't have a new product/service to introduce, think about a new angle to promote your offerings.

## **5. Have Giveaways That Work.**

Tied into giving visitors an incentive to visit your booth is the opportunity to offer a premium item that will entice them. Your giveaway items should be designed to increase your memorability, communicate, motivate, promote or increase recognition of your company. Developing a dynamite giveaway takes thought and creativity. Consider what your target audience wants, what will help them do their job better, what they can't get elsewhere, what is product/service related and educational. Think about having different gifts for different types of visitors. Use your website to make an offer for visitors to collect important information, such as an executive report, when they visit your booth. Giveaways should be used as a reward or token of appreciation for visitors participating in a demonstration, presentation or contest, or as a thank-you for qualifying information about specific needs etc.

## **6. Use Press Relations Effectively.**

Public Relations is one of the most cost-effective and successful methods for generating large volumes of direct inquiries and sales. Before the show ask show management for a comprehensive media list, and find out which publications are planning a special show edition. Send out newsworthy press releases focusing on what's new about your product/service, or highlighting a new application or market venture. Compile press kits for the press office that include information about industry trends, statistics, new technology or production information. Also include good product photos and key company contacts. Have staff members at the booth who are specifically assigned to interact with the media.

## **7. Differentiate Your Products/Services.**

Too many exhibitors are happy to use the "Me too!" marketing approach. Examine their marketing plans and there's an underlying sameness about them. With shows that attract hundreds of exhibitors, there are very few that seem to "stand out from the crowd." Since memorability is an integral part of a visitors' show experience, you should be looking at what makes you different and why a prospect should buy from you. This is of particular concern with generic products in your industry. Every aspect of your exhibit marketing plan, including your promotions, your booth and your people should be aimed at making an impact and creating curiosity.

## **8. Use The Booth As An Effective Marketing Tool.**

On the show floor your exhibit makes a strong statement about who your company is, what you do, and how you do it. The purpose of your exhibit is to attract visitors so that you can achieve your marketing objectives. In addition to it being an open, welcoming, and friendly space, there needs to be a focal point and a strong key message that communicates a significant benefit to your prospect. Opt for large graphics rather than reams of copy. Pictures paint a thousand words while very few exhibitors will take the time to read. Your presentations or demonstrations are a critical part of your exhibit marketing. Create an experience that allows visitors use as many of their senses as possible. This will help to enhance memorability.

## **9. Realize That Your People Are Your Marketing Team.**

Your people are your ambassadors. They represent everything your company stands for, so choose them well. Brief them beforehand and make sure that they know why you are exhibiting, what you are exhibiting, and what you expect from them. Exhibit staff training is essential for a unified and professional image. Make sure that they sell instead of tell, don't try to do too much, understand visitor needs, don't spend too much time, and know how to close the interaction with a commitment to follow-up. Avoid overcrowding the booth with company representatives. Have strict rules regarding employees visiting the show and insist staffers not scheduled for booth duty stay away until their assigned time. Assign specific tasks for company executives working the show.

## **10. Follow-Up Promptly.**

The key to your tradeshow success is wrapped up in the lead-management process. The best time to plan for follow-up is before the show. Show leads often take second place to other management activities that occur after being out of the office for several days. The longer leads are left unattended, the colder and more mediocre they become. It is to your advantage to develop an organized, systematic approach to follow-up. Establish a lead handling system, set time lines for follow-up, use a computerized database for tracking, make sales representatives accountable for leads given to them, and then measure your results.

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## 10 Tips to Use Giveaways Effectively

By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach

Walk around any trade or consumer show and you will be able to collect a bag full of advertising specialties, or giveaway items all designed to promote. But look a little more closely. How many really do an effective job? How clearly do they get a message across? Is the message sufficiently visible? Is the giveaway useful or unique enough that you would want to keep and use it? All these questions, and more, need to be considered before jumping into the giveaway game. Everyone enjoys receiving a gift, even if it is "just a little something." Gift giving creates a favorable impression. It can build goodwill, be an incentive, communicate a message and create awareness. When thinking about advertising specialties for your next show, consider the following ten questions:

### 1. What do you want to achieve by giving away a premium item?

Your giveaway items should be designed to increase your memorability, communicate, motivate, promote or increase recognition. It is important not only that the message have an impact, but also the premium itself.

### 2. How will you select your premium item?

There is a multitude of different items you could consider as a premium. However, which one will best suit your purpose? To select the right item, you need to decide your objective. Do you want it to enhance a theme, convey a specific message, or educate your target audience? A clear purpose should help make your selection process easier. A promotional specialist can also help you make an effective selection. Remember that your company image is reflected in whatever you choose to give away.

### 3. Whom do you want to receive your premium?

Having a clear objective for your premium item will also help you decide who should receive it. You may consider having different gifts for different types of visitors. You might have different quality gifts for your key customers, prospects, and general passers by.

### 4. How does your giveaway tie into your marketing theme?

Is there an item that naturally complements your marketing message? Have the message imprinted on the item and make sure that your company name, logo and phone number appear clearly. An important aspect of any gift is to remember who it was from long after the fact.

### 5. What is your budget?

The price range for premium items is enormous. Quality, quantity, and special orders all impact the price. Establish a budget as part of your exhibit marketing plan. Consider ordering the same item for several different shows. The greater the quantity of your order, the lower the individual unit price for the item you're ordering.

## 6. What must visitors do to qualify for a gift item?

There are several ways to use your premium effectively. For example: As a reward for visitors participating in a demonstration, presentation or contest, as a token of your appreciation when visitors have given you qualifying information about their specific needs or as a thank you for stopping at the booth. Avoid leaving items out for anyone to take. This diminishes item value and has little or no memorability factor.

## 7. Will your giveaway directly help your future sales?

Consider handing out a discount coupon or a gift certificate that requires future contact with your company for redemption. Consider premiums that will help generate frequent visits to customers and prospects, such as calling you for free refills.

## 8. How does your premium item complement your exhibiting goals?

Premiums can be used to pre-qualify your prospects. One company uses playing cards. Prior to the show, they send "kings" to their key customers, "queens" to suppliers, and "jacks" to new or hot prospects. They then request that the cards are brought to the booth in exchange for a special gift. When the cards are presented, the booth staff already knows certain information about the visitor. They can then act on their previous knowledge and use time with the visitor more productively.

## 9. How will you inform your target audience about your giveaway item?

A sufficiently novel or useful giveaway can actively help to draw prospects to your booth. So make sure your prospects know about it. Send a "tickler" invitation with details of the giveaway, or create a two-piece premium, sending one part out to key prospects prior to the show and telling them to collect the other half at your booth.

## 10. How will you measure the effectiveness of your premium?

Establish a tracking mechanism to measure the success of your giveaway. If it is a redemption item, code it so that you know it resulted from the show. Post-show follow-up could include a question about the premium: Did visitors remember receiving it? Or, how useful was the item? After the show, critique your giveaway with your exhibit team: Did it draw specific prospects to the booth? Was it eye-catching enough to persuade passers by to stop? Did your customers find it useful? Did it project the right corporate image?

There are plenty of exciting premiums for you to choose from so that you can avoid the usual pens, pencils, and key chains. Make your premium work for you and it will be money well invested.

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## Determining Visitor Types

*By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach*

The trade show floor is full of different types of people with different agendas. Some people have specific goals for attending the show; others do not. As an exhibitor, your observation and questioning skills will be your key to determining who may be a viable sales prospect. Familiarize yourself with the various visitor types likely to frequent the tradeshow floor.

### 1. "Definites".

If you have done a thorough job of pre-show marketing, definite prospects and customers will visit your booth.

### 2. "Demonstration Junkies".

Watch out for passers-by who are attracted to your booth by a demonstration or other activity. These could be valuable prospects or time wasters. Ask a few short, open-ended questions to find out.

### 3. "Curiosity Cats".

These types could be curious about anything: what exactly your company does, a graphic, who designed your booth, and so on. Do not spend too much time with someone who is just interested in the design and construction of your booth or intricate details about your graphics.

### 4. "Paper Lovers".

Some people love to collect literature or just take any piece of paper no matter what it is. Are they attending the show to research the market for a boss? If so, they may be an influencer worth pursuing.

### 5. "Eyeballers".

These types are usually extremely friendly. They smile and their whole body language says, "please talk to me." Questioning will determine whether or not they are prospects worth pursuing.

### 6. "Jeopardy Gigolos".

Winning contests is their passion. They are always ready, willing and able to drop a business card into a fishbowl for any kind of drawing. Contests that require more than just a business card to enter will help deter these types from finding their way onto your follow-up lists.

## **7. "Keepsakers".**

Any kind of giveaway attracts these types. They may even want more than one for family, friends and colleagues. Keen questioning will ascertain if this visitor has potential.

## **8. "The Disinterested".**

Some people in the crowd will simply not be interested in what your organization has to offer. They often let you know in no uncertain terms through their body language; for example, walking by purposely avoiding eye contact or chatting with a colleague. Waylaying these types will only upset them.

## **9. "Hawks".**

These people attend shows for the sole purpose of selling you their products or services. Publication advertising representatives are a prime example. They are unlikely to be prospects, but you never know. If floor traffic is slow it may be worth asking a few questions, if only to find out to whom they could refer you to.

## **10. "Job Seekers".**

Trade shows are an excellent place to network and look for organizations who may have present or future job openings. As with Hawks, you may want to spend time with them during slow, unproductive periods.

## **11. "Nonentities".**

These types could be underlings in their organization sent to do some specific research. Never underestimate them. They may be extremely strong influencers. In addition, they probably know whom in their organization you need to contact. Time spent with them could be invaluable.

## **12. "Snoops".**

Beware of the competition! These types often give themselves away by knowing too much or asking precise questions. Make sure that you do more questioning than talking so that you lessen the chances of giving away valuable information.

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## **At Your Service: The Ten Commandments of Great Customer Service!**

*By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach*

Customer service is an integral part of our job and should not be seen as an extension of it. A company's most vital asset is its customers. Without them, we would not and could not exist in business. When you satisfy our customers, they not only help us grow by continuing to do business with you, but recommend you to friends and associates. The practice of customer service should be as present on the show floor as it is in any other sales environment.

### **The Ten Commandments of Customer Service:**

#### **1. Know who is boss.**

You are in business to service customer needs, and you can only do that if you know what it is your customers want. When you truly listen to your customers, they let you know what they want and how you can provide good service. Never forget that the customer pays our salary and makes your job possible.

#### **2. Be a good listener.**

Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying. Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel. Beware of making assumptions (thinking you intuitively know what the customer wants.) Do you know what three things are most important to your customer? Effective listening and undivided attention are particularly important on the show floor where there is a great danger of preoccupation: looking around to see to whom else we could be selling to.

#### **3. Identify and anticipate needs.**

Customers don't buy products or services. They buy good feelings and solutions to problems. Most customer needs are emotional rather than logical. The more you know your customers, the better you become at anticipating their needs. Communicate regularly so that you are aware of problems or upcoming needs.

#### **4. Make customers feel important and appreciated.**

Treat customers as individuals. Always use their name and find ways to compliment them, but be sincere. People value sincerity, as it creates good feeling and trust. Think about ways to generate good feelings about doing business with you. Customers are very sensitive and know whether or not you really care about them. Thank them every time you get a chance. On the show floor, be sure that your body language conveys sincerity. Your words and actions should be congruent.

#### **5. Help customers understand your systems.**

Your organization may have the world's best systems for getting things done, but if customers don't understand them, they can get confused, impatient and angry. Take time to explain how your systems work and how they simplify transactions. Be careful that your systems don't reduce the human element of your organization.

## 6. Appreciate the power of "Yes".

Always look for ways to help your customers. When they have a request (as long as it is reasonable) tell them that you can do it. Figure out how to meet the request afterwards. Look for ways to make doing business with you easy. Always do what you say you are going to do.

## 7. Know how to apologize.

When something goes wrong, apologize. It's easy and customers like it. The customer may not always be right, but the customer must always win. Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve. Even if customers are having a bad day, go out of your way to make them feel comfortable.

## 8. Give more than expected.

Since the future of all companies lies in keeping customers happy, think of ways to elevate your business above the competition. Consider the following:

- ❶ What can you give customers that they can't get elsewhere?
- ❷ What can you do to follow-up and thank people even when they don't buy?
- ❸ What can you give to a customer that's totally unexpected?

## 9. Get regular feedback.

Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve. There are several ways in which you can find out what customers think and feel about your services:

- ❶ Listen carefully to what they say.
- ❷ Check back regularly to see how things are going.
- ❸ Provide a method that invites constructive criticism, comments and suggestions.

## 10. Treat employees well.

Employees are your internal customers and need a regular dose of appreciation. Thank them and find ways to let them know how important they are. Treat your employees with respect and chances are they will have a higher regard for customers. Appreciation stems from the top. Treating customers and employees well is equally important.

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## The Power Of Buzz

*By Susan Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach*

How did Hotmail gain over 12 million subscribers in 18 months? How did the very low budget movie "The Blair Witch Project" become such an incredibly successful phenomenon? The answer lies in the power of "buzz." Buzz or word-of-mouth marketing influences more people to buy, or not to buy products and services, than most other forms of marketing. Why is it so powerful? Basically, we have a need to share information as a means of communication and also as a way of understanding the world around us. Often, we base many of our purchasing decisions on information gleaned from friends and well-respected associates. We tend to listen to them more readily than most mass-media messages. In his book "The Anatomy of Buzz," Emanuel Rosen states, "most marketing today ignores the power of buzz and tries to influence each customer individually." He believes that "buzz travels through invisible networks that link people together. Noise, skepticism and connectivity all influence today's buzz."

As exhibitors you need go no further than the tradeshow floor to find a network that creates a real buzz. It starts prior to the show, gathers momentum at the show, and then slowly dissipates after the show ends. Every exhibitor has the power to influence the buzz. It all depends on product/service quality, marketing savvy and the decisions made. I recall visiting a telecommunications show a couple of years ago when the buzz on the show floor concerned a Fortune 100 company and major player in the industry, (who shall remain nameless). The talk centered on the image of their booth, which wasn't quite up to expectations. The buzz went like this: "The ABC Company has gone cheap. They must be having financial problems." It is gossip like this that starts the wheels of the "rumor mill" turning and can even create havoc on the Stock Market. Remarks like this often have very little bearing on reality, but people make assumptions and decisions based on what they see and hear. Obviously, the originating source of the buzz plays a key role in its basis for truth.

I'm sure that you would much prefer any tradeshow buzz to be positive. Since talking about products/services makes economic sense, how can you use the buzz to add to your existing marketing efforts? I've put together ten guidelines for you to consider:

- 1.** Brainstorm all possible groups of people who might be interested in your products/services. Consider including the media, opinion leaders, influencers, lead users, politicians, analysts, etc. Don't forget chat rooms and newsgroups although buzz still spreads primarily by personal interaction.
- 2.** Research how information spreads among your customers. Ask them how they usually learn about new products/services. Who are their major information sources? Whose information do they value? You're primarily looking for groups of people rather than individuals. However, don't discount individuals, as they may well be a powerful opinion leader.
- 3.** Develop a clear and concise message highlighting the product/service benefits you want to filter through these different groups. Zero in on your product's uniqueness and what it can do, for example, to help save time and money – two basic elements most people seek.

**4.** Think about ways to tap into these groups to spread the word about your products/services. Use these in addition to your existing marketing efforts. Never rely on just one means of connecting with your target audience. Your credibility is enhanced through different marketing mediums. For example, exhibit marketing could include pre-show advertising, at-show sponsorship, and post-show: a trade publication article. The more ways people can hear and see you the better.

**5.** Offer prospects easy ways to try your product/service. For example, the makers of Pictionary gave demos in parks, shopping centers and other gathering places. The tradeshow floor presents excellent opportunities for this.

**6.** Come up with other creative ideas to enhance tradeshow show demonstrations. What can you give people to take away to remind them of your company, products and positive show experience. Think about something that will help create the buzz. It'll have to be more creative than a keychain or stress ball. The more product-related the item is the better. You want people to remember and talk about you... Positively!

**7.** Look at special groups whom you might offer a product discount, a loaner or even for free. You're looking for groups/individuals where the direct product experience will help spread the word. For example, when FedEx started out, it offered free shipping to show people how their program worked. America Online continuously finds ways to offer hundreds of free hours of trial usage to entice new users. I recently saw a display of free CDs at Wal-Mart.

**8.** Use press conferences for major announcements, new product introductions, but only if they are truly new or improved, or general industry trends: what's hot and what's not. Realize that editors are interested in timely newsworthy information; industry trends, statistics, new technology or product information. The media get very upset attending a press conference which is poorly organized and where there's nothing newsworthy.

**9.** Use sneak previews at tradeshows to build anticipation and help create a buzz on the show floor. Give people a fun experience and a behind the scenes view of what's coming. TV and the movies have got this down to a fine art with their coming attractions. Siemens just did this extremely successfully at the recent CTIA show in Las Vegas. They organized a live marketing presentation with a futuristic theme that featured a digital phone prototype. They certainly created a buzz, which had people, including myself inquiring about the product's availability.

**10.** Make use of tradeshows to educate your target audience. People are hungry for information. Investigate opportunities to speak either during the workshop sessions or incorporate an educational session into your display.

The power of buzz far exceeds many conventional marketing vehicles. It is probably the oldest, most well-used and valuable one out there. Look at how you can make it an integral part of your existing marketing plan to influence the voices in your industry.

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