

BIZACTIONS

The Intrinsic, Yet Tangible Value of Trade Shows for Increased Sales

Posted by [Brenda Sleeper](#) on April 12, 2013



There are many reasons why companies benefit from exhibiting at trade shows. Participating in trade shows has become less about marketing and more about sales strategy. Generating awareness, defining your brand in the marketplace (especially in developing niche markets), creating leads, and positioning your firm strategically within the marketplace are still valid reasons for participating in trade shows. Treating modern trade shows as sales events will deliver more tangible results. How many leads can be generated by attending or sponsoring a trade show?

[SkyLine Exhibits](#) conducted a survey recently and the statistics for both trade show attendees and trade show exhibitors was overwhelmingly positive – over 90% of all those surveyed felt that trade shows are highly valuable (and often critical) to the sales or buying process.

Attendees Find Value in Trade Shows

First, let's take a look at what attendees think about trade shows. Without attendees, there would be no trade shows, after all. The quantity of qualified prospects drawn to a trade show can help a company determine the return on investment for participating in a show. The survey asked why attendees found value in attending trade shows, and:

- 91% indicated that a trade show gives them the opportunity view many products in one place
- 73% of surveyed attendees buy from at least one exhibitor at trade shows

What are the benefits of attending a trade show, from the attendee's perspective?

1. 92% to see new products
2. 78% go to keep up to date on industry trends/issues

3. 75% like to see many companies at one time for comparison purposes
4. 67% of attendees go to see existing suppliers
5. 67% go to see specific company(s) or product(s)
6. 65% attendees go to network with colleagues and/or vendors
7. 60% go to trade shows for industry relationships or partnerships
8. 57% attendees go to see products in person that were reviewed online
9. 52% go to get technical information or specifications

In today's electronic age, it would appear that trade show attendees continue to place a high value on face-to-face communications, the ability to review and discuss products in person, and compare their options all in one relevant, group environment that presents social and professional benefits as well.

Why Exhibitors Value Trade Shows

Since attendees clearly value trade shows and the benefits they offer, you might be remiss if you failed to include trade shows in your marketing plan. Skyline also surveyed exhibitors and found that the responses were very similar to those of the attendees surveyed.

Here are the top 8 reasons why the majority of exhibitors surveyed continue to exhibit at trade shows:

1. 88% participate in trade shows to raise awareness of the company and its brand
2. 72% participate to get leads from new buyers and prospects
3. 70% to strengthen relationships or partnerships
4. 65% attend to see current clients – it is harder to get face to face time with clients
5. 58% like to see colleagues and vendors, catch up on the industry trends, and strengthen their networks
6. 54% attend because their competition is there
7. 52% exhibit to support the industry or association
8. 52% exhibit to see many buyers at one time

Tips for Trade Show Exhibitors

You're aware of the benefits a trade show can offer. You want to maximize your investment and stand out from your competition in a large group venue. As an exhibitor, what are some best practices your firm should keep in mind to improve performance and return on investment?

- **Pre-Event Planning** – assign someone who is dedicated to trade shows, thinks through the details, plans and prepares the materials, equipment, products, giveaway and booth, handles the sponsorships, and arranges speaking engagements at the show. This person is your conference liaison – the person who communicates and develops a relationship with the trade show association or group. Find out if the trade show does any pre-show marketing that you could be included in and request the association membership list or trade show attendee list.
- **Pre-Show Marketing** – nurture attendees before the show through an email campaign and/or direct mail campaign, inviting them to demonstrations, private meetings, and special presentations. Offer something engaging to entice

them to stop at your booth, plan an activity, provide an exclusive offer, and tantalize them with your services, products and giveaway as well as the benefits of your service (why people buy from you).

- **Better Marketing** – take your marketing to the next level by targeting specific prospects with the products and services they are most interested in, focusing on your brand, products and services that will help them and solve their problems. The fastest growing trade shows use social media to reach attendees: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.
- **Exhibit Facelift** – take a good look at your booth, presentation, materials and displays. Think about how you can improve upon them to make them more portable, more environmentally friendly (go green), more engaging, more representative of your brand. Use an iPad to demonstrate online products.
- **Giveaways** – be sure to have something interesting and unique as a giveaway at your booth; make it something of value (think about something most attendees could use, such as a lost and found sticker for their cell phones).
- **Booth Staff Training and Selection** – informed, well-spoken and friendly booth staff make eye contact with attendees, listen to attendees' concerns and questions, and are approachable and available. They do not sit behind the booth in chairs, waiting for people to come up to them. Have enough people at your booth for the space – for example, a 10×10 booth can comfortably accommodate 2 staffers.
- **Network Beyond the Booth** – there are ample opportunities to make connections outside of the booth. The average trade show has about 400 attendees, and attendees visit about 20% of all booths. Dinners, breakfasts, events, cocktail parties, and other gatherings allow you to meet and mingle with prospects and clients. Do not hang out with people from your own company – spread out, mix it up and mingle. This will only increase your connections and maximize your leads.
- **Presentations** – group presentations have limited appeal unless you are truly excellent at garnering and maintaining attention; consider how much information about your service or product you will give away at a group show... do you present everything or give them just enough to pique their interest and encourage an individual meeting to follow up? Educational presentations (how can you solve problems) are often appealing to attendees, as are product demonstrations. Make sure that you have products on hand at your exhibit booth so prospects can see exactly how it works for themselves.
- **Business Cards** – after you speak with each prospect, jot notes down on his or her business card so that you can follow up properly. You will forget once you leave the trade show.
- **Follow Up** – follow up as quickly as possible with prospects after the show: consider sending an email before you even leave the booth, thanking them for visiting, offering them a special package or individual demonstration; give them something to print out or take with them from your booth to take back to their offices. Once you get the post-show attendee list, follow up with them as well. Use the numbers to plan, engineer and measure your results.
- **Focus on Lead Management** – establish a process, provide training, and require the sales team to staff the booth. Use your trained staffers to pre-qualify leads. Assign the leads to the sales team or telemarketing team upon your return to the office to enhance your follow-up with a personal call from a live human being.

And, let's not forget about the value of visiting with current relationships and clients. Because BizActions is a completely virtual company, we participate in some trade shows to have face time with existing clients. Building relationships and client retention is important, too – something that is a little more difficult to do via phone and email only.

Generate Leads From Trade Shows

So how many leads can be generated by attending or sponsoring a trade show? As you've read, the average trade show draws 400 attendees. Each attendee is theoretically a lead or prospect because they are interested in what you have to offer or they would not be there (excluding competitors, of course). Trade shows are one of your most effective sales strategies. Position your firm strategically within the marketplace by participating in trade shows and following these best practice tips to maximize your prospecting efforts and lead generation. Track and measure your results to identify the true ROI on your involvement.

Have you had tremendous success at a trade show? Share your comments here.

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Brenda Sleeper is the Manager of Marketing and Business Development for Bizactions | PDI Global, Thomson Reuters. She has been involved in business development and marketing for the accounting industry since 1999. A member of the MSCPA Marketing Committee, co-Chair of the Association for Accounting Marketing (AAM) Membership Committee, board liaison to the AAM Membership Satisfaction Committee, and Board member for the Association for Accounting Marketing (AAM), Brenda specializes in identifying new business opportunities — new markets / verticals, new partnerships with other businesses, new ways to reach existing markets, and new product or service offerings to better meet the needs of existing clients.

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