

50 Ways to Maximize Your Trade Show Investment

Independent Reps hate trade shows.
They'll tell you they don't work.
Which is true – the way *they* work them.

They hate the expense.
They hate standing around in the booth all day long.
They complain that they don't see anyone from their territory.

"It is a waste of time."
"I could be more productive in the territory."
"I've already seen these people in their office."



The fact is Trade Shows and Conferences are one of the strongest selling opportunities we get all year long. If your sales associates don't understand that, they are either tainted with poor work habits, or they've never been taught. So let's teach them.

Maximizing Trade Shows

It all starts with preparation.

It starts by recognizing the real action at conferences takes place outside the booth.
It happens six weeks before the conference (even with prospects that aren't planning to attend).
It happens after the exhibits close in the evening and before they open in the morning.
It only happens when sales reps target prospects with a plan to achieve something.

Think of the Trade Show at a major campaign.
Intend to reap benefits from it for 90 days.

The first step is to have an objective and a plan: What do you want to achieve at this conference?

- Meet new prospects
- Connect with a major prospect
- Re-connect with Key Account Management
- Socialize with particular customers or prospects to further the relationship

To make a trade show successful, define specifically what you consider a success.
When a sale can mean tens of thousands of dollars annually, it doesn't take very much to make a trade show extremely profitable. Your job is to define what needs to happen to open those gates.



Here's how to stretch the effect:

1) Customer Contacts

Conferences are a reason for a rep to talk to a customer or prospect.

Six weeks out they can be talking to their customers asking if they are planning to attend.

It is just another excuse for a contact. A conversation starter.

This is the perfect way to mention the new product that will be unveiled to build some anticipation. This is also the right time frame to be planning dinners.

Every one of the sales people attending should have dinners planned with customers or key prospects. It is a great opportunity to enhance the relationship. Reps should not plan on having their evenings free at a trade show.

2) Customer Relationships

A month out, the company should be distributing formal printed confirmations of the dinner to the reps with appointments. This formalizes and locks in that invitation that the prospect might think has been a little loose. Other customers should be invited by to see the new product, watch the demo or enjoy any other attraction. We're assuming here that marketing has delivered a promotional event to strengthen the offer. If not, invite customers by to meet the top executives that will be in attendance. It is very flattering that your rep wants you to meet their boss or the company brass.

3) The Show

Conferences are nice because it gets your customers out of the office and away from the time pressures of business. Sure they are scheduled tightly with lots to accomplish at the show.

But the responsibility is different and the stress is reduced. Every sales person should strive to make use of this relaxed mind set. Appointments are easier to get after you've spent social time together.

At the show, look for anything you can do to spend personal time and effort on your customers and prospects. Like what? Well, we've seen it all:

- A ride in from the airport
- Customers sharing rep hotel rooms
- Sharing badges for entry
- Getting off their feet at the booth
- Joining a group from the company for cocktails
- Forming a group for dinner
- Slipping away for a quick lunch
- Getting up early for breakfast
- Nightcaps
- Sharing cabs
- Loaning product for use at the show (I've done this with jackets, skiwear, walker boots, knee braces...even insoles)



4) New Product Launch

Product development should have key dates on their planning calendar with the responsibility to introduce something at the show.

Launch mean all materials available including samples, prototypes, field tests, marketing materials – everything.

5) Pre Launch

Products not quite ready to launch? Have prototypes available (under the counter) for key accounts and prospects to get input, build anticipation and find ‘friends’ willing to test.

This isn’t really testing – it is building relationships and pre-selling. Note that this is in addition to the product launch, not instead of.

6) After the Show

Appointments are easier to get once you’ve spent some social face time.

Leads and presentations give you a business reason to follow-up.

The new product launch gives the prospect something to try or consider.

It is up to you as a Sales Manager to set the standard for Trade Shows and teach your reps how to make them productive.

Who Should Attend

If trade shows are part of your marketing strategy, reps should make a point of attending a minimum of two conferences a year. They should be expected at any conference scheduled within their region. Local reps should also attend with a full array of samples and brochures, just in case an emergency or opportunity arises.

Remember, reps bring their own array of relationships. Booths that are crowded with reps are also crowded with prospects. (Especially if they’ve invited them by).

Summary

No one should be attending a conference without a plan.

Before the show, study the list of attendees. Every show publishes it.

Notate everyone attending from your territory. Notate customers and prospects differently.

Make a point of using the show as an excuse to talk to prospects.

Schedule your evenings with prospects and customers. Do this in advance.

Find interesting restaurants, sights, activities – anything to make your time together memorable.

The next page features 50 worthwhile things you can achieve at any given conference.

Take copies to give to your associates that start complaining about the waste of time.



50 Goals for Every Trade Show

We've just talked about the selling opportunities at a conference. Here are 50 things (along with selling) reps can do to stay busy and productive at a Trade Show. Publish them before every show.

1. Find a prospect from your territory on the floor. Bring them by the booth
2. Start a conversation with a new prospect in or out of your territory
3. Roam the food courts during coffee breaks and practice meeting prospects
4. Write down lead information in support of someone else's discussion
5. Ask a prospect to explain how they use your product category
6. Review the booth and products of your top competitors
 - Are they busy? • What are they promoting?
 - What are they presenting? • How are they presenting?
7. Review the booth and products of minor competitors
8. Stand in on presentations by senior sales associates.
 - Watch how they interact and present
9. Share product presentation techniques with other reps
10. Talk to your Regional Director about your target prospects
11. Around lunch time try to find prospects from your territory to invite to lunch
12. Ask management for ways to improve your sales results
13. Practice presentations – build frequency
14. Clarify product attributes with the product manager
15. Practice reading prospects badges, emblems etc for conversation starters
 - Practice starting the conversation
16. Observe Sales Management as they interact with prospects
17. Invite a new prospect to the Booth
18. Trade sales stories with other reps.
19. Recruit sales people for open population centers in your territory
 - Get referrals • Meet prospects
20. Review competitive product solutions
21. Ask other reps about their sales successes
22. Learn to sell new products
23. Talk with other reps about alternative distribution ideas
24. Talk to Product Managers about newly launched products
25. Encourage prospects to interact with a product.
 - Practice handling the product while chatting
26. Meet the competitor sales reps in your territory
27. See what new products are being introduced by competitors
28. Gather and review competitive literature on products your key accounts are using
29. Ask to be shown competitive products that are dominant in your market
30. Create a session with reps and product managers to review competitive products
31. Straighten the booth



32. Familiarize yourself with products you aren't selling well
33. Practice linking products that relate in a sales presentation
34. Share value statements on profit and productivity with other reps
35. Build a customer relationship outside of a product presentation
36. Learn about competitive reps working in your territory
37. Socialize outside conference rooms between sessions
38. Review your 90-Day plan with your regional manager
39. Use booth traffic to practice your product presentations with frequency
40. Spend time with the marketing team in attendance.
Learn their plans and perspectives
41. Develop new product demonstration techniques
42. Make sure everyone entering the booth is greeted
43. Invite a prospect to dinner
44. Make 10 presentations of each product until it is effective and natural
45. Spend time in your hotel lobby or lounges chatting with prospects
 - Invite them by the booth.
46. Challenge yourself to join a group socially at the hotel
47. Develop your Human Relations skills by initiating conversations with prospects
48. Visit competitors and review their products with them
49. Meet with every prospect on your territory list whose attendance you had confirmed
50. Ask sales and executive management if they know key prospects in your area.

