

## Tradeshows — How To Get The Most Marketing Bang For Your Buck®

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

'Tis the time for tradeshows. Tradeshows require an investment of time and money. What you receive in return for this investment will depend on your expectations and what plan you have in place to meet or exceed those expectations. Companies participate in tradeshows and participants attend tradeshows for various reasons. Understanding what your expectations are from participating in a tradeshow will define your goals and strategy. A thorough understanding of the show will also be important to ensuring your goals are met. In this month's article, we share tips and techniques for getting the most marketing bang for your buck when participating in tradeshows.

**Determine why you are participating at the show:** Your objective for attending a tradeshow will guide you in the best way to manage the event and the contacts you acquire. Some companies use tradeshows for pure publicity (they simply have to participate – being there may not help, but not being there would hurt). For some companies, tradeshows are a way to connect with their existing customers and top prospects (some companies use the tradeshow as an annual “thank you” event and host a party to invite all their key clients and prospects). For some companies, tradeshows are a great way to share their information with a large number of people in a short period of time.

*Tip from The Business Lab:* With your team, determine which tradeshows will be the best match for your company. Create a tradeshow criteria form and use this to determine the shows that will benefit you the most. Some items to include when creating your form:

- Number of years this show has been held, and attendance last year.
- Target audience of show.
- Who attended last year? You can learn a lot by reviewing last year's attendee list. If you cannot get last year's list, then ask the show host to at least provide the company names and titles of persons attending. Sort the list by the titles and see how many of each attended (i.e., how many CEOs, CFOs, Account Executives, Administrative Assistants, etc.). By quickly reviewing this, you will get a good feel for who will actually be attending.
- Shows' general reputation within the industry.
- How will the show host be marketing this show?
- What pre-show marketing will be required?
- What at-show marketing will be required?
- What post-show follow-up will be required?
- What is your goal for attending this show?
- How will you know if you achieved this goal?
- What will the investment be? Consider all costs involved – exhibit fees, cost of attending the show (travel, meals, parking), cost of your booth (new graphics), promotion of the show (pre-, at-, post-show marketing).
- On a scale of one to 10, rate this show as compared to all other shows available to us this year.

**Follow-up:** While exhibiting at the tradeshow itself can introduce your company to many new prospects and reinforce your presence with your existing clients, the real magic lies in following up with the people you meet at the show. Because you can literally meet thousands of people at a tradeshow you will want to create some type of system that allows

you to separate the “suspects” from the real “prospects.” You have several ways to do this — you can write on the back of the business cards you receive, or you can bring a set of colored dots (red = hot prospect; yellow = high interest; blue = low interest; black = not a prospect, etc.). Teach this system to everyone who will be tending the booth, so that at the end of the show you can quickly sort your prospects and make immediate contact with those most interested in your services.

*Tip from The Business Lab:* Why you are participating at a tradeshow will determine how you gather names and/or how you follow up. If a high percentage of the show attendees are already clients of yours, then your primary reason for being there is to show support for them and the organization.

If your objective is to gain awareness and meet as many people as you can, then your primary focus will be on sharing your message with as many people as possible, as often as possible. Your pre-show marketing might include a postcard letting clients, prospects, and pre-registered attendees know you will be at the show – inviting them to your booth (tied in with a give-away, demonstration, etc.) Your at-show marketing might include some high awareness activity (flashy presentation, auctioneer, music, food). You will also want to collect as many business cards as possible, oftentimes done through a contest or gift. If you are having a contest, giving a gift, or doing a demonstration, do your best to tie it in directly with your company, product, or service. For example, while attending a national food industry show our client brought in a professional chef to cook and provide samples of the new food item the company was introducing. You will also want to hand out your own business cards (or sales literature) to as many people as possible. It is a good idea to have two types of collateral with you to hand out. Use your business card, one page sales sheet or flyer to hand out to the masses and then save your capabilities (more expensive marketing collateral) for those you've actually gotten to speak with and know have a true need or desire for your product or service. Your post-show marketing will consist of contacting those names you acquired and following up in some way (phone call, direct mail, meeting, etc.).

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**More Information?** If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to [kathy@thebusinesslab.com](mailto:kathy@thebusinesslab.com), visit our Web site at [www.thebusinesslab.com](http://www.thebusinesslab.com), or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-374-0569.

**Author's Note:** Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, web sites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share our FREE newsletter with you to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques, and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX, at 281-374-0170 or by E-mail at [kathy@thebusinesslab.com](mailto:kathy@thebusinesslab.com)