



**CUSTOMER
MANUFACTURING
GROUP**

THE TEN BIGGEST TRADE SHOW MISTAKES NEARLY EVERY BUSINESS IS MAKING

AVOID THESE MISTAKES AND INCREASE YOUR EFFECTIVENESS

“Their real job is to sort through the visitors to get to the qualified prospects who deserve your time and attention.”

“Even the staff with the best intentions and training resort to their old behaviors and habits when they get on the show floor.”

Influence more buying decisions. Collect more highly qualified leads. Launch new products successfully. Position each trade show as a serious sales and marketing event. These are all good reasons for enhancing your trade show efforts. To make each trade show a success, you prepare, schedule, and coordinate everything within your span of control. And when the show opens and everything is ready, your success . . . and the success of the show . . . is entirely dependent upon a group of people almost completely out of your control: your exhibit staff.

Numerous studies of tradeshow effectiveness over several years have found that your exhibit (booth) staff has a larger impact on trade show results than any other aspect of your trade show participation.

Bigger than the size of the booth, bigger than the freebies you give away to attract attention, bigger than the pre-show publicity you use to try to attract attendees to your booth, and bigger than the impact of the new products you announce. Despite this knowledge, most companies still send under-trained staffers to work the trade show booth.

People are under-trained because the sales people who staff the booth don't think they need exhibit staff training (it's just selling for goodness sake, and they do that all the time. Oh, if it were just that simple.). And the rest of the staff just doesn't get trained because there's no time or budget. Whatever training they might get is usually last minute, as an after-thought, coaching minutes before the opening of the show.

As a result of this neglect, trade show results are less than they could be. You can improve your trade show results by understanding that there are 10 critical mistakes most exhibit booth staff make (including experienced sales people). Learn to avoid them by reading this paper. Your trade show results will improve.

1. Ignoring Or Not Acknowledging Visitors

The purpose of your exhibit booth, both its location and design, is to compel visitors to notice and enter your space. Once they're in the booth, it's up to your staff to engage and greet them.

Engaging can be done by making eye contact, having open body language, and by smiling. Greeting a visitor gives your staff the opportunity to begin the qualification process by asking open-ended questions that can't be answered by “yes” or “no.”

2. Letting Visitors Control Conversations

If your staff isn't controlling conversations with visitors, then the visitors are determining the length of conversations and what will be discussed. It's important for your staff to have control. They need to make certain they're working with those visitors that can help them meet your show's objectives.

The person asking the questions is the one in control. Encourage your staff to ask that first question. If the visitors ask the first question, use the reversing tactic to regain control. The reverse is simply answering a question with a question.

**Hiring the right
people is only
step one in your
Human Resource
Investment**

3. Spending Time With Unqualified Visitors

Most exhibit staff think their job is to answer any and all visitor questions. Their real job is to sort through the visitors to get to the qualified prospects who deserve more time and attention.

Ask your staff to weave these qualifying factors into the first two minutes of every conversation: (1) Buying authority; decision maker, influencer, recommender; (2) Buying time frame; 0-3 months, 3-6 months, 6+ months; and (3) Enough budget to support the purchase of your products and services.

4. Unable To Dismiss Unqualified Visitors

Most exhibit staff will stand there forever and answer questions or do a demo for any interested visitor. Unfortunately, a lot of those visitors are probably not qualified. So if your staff can qualify them quickly, how do they dismiss the unqualified visitors? By making eye contact, shaking their hand, and saying “thanks for coming by, have a great show.” That’s it. It’s easy and it works.

5. Providing Excessively Long Demonstrations

Your staff is probably happy to show visitors everything they want to see during a demonstration. And they’ll probably want to show the visitors everything they think is exciting . . . and they’ll always be guessing.

Encourage them to be prepared with two demonstrations. The first is a quick (less than 2 minutes) general overview of your products and services. This is used to help qualify the visitors. The second is a longer (less than 6 minutes) visitor application demonstration focused on what the visitor cares about. Also, every demonstration should have a beginning, middle, and end.

6. Letting Visitors Leave Without Seeing The Entire Booth

Typically, when one of your staff is finished with a conversation or a demonstration . . . even if they fill out a lead form or just scan their badge . . . the interaction with the visitor ends and the visitor leaves the booth. If you can get your staff to ask a few more questions to see if the visitor has any interest in any other areas or stations in your booth, they can create additional opportunities. This is called cross-selling. The visitors should be escorted, not just directed, to other parts of the booth.

7. Working Only One-On-One

If the show is at all busy, as your staff is working with one or two visitors, another will walk up, then another, and so on. These newcomers to the group usually end up watching your staff talk to the original one or two visitors.

Ask your staff to pause to engage these new visitors. Tell them to make eye contact, a verbal greeting, a quick summary of what they’re discussing, and to take a step to the side to open up some

room for them. Now these new visitors will become part of the group and your staff's productivity can double or triple.

8. Forgetting Everything They're Supposed To Do

Even the staff with the best intentions and training will usually resort to their old behaviors and habits when they get on the show floor. Instead of just scheduling breaks and restocking brochures, have your booth captains work with the exhibit staff to help them implement, refine, and master their trade show selling skills.

9. Working Toward Their Own Objectives

To keep your staff focused on your objectives for the entire show, use an easy, inexpensive incentive program to reward the behavior and skills you want to see. Hand out play money when they cross-sell, dismiss, or work effectively with changing group sizes. Reward the top three "earners" with prizes, meals, or real money.

10. Display Unprofessional Behaviors

If your exhibit staff is still eating and drinking in your booth, standing in circles and talking to each other, using poor body language, or ignoring visitors, you will be forced to accept a lower level of professionalism that will affect each show's success. Use digital pictures to record the unwanted behavior and present a show at your next pre-show meeting. Pictures are worth a thousand words.

Final Thoughts

There is no substitute for training, coaching, and practicing these behaviors. You spend a lot of money on trade shows and very little on making sure your booth staff is the best they can be. Given the leverage your staff can have on results, consider spending a little less elsewhere if you need to reserve the budget for the high-leverage value of training and coaching your staff.

Customer Manufacturing Group takes a fresh approach to training your exhibit staff. We believe your people should have fun working in the exhibit booth and they should stay focused on the show objectives. The key to making your shows more successful is our training methodology.

First, we present a tailored version of our Building Trade Show Impact program, before the show, in a formal training session. Second, we work with your staff during the show to get them to try, refine, and master their new skills. And third, we motivate and add to the process with an incentive program that keeps the staff focused on the skills and behaviors we want to see.

Our clients include Apple Computer, Pacific Bell, Network Equipment Technologies, and Borland International. We typically raise the qualified lead count 10-20% and the staff has fun doing it. Call Customer Manufacturing Group at (800) 947-0140 for a free consultation or to get more information.

More Information About Customer Manufacturing Group

If you would like more information about how to apply a process to improve your marketing/sales function, simply contact us and we'd be happy to help you get started. From sweeping marketing/sales management process strategies to specific branding or product launch services, Customer Manufacturing Group can help.

If you'd like to learn more about Customer Manufacturing Group, or for a complimentary subscription to Customer Manufacturing Updates, give us a call at (800) 947-0140, fax us at (408) 727-3949, visit our website at www.customermanufacturing.com, or e-mail us at info@customermfg.com.

We have offices in major cities in the United States, and our experts travel extensively throughout the world. If you'd like to schedule a meeting when we're in your area, just let us know.