

Tips for a Successful Exhibit

Whether this is your first time exhibiting, or your 101st, every exhibitor can benefit from a few helpful hints on making your exhibit a successful one. Below are a few tips ITE has put together to help make the 2011 Annual Meeting and Exhibit your most successful yet.

BEFORE THE SHOW

Every exhibitor should ask, "Why is my company exhibiting at this show?" Your reason may be to promote new products/services, make new business contacts, stay current in the industry, etc. There are endless viable reasons to exhibit, but no matter your reason, it is important to develop a plan to make the most out of your experience.

Establish realistic, measurable goals. It is critical that companies know what the main goals of exhibiting are. If clear goals are not established before the show, how will you know if you have been successful afterwards?

Your exhibiting goals should align with your company's mission and be both realistic and measurable. These goals may be based on number of booth visitors, meetings set-up, qualified leads obtained, etc. Knowing these goals will assist you in proper budgeting and determining ROI.

Train the show floor staff. Once you have established your goals, be sure to communicate them to your booth representatives. This will help them to craft their message and give them the confidence to sell the company.

If any of your booth personnel are new to exhibiting, make sure they know what to expect on the show floor. Labor, rental and service costs may be surprising and even upsetting to a new exhibitor. Make sure they understand what they are and are not allowed to approve to relieve any undue stress on the individual.

Read your Exhibitor Services Manual. The best way to avoid sticker shock on the show floor is to read your Exhibitor Services Manual thoroughly. ITE has contracted The Expo Group (TEG) as its general contractor, and the online Exhibitor Services Manual is provided by TEG. Taking advantage of TEG's early-bird deadline is a great way to save money and will keep you in-the-know.

Even if you don't plan to use any services provided by TEG, there are still forms that every exhibitor must complete, so every exhibitor should read their manual.

Promote your presence. Don't rely on meeting attendees finding you in the exhibit hall. Take the initiative, and reach out to them before the meeting. ITE offers several opportunities for you to spread the word.

A great way to reach meeting attendees is by advertising in the Annual Meeting and Exhibit issue of *ITE Journal*. Exhibitors not currently under contract receive 10% off!

Get the pre-registered attendee mailing list from ITE by returning your non-disclosure agreement and send direct mail, meeting requests and/or promotional items to specific attendees prior to the show. ITE has made this even easier by providing a template for a postcard mailing that may be downloaded for use by exhibitors.

Additionally, you are encouraged to invite guests to tour the hall free of charge. A guest invite is available online and can be emailed to anyone you think would benefit.



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DURING THE SHOW

Once on site, it is important to keep those established goals in mind. Company representatives should be able to speak clearly and directly to attendees about their company and how its products and/or services will benefit the attendee. Remember, what you're really paying for when you exhibit, is not the booth space, but the face-to-face time with your target market. Make this time count.

Be Dynamic. Booth representatives should be out-going, vibrant people who are not afraid to speak up. The biggest mistake an exhibitor can make is to stand silently in his booth with a look of boredom on his face. Make sure the people you send to represent your company are friendly, welcoming and well spoken.

Draw a crowd. Do something to stand out from the other exhibitors. Give away a unique promo item or take advantage of one of the food and beverage sponsorships available through ITE. Once you get them to your booth, it's up to the representative to keep them there.

Another popular way to reel in prospects is holding a raffle for a sought-after prize. Collect business cards and draw a winner during the last beverage break of the week, or some other pre-planned time. Not only will that get people to your booth, but you'll also collect their contact information with ease. It's best that the prize be something appealing to the individual, not necessarily their company. Electronics are always a good bet.

Don't Oversell. Most people don't enjoy being sold to. Instead of delivering a sales pitch, have a conversation with attendees. Find out what their current challenges are and suggest ways your company's products and/or services may help to solve those problems. The key to engaging attendees in the conversation is to talk *to* them rather than *at* them.

AFTER THE SHOW

The real work begins once you're back in the office. Don't let those sales leads collect dust; make sure you follow up with attendees while the event is still on their mind. This is also when you will want to evaluate your success.

Follow up on hot leads. As soon as you get back to the office, make your first priority getting in touch with your hottest leads. Make personal calls and send emails to those attendees that seemed most interested in your company. Remind them of your conversation and how you think your company's products and/or services will help them and their organization do business better. This is when you can start selling more directly.

Follow up with everyone else. Once you've made contact with your most important contacts, send quick messages to those that were a little less likely to purchase. They may not have a need for your product/service now, but when they do, they will know who to contact.

You will also want to take advantage of the final attendee mailing list, which should be available a few weeks after the meeting. You will need to complete a new non-disclosure agreement for this list; it will be e-mailed to you after the show. This is a great way to reach those prospects that did not have time to stop by your booth.

Reevaluate your goals and budget. What worked? What didn't? Use this experience to immediately plan for the next show. If you wait until next year to start planning, you'll have forgotten many of the little details and notes from the year before. Debrief with booth representatives and meeting planners to determine your success.

Remember, don't judge an exhibit's value on one year alone. It takes at least three years of consecutive exhibiting to determine the real value of a show.

