

# EXHIBITIONS & DISPLAYS

**Time and money - that's how growing businesses count the cost of exhibiting. But with the opportunities they offer, can you afford not to include exhibitions in your marketing strategy?**

Exhibitions are the only medium where customers and prospects actively seek you out. Nothing beats face-to-face interaction. Visitors are expressing an interest, so there are few time-wasters. You can be sure that these people are worth talking to.

## **Setting objectives**

Exhibitions are not only about sales, they make good platforms when you need to re-position the company or launch a new range. Exhibitions offer you the chance to demonstrate products, answer questions, build a database or conduct market research. Above all, they help build relationships.

Exhibitions aren't cheap. The general rule is: the space will cost about one third of your total outgoings for an exhibition. If your budget is tight or you are a first-time exhibitor, you can book a basic stand and turn up with your brochures. If you are a large company and are exhibiting on a big space and have spent around £10,000 on a stand, you can't just sit in the corner. You have to tell people where you are and why they should visit you. So you may have more success if you spend £13-14,000 overall, which would include the costs of any training, advertising and printed materials you would need. This also applies to the small business, but the costs would be vastly different.

## **Three months to go**

The successful companies are the ones that take the trouble to mail their prospects and customers before the show. You can mail to your own lists, buy in a list or contact all the pre-registrants.

## **Two months to go**

Train your staff. Key issues include how to spot hot prospects and how to politely shake off time-wasters. Most organizers run their own training sessions for exhibitors about six weeks before an event, so take advantage of them. Decide which mix of people should be manning the stand - such as technical experts, sales people and top management to meet big decision makers.

## **One month to go**

Don't forget sales lead forms, order forms and price lists, business cards, company literature, product literature, specification sheets, details of all invited guests and a camera. Invite key journalists to the stand and put press material in the press office. And finally check that you have got enough of what you are selling?

## **The event**

Its show time! Hold daily staff briefings to remind them of the goals, reward those that have generated the most leads. Concentrate on attracting visitors, ask the right questions and then listen. Get their details for follow up. Classify all leads. Don't forget body language - crossed arms, chatting amongst yourselves or reading the paper with your feet up are not on. Instead, smile, make eye contact and ask open questions.

## **One month after**

Have a de-brief while the event is still fresh in everyone's minds. Sit down with staff and do an honest assessment. Ask for suggestions of what could be improved. Now chase those leads, follow up with letters, visits, phone calls or information packs. Track the leads over the following months. Remember, you're only as good as your follow-up.

## **Five benefits of using exhibitions**

### **1. Customers seek you out**

TV, radio and magazines provide interruption marketing! With exhibitions and events the buyer/visitor chooses to attend in order to see the advertisements. Time is precious. Customers give their time at events and are ready to buy. Other forms of advertising hit their target audience on the 'off-chance' that they are ready to buy.

### **2. The human touch**

We are social beings. We like to do business face-to-face, shaking hands and looking people in the eye.

### **3. Trade shows deliver buyers**

76% of visitors to trade shows have buying responsibility.

### **4. Consumer shows create awareness**

Consumer shows are extremely effective for creating awareness. Where brand messages reach enough people to create a wave of 'word of mouth' advertising that will cost you nothing!

### **5. Use all FIVE senses to communicate**

This defines 'experiential marketing'. I saw it at an exhibition... Touched it, heard it, smelled it, tried it, liked it - bought it!!!