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The Top Ten Unbreakable Rules of Exhibiting

Within almost every sector, exhibitions play a major part of the sales and marketing strategy for many companies. Organisations, large and small, spend a fortune - both in terms of money and effort - in building stands aimed at winning awards. But there are two things that exhibitors **MUST** do to make sure exhibitions live up to their potential.

Firstly, make sure you have very clear and explicit objectives for being at the show, objectives that are clearly quantified and can be measured after the event. Few companies do this.

Secondly, share those objectives with staff who are involved in the event, and provide them with the training to deliver those objectives. Research - undertaken both in the US and the UK - shows that up to 80% of the success of the stand will be down to the stand staff. Nothing is more likely to spoil all your efforts than staff who are not willing to work the exhibition. And yet few companies devote much effort into this area, relying instead on cajoling unwilling victims, or accepting the offer of staff who relish the opportunity to spend time talking to old chums and running up large expense accounts. That approach will leave you with minimal results. Many companies do this and then complain that the event didn't work. What they mean is they didn't work the event. So, with that in mind, we are delighted to present our top 10 hints on getting the best results from your investment.

- 1. Tell your team what it costs to exhibit** - Add all the costs of your event together, divide by the number of staff, and then by the number of hours the event is open. The figure is usually more than several hundreds of euros **per person per hour** (we've worked with companies where the hourly figure exceeds four figures). Most staff are shocked at the figure, and it makes that late arrival, long coffee breaks and general apathy appear rather pricey!
- 2. Understand that exhibition visitors are serious** - Buyers at exhibitions have come for a purpose and want to be treated with attention; don't ignore all those people in the aisles. Senior people go to exhibitions, to meet new companies with whom they can work; these are people normally shielded away behind receptionists, junior staff and other barriers to communication; often they don't have time to see salespeople. Yet at the exhibition they are right under your nose - get out there and talk to them. Stand on the outer edge of the stand, look down the aisle, spot a friendly face, smile, and get talking. If they shun you, just move on to the next - it's their loss.
- 3. Think about how different exhibitions are** - Exhibitions offer a neutral territory, and many of the "rules" of salesmanship go out of the window. Because staff and visitor meet face-to-face, without many of the "ego" issues attached to our places of work, a slightly more relaxed approach will often work wonders. Research from the US event industry shows that exhibition leads usually convert to business faster - and with less follow up - than any other type of sales lead.
- 4. Remember visitors come in a variety of shapes and sizes** - Both organisers and exhibitors far too often get swept up in the "numbers game" of visitors to shows. Forget it. It's more important to remember the types of visitors an event attracts, and to amend your "pitch" accordingly. Exhibitions attract buyers, specifiers, the media, advertising sales staff, overseas visitors, end users, intermediaries, agents, franchisees, job seekers, consultants, etc. Don't think you get away with one standard 'spiel' for all those different groups.

5. **Never forget the time factor** - Your stand team must always have that hourly rate in mind when talking to visitors. Additionally, remind them that the average visitor also has immense time pressures; lots of other stands to see, seminars to visit, bars to frequent. So don't plan any long presentations; insist on a "ten-minute max" rule for visitors. Get them on, get their details, get them off!
6. **Remember why you are there** - Many exhibitors believe their role is to dispense, cuddly toys, brochures, coffee and general largesse to all and sundry. No; their role is simply to meet people with whom - after the show - there is the potential to do business. That, in a nutshell, means...
7. **Set SMART objectives** ... you need to be clear about what measurements you have in place to decide whether the event is a success or otherwise. After all, if you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you get there? In training jargon, objectives should be SMART; **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time** bound. Of course, they needn't just be numbers of new potential customers; meeting the Press, seeing lapsed customers, or increasing penetration within existing accounts are all good objectives.
8. **Get qualified leads** - Many exhibitors believe they are after "names" at an exhibition; nonsense; if you want names, buy a 'phone book. You want qualified leads, visitors from whom you have enough information to return to soon after the event with a specific response. After all, it's no good sending out your standard sales letter to a journalist or a potential job applicant. And don't throw your literature around like a spraying tomcat! Only hand it out in exchange for a name and address; better still, capture the data and offer to post out brochures after the event.
9. **Follow Up Ruthlessly** - There is little point in going to all the effort of organising your company's participation at an event if you don't effectively follow up all the people with whom you had contact. Common sense, yeah? **Well, around 70% of exhibition leads are not followed up.** What an incredible waste. Of course, there are many reasons for this; usually there is no effective grading system, so the "hot" leads end up in a pile with "just mildly interested"; at the exhibition you must grade leads, to decide both how you follow up, and how soon. Many companies get back their offices after an event with a pile of business cards and a host of good intentions. But they have been at the show for a week, during which time business continues, and their desks are awash with urgent tasks. Those business cards go in the draw for "later", and "hot" leads go "cold" very quickly. Successful exhibitors book follow up time in their diaries even before the show starts!
10. **Enjoy** - Exhibitors who complain the show didn't work are generally those who sat around their stands with bad backs and long faces. **The secret of successful exhibiting is simple; exhibitions work when you do.**



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