

# Everything you need to know about going to a trade show...from a 30 year trade show veteran.

## What do you need to know in order to go to a trade show?

After you decide to go to a show your first decision will be what size of booth space you need and where should it be.



**1. Your Finished Tradeshow Booth**

### Booth Size

Obviously size is dependent on budget but after that you have to think of your competitors' booths. If your competitors are all showing up with 60' x 60' Islands you're going to look pretty mediocre in a 10' x 10' booth. HOWEVER if the budget is really low, then you may not have a choice. If you do have a choice, try to AT least pick a 20' x 20' booth as that will give you a lot more room to work in with better visibility. Of course another essential consideration

when you determine your booth size, is the size of your existing trade show booth (if you have one) and what minimum size booth space it fits into.

## Booth Location

If you exhibit at the same show each year, then at the end of the current year's show you can usually go and



**2. Trade Show Exhibit Map**

pick your booth location before most of the other exhibitors do. The selection process is usually done on a matter of seniority (based on how many times you have been to the show previously and how big your booth was at those shows). The negative thing about picking your booth space at the previous year's show is that you'll have to pay your deposit right then (which can sometimes be a hardship after you've just paid for the previous show). So if you didn't pick your booth space last year, then sometime before the show, you'll be mailed or emailed a map that will essentially make no sense whatsoever [especially if

you've never been to that particular exhibit hall]. If that's

the case, it is a good idea to call someone at the trade show developer's office (a.k.a. "the show people") and ask them to go over the map with you. Review all the available spaces with someone familiar with the exhibit hall and how it's going to be set up. Try to pick a booth closer to the front of the exhibit hall or next to some rest area or eating area (that you know potential clients will be hanging out in). If the map you see doesn't have any decent booths, be sure and let your show rep know you'd like something better. There are often cancellations and booth spaces become available, so if you don't tell them you want something better, you'll never get it. Be sure and ask the show people if there are any columns or other obstructions that will be in or around your booth and if there are, try to pick another space. It's also a good idea to be near your biggest competitors (especially the ones that all your customers will go to see or all the customers you WISH were yours will go to see). If you're close them or next to them, sooner or later decent, potential clients will stroll by your booth. Be sure to read the show book. Then fill out all forms and write all checks which are due by the show deadline in order to receive pre-show discount

## Trade Show Forms

Sometime before the show they'll send or email you what's called the "Trade Show Guide Book" that will have all the forms you'll need to fill out to exhibit at the show. You don't HAVE to fill them out in advance but if you don't you'll pay more and sometimes get the bottom of the barrel when it comes to renting furniture and flooring, etc.

# Getting people to your booth

## Invitations

Consider ordering and sending out some invitations to your top customers. It's a personal way to let them know that you remember them and care if they show up or not. Make sure whatever you create (design & content wise) is consistent with your overall corporate brand as well as the show theme. You may not think you need a show theme but if not, refer to my previous blog posting ["What Mardi Gras Beads can teach you about Advertising"](#).



**3 . Trade Show Invitation**

## Invitations Ordered

Consider having your invitations (and all your trade show printing) handled by a print broker. People mistakenly think that print brokers are more expensive than going out and getting your own work printed but nothing could be further than the truth. If you don't believe me get your own quotes and then give them to a broker and ask them to beat them.....see what happens.,

## Mailing List



**4. Get a Good Mailing List**

Include existing and potential customers. It goes without saying that it's a good idea to send out invites to your existing distributors or clients but of course you also want to attract new clients. To do that call your reps at the trade show headquarters in advance and ask if you can purchase last year's attendee list. Alternatively ask if you can get this year's registrant list to make sure you're communicating with the people who are planning on attending this show. There are other ways of reaching potential new customers such as co-marketing with other attendees (who have similar target markets but who don't compete directly with you), local advertising, press coverage and distributing invites or flyers at local hotels to name just a few.

## PR & Advertising

See more things that you can do to get people to your trade show booth in the advertising section below. Don't forget to release a Press Release prior to the show. Call the show publication and ask them when the show issue will be "closing for editorial" so you can make sure your press release gets to them in time. Consider releasing some newsworthy product or other story to other trade related journals so you have

something to say that's enticing to get potential clients to your booth. Consider conducting a show event or contest or other promotion that you can announce in advance of the show and entice visitors to stop by.

### Comfort & Refreshments



#### **5. Serve Beverages In Your Booth**

Once you get visitors to come by your booth via PR and marketing, you can get them to stay by providing a place to sit and food and/or beverages (water for sure, and booze if the show will let you). Make sure you provide a place for passersby to sit down as well as a private area for customers and your 'higher ups' to sit and meet. Sometimes people complain about having too many people lounge in your booth but a) it's better to have too many people than not enough (think of your local

restaurants...do you want to go in if no one is there?) and b) if you provide enough room for people to sit down (and stay out of the way of the regular customers) then it won't matter anyway.

## **Trade Show Booth and Supplies**

### Condition of Booth

If you are reusing an old booth be sure to have someone get the booth out and set it up...believe me there's nothing worse than getting to the show and finding out your missing a piece that takes a week or two to reorder and replace.



## New Booth

Once you've inspected your existing booth you can decide if you need a new one....besides if you have to gravel in front of your boss you'll want to have all the information you can get as to why the old booth can't be reused again. I've purchased many a "pop up" booth which is convenient, easy and can be brought into the show without paying the "show labor" (union workers). If you're lucky enough to be able to afford a custom booth do me a personal favor and don't hire someone who's unimaginative. If you've got a budget to create a new booth make sure you have the help of someone who knows how to do this, knows how to save money doing it and can think out of the box to get you something memorable.

## Inventory List

Create a trade show booth inventory that includes every single item that is in your show crates. You THINK you'll remember this when you're packing up your booth at the end of a show but trust me, next year when you're getting ready to go to a new show you will not remember that one of the support rods buckled under the weight of one of your customers who sat on your counter!

## Flooring

Carpet or other flooring; is the current condition is ok? Does it need to be cleaned or replaced? Think twice about renting the show carpeting....it's usually gross and it's almost always cheaper to buy something and just toss it (or donate it) after the show. I used those puzzle pieces made out of foam once for a show and not only did they look great but they felt good on our feet. It's a good idea to try to think about providing a certain amount of comfort to your clients because it helps to get them into your booth and to stay there.

## Storage space

To lock up inventory & handouts; do you need to hire a cage to lock up the equipment or does the booth have a lockable area to put valuables? Do they need to be replenished from last show? If so what? Consider taking things like Windex, Plexi cleaner, Formica cleaner, paper towels, Velcro, scissors, staplers, screw drivers, hammers, tape (bring clear packing tape not only to pack up show boxes but also to run along the edge of your flooring...it's usually required by the show management to ensure that visitors don't trip over the edge of your carpet), vacuum / vacuum cleaner bags, writing pads and pens, etc.

# Shipping/Crating



**6 . Trade show Crates**

## Crates & Crate repairs

Does your trade show booth require crates? Don't forget to bring locks and it's a very good idea for your crates to have wheels. Did the crates survive the last shipment or do they need to be repaired or replaced?

## Shipping

Your shipper should provide you with preprinted labels either before you go to the show or at the show. If you don't have labels go find your shippers booth around the service area of the trade show and there should be someone there that can help you. If you know your shipper isn't going to have a booth at the show, be sure and take their complete contact information and name with you so you can call them to let them know you're ready to be picked up.

## Shipping Options

Research the different options and how it affects other costs: 1. Shipping with cheap shipper (not a common carrier); if you do that will you have to pay full price to get the products into the booth and will you have to hire a separate shipper to bring crates from airport to the show? 2. Or, ship with the show shipper; pay a higher price, but get the package deal to bring the crates into the show floor. 3. Or get a quote from a common carrier – other than show shipper?

## Credit with your shipper

Consider filing for credit with whichever shipper(s) you use, otherwise you'll have to have a check or a credit card for these people when they pick up your booth at the show.

## Target arrival date

Check with the show management to see what your "target" delivery date is for your shipment arrival. Most shows have dates that they want each exhibitor to have their crates delivered by.....and you might be penalized for "missing" that date.

## Lift Gates

If needed, don't forget to tell the shipper to come to pick up your shipment with a truck that has a lift gate. The main reason they'd need a lift gate is if you don't now have a truck height dock in your warehouse (or if you don't have a warehouse period. It's mighty hard to get those big crates up on a truck even with a dolly and a couple of burley guys. Spare yourself some strife by ordering a truck with a life gate so they can hoist your crates up into the truck without any stress.

## Furniture for booth

### Furniture - rent or own?

Keep in mind that sometimes the show furniture is really hideous so you might want to go and rent furniture at a local furniture rental location (but don't forget to consider how using outside vendors will influence OTHER show costs, because you almost always have to pay union people to carry in items from non-show related vendors). (you also may have to do the same with show vendors but often there's a package price).

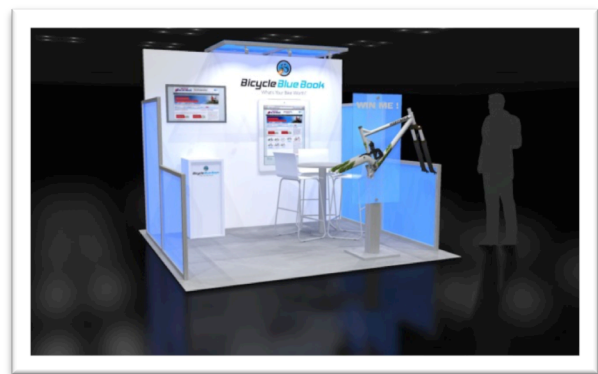
### Repairs

Condition of any existing furniture, does it need to be painted or repaired? Did anything break the last time around that needs to be replaced? Does the existing furniture upholstery and colors match your new show theme or will repairs and/or replacements need to be considered?

### More about renting

If you're renting them, have the forms been filled out and how many to you need? Keep in mind that sometimes it's cheaper to buy something than to rent it....even if you have to donate it to the local shelter when you're done. When you rent or buy anything outside the show you have to consider when the exhibit hall will allow your vendors onto the show floor to deliver the items among other nightmares (such as will your vendor have to wait in the line of teamsters to get into the exhibit hall itself and will they charge you more for this or not?). As much as the

rule books often tell you that each and every item has to be checked in and out....it's not always true. My sister and I bought a HUGE circular sofa and dragged the entire thing in through one of the side doors at a Consumer Electronics Show in Vegas (we did a lot of things like that to have a nicer hipper show when we knew we wouldn't be able to afford both the cost of the sofa and the cost to pay the teamsters to bring it



**7 . Trade Show Rental Booth**

into the show.....now mind you I heard of a guy who got beat to a pulp for doing this at the Jacob Javits center in NYC years ago but we were young girls and I can't say that didn't help us to get by with more of that type of thing, at least just a little)

### Trash Cans

Don't rent these.....that's ridiculous. Just buy some inexpensive ones you can hide under or behind the booth and donate them to the Salvation Army after the show.

### Other Rental Items

Looking through the list of “rent-able” items in the show book will usually remind you of other items you may need for your show. Keep in mind that 99.9% of the time it's cheaper to just buy the thing you're thinking of renting and donating it to a local shelter, but there are rules about getting furniture, communications equipment and other rentable items in and out of the show facility that need to be taking into consideration. If you can buy and donate the item you need without getting into a heap of trouble, fine; but if not you might want to just pay the exorbitant fees to make things a little easier for yourself.

### Booth Communications

Bring your own phone as it's much cheaper than renting a phone at the show (sometimes it's cheaper to just bring cell phones but the signals aren't always perfect on a show floor and if you do that don't forget to arrange in advance to get your internet connectivity via your wireless carrier as well).

## Posters/Signage

### Signage

Do you need to have any of the signage on the booth changed or can you use existing signage? If so, what is needed and where do you get it done at? Do yourself a favor...don't use those ridiculous white cardboard signs that the show often supplies exhibitors with - they just reek of cheap, homemade and unprofessional. You're better off not having a sign if you have to use that ugly dog. You can print your own signs that will be a huge step above the sign that comes with your booth by following a few simple steps:



**B . Trade Show Signage**

- 1) Graphics - Hire a professional graphic designer to design new layouts (this is not time to get cheap and if you use your head and get a professional design done for your company its going to be something that will do double duty for you – a good design

will help people recognize and remember you so they can purchase your product or service when they're ready to do so. Additionally, if you pack/crate it properly, you can use the signage at more than one show and amortize the cost over multiple shows.

- 2) Content – don't forget that there's more to good advertising & marketing than good design. You also need intelligent advertising "copy" or content. Have a writer develop the content for all your materials including your signage. The one biggest mistake that I see people making time and time again on their show signage is that they want to try to put everything including the kitchen sink into the signs. Think of your signage as a bill board. You don't write a dissertation and expect people to read it as they're driving by a 70 miles per hour and you don't type up your entire sales pitch and expect people to read it as they walk by your booth either.
- 3) Print Large Format Graphics – You can print four color professional looking signage at a large format printer. Kinko's, Office Depot, Office Max, etc. can all do this but they will charge you more than if you just look for a "large format printer" in your neighborhood (and by that I don't mean your local mail/shipping outlet either...whenever you go to a vendor like that you'll most likely be paying a premium). Large format four color
- 4) Other types of signs – Of course not all signs have to be printed on paper or fabric. There are many other types of signs that you can use for your trade show including Neon, Back lit, Front lit, Video signage, Electronic Message Signs, etc. I have used a lot of Neon signs in my booths just because they're beautiful and look at heck of a lot better than a "channel set" sign (the type you'd see on wheels out at a rural gas station or diner).
- 5) Packing & Shipping your signs – If you have a nicer sign, you'll need to properly pack and create the signs to be able to reuse them. I've always hired a local crating company in the city where the site was first created to build a crate for the sign. If the sign is originally built to be packed & shipped in a crate then it will be easier to slip a sign into it's crate, brace it and ship it off to the next destination.

## Lights

### Light Fixtures

Most trade show exhibit halls aren't lacking when it comes to lighting but a few carefully placed spot lights



can highlight important products or signage and make your booth look better. Consider if your lighting is part of your display or if you need free-standing lights...if so find something sturdy. Don't forget whatever you put in your booth is going to have to be approved by the Fire Marshall who will take a "walk through" right before the show starts so be prepared to have you booth shut down if you have some crummy lights that don't pass inspection.

### **9. Trade Show Lighting**

## Bulbs

Do you need to replace bulbs? (Better safe than sorry and having to run around a foreign city in a taxi or a rental car and looking for some odd sized bulb is not my idea of having a good time.....also it's hard to explain a huge taxi bill to your boss).

## Cords

I know it seems I'm being a bit overly "type A" but be sure to organize, label and inventory all the cords in your exhibit in order to make sure you can find them at the next show you go to. The last thing you need is to be driving around an unfamiliar city trying to locating some odd-ball cable for a lighting system or other equipment you need for your show. Consider putting all the cables that go with one item into a "zip loc" type bag and then attaching the bag to whatever equipment it goes with. For more helpful tips about packing and shipping your trade show exhibit, I'd recommend referring to a book I recently read about "Relocating your Business" because there are a lot of tips in there that apply to a trade show....after all, packing and shipping your trade show booth & materials is very similar to packing and moving your office from one location to another. For more information see: [relocatingyourbusiness.com](http://relocatingyourbusiness.com)



**1 O. Organized Booth Cords**

# Back-wall curtains



1 1 . Show Curtains

## Show Curtains

Use existing curtains that come with the show or opt for a different color curtains? Seriously try not to use the show curtains as your only backdrop – as they are too ugly...unless you're desperate and quite frankly you could at least have a custom set of curtains made (silk screened with your logo) and hang them on a secondary set of curtain rods (you can't take down the show curtains most of the time because the booth behind you may need them...of course if you're an island booth that's a different story all together).

If you end up changing the curtains, you'll need to address this question: do you “rent” show curtains or should you bring our own curtains? If you bring our own curtains, try to have them made in advance and ship with the booth. An 8' x 10" or 20' curtain may not be so easy to lug around. I had one made once out of that bright blue boat canvas and had it silkscreened with the company's logo – it was BEAUTIFUL. However don't forget that any fabric you bring into the facility **MUST BE FIREPROOFED** and you have to be ready to provide the Fire Marshall with proof that the fabric is fire safe at the drop of a hat. Make sure you bring that with you because at some point during set up the Fire Marshall **WILL** sweep the show floor and may ask you for this certification. If you are unlucky enough to have selected a non- fire proofed fabric for your new curtains (or for any materials in the trade show booth, for that matter, you can purchase a fire proofing spray that will fire proof the fabric after the fact but then you'll have to get a copy of the certification for that spray from its manufacturer. Keep this in mind and this is another reason to get help from someone that knows what they're doing. This type of work is more than just “advertising” and “marketing”. There is a whole set of rules that go with exhibiting at a tradeshow so if your marketing people haven't been to a show before you could end up with a last minute nightmare and a booth that looks like “figure 11” above!



# Catering for the booth

## Beverages & Food

Do you want to serve coffee or at least have a water dispenser? What if you want to have food at the booth or at a booth event? You have a couple of choices when it comes to food.

- 1) The Easy Way - The easiest way to get food for your booth is to have your booth or show event catered by the show caterers. Food is too obvious to sneak in!
- 2) The Better Way – you can usually get better food from a local restaurant as opposed to getting it from the show “caterer”. Think “5 star restaurant” vs. “Wedding catering”. Which one would you prefer? The problem with having your trade show or event catered from an outside restaurant is that the show people want to get their cut so you’ll probably end up paying more. However if you’ve got that cost covered by your budget it will be nice to know that people won’t think of you as the booth with the mediocre food.



**12 In-Booth Catering**

## Events

It's not a bad idea to have an event or a “party” in the booth at the end of one day – with music and catering. Just remember that you'll need to get special permission from the show management. Of course you don't have to have the event AT the booth itself....you can have it at a local restaurant or in the “show hotel”. I think that decision depends on how big your booth is and if it can accommodate the number of people that



**13. Event in Trade Show Booth**

you want to invite. If you invite 100 people you'll need room for all of them plus all the other people that show up just to see what is going on at your space.

Also consider hiring a musician or small band to provide entertainment (all requiring preapproval from the show people). We hired a jazz band to play in New Orleans once and it was really the hit of the show but we had so many people in our booth it was almost TOO successful.

Just keep in mind that having a lot of people in your

booth (even if it's towards the end of the day) can be a double edged sword when it comes to your neighbors. Up to a point your neighbors will be glad to be next to such an active booth but once the traffic starts to interfere with their ability to talk to their own clients, you may have an issue. Just be sure to be very friendly to all your show “neighbors” and invite them over early and offer them refreshments & libations to make any later inconvenience that much less irritating for them. Use a trade show event to make an impression on your distributors or retailers and consider inviting the press. If you do that be sure to have a press package ready to hand out to these people to make it easier for them to find out what you do and to cover you in their next article.

Also no matter what food you provide or what events you have, make sure they coordinate with the rest of your marketing campaign. This is where a creative team (an advertising agency) can really help you to think of some great ideas of things you can do that promote and support your branding and your campaign, while at the same time you are educating people about what you do and getting new customers. Never lose site of the ultimate mission or goal of your show's marketing campaign – that should be the first thing you think about when you're planning your show and the last thing you ask yourself if you accomplished once the show is over.

## Booth Giveaways

### Ad Promos & Getting your orders on time

One thing you see at many trade shows is a “giveaway item” also called an “advertising specialty item”. “Giveaways” include things like pens, flashlights, baseball caps, candy, t-shirts and many other items that are printed with the company's logo or ad slogan. To come up with a good “give away” idea you should work with an advertising group who has some creative minds that can help you think of something that supports your marketing campaign. Research giveaway ideas and go to an ad specialty website to look through all the different types of products that are available to be used as a “giveaway” type item at your next show. Consider giving away something that's memorable and preferably something that coordinates with your advertising campaign. I wrote an article a while back about the impact that a good “give away” can have (and even the impact that a crummy giveaway can have). You can read that here: [“What Mardi Gras Beads Can Teach You About Advertising”](#).



**14 . Ad Specialty Items**

## Promo orders & Timing

In order to get an ad specialty item for your next tradeshow, you need to make sure you order the item with plenty of time to go through the process. Giveaway items need to be researched, selected, quoted, designed, created/printed, proofed, approved, ordered & shipped far enough in advance so you can ship with your trade show booth. Of course if you don't get that done in time to ship WITH your booth you can always ship the ad specialty items separately to the show, but believe me when I say that if you do this a lot, you'll find you have a large number of things that you need to carry from your hotel to the trade show floor and that's not easy. You will be glad you didn't put these purchases off too long because it's just not that easy to drag in 10 boxes from the hotel to the show floor.

## Booth Security



**15. Trade Show Storage Cage**

### Product security

Most trade show exhibitors have and use a significant number of “portable items” including things like product samples, point of purchase displays, laptops & computers, videos, cameras, artwork and other valuable items that someone might be tempted to steal. Most show floors have restricted access after a certain time of day however there are still people who are able to access the floor and even laborers, cleaning staff, night-time delivery personnel and other show staff might be tempted if they see valuable equipment laying around unsupervised at night. You'll

want to find a way to secure your valuables at night so you don't return to your booth in the morning only to find it all gone.

Many trade shows provide rentable “cages” that can be used to put any small (rip off-able) items each night after you shut down your trade show. These cages come in all shapes and sizes and usually roll out on to the show floor each night giving you a place to store your portable items. Some of these cages can be rolled off by you each night and hidden behind a curtain; others will need to be removed and redelivered each night by the show laborers. In any case, be sure to bring a padlock with you to the show that you can use to lock your cage each night. There's not much use to load all your portable items into a cage each night that can be opened by any people who might be passing by.

### In booth security options

Alternatively if you have a solid booth with cabinetry, it's a good idea to pre-plan lockable areas with enough space to hold your smaller valuables. No matter where you store your portable items each night just be sure that whoever opens the show in the morning has a key they can use to access the locked areas of the booth. There's nothing worse than opening the show with NO product because the product is all locked away and no key can be found!



**16. Security Guard**

### Security guard

Another security solution you might consider is to hire a bonded security guard that would sit and guard your booth all night long. Security guards are usually offered at a cost by the show management but can also be hired from outside sources. If you hire a guard from an outside source make sure they're bonded and have the proper identification/documentation required to get in and out of the show each night. Security guards are a particularly good option if you have items that are of a high value or hard to uninstall and reinstall each day such as electronics equipment.

# Brochures

## Existing or New Brochures?

Do your existing advertising and sales support materials suffice to take to the show or do you need to do a new one specifically for your tradeshow event? Most companies use a trade show as a starting point to create new brochures and other advertising and sales support materials each year. The reason they do this is



because trade shows are often used by companies in order to display new products to their retailers and distributors each year - and their vendors expect to see something new. Retailers & distributors won't travel all that way to see the same old thing each year, so use new advertising materials to generate enthusiasm about your product.

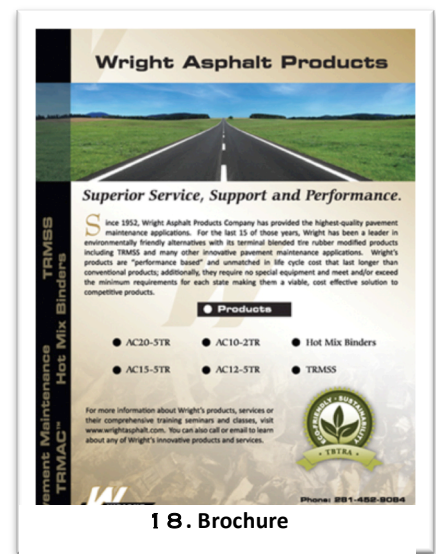
A good way to generate new interest in your new product or service line is to have a new ad campaign and include newly designed pieces. While it is important that all your advertising pieces are consistent so that your

clients know they're looking at your products, it's also important for them to know when you have something new. One way to do this is to create new materials (at least) each year and to make sure they have some repeatable elements that can be recognized as "your brand". Ad agencies take pride in being able to help you maintain recognizable "branding" while at the same time helping you to develop a new "look and feel" that can generate excitement each year.

No matter what printed materials you do for the show, consider how the show objective differs from your normal marketing objectives and make sure that whatever you do supports your tradeshow goals and missions.

## Show Special Brochures

In addition to creating a brochure that represents your company and your product or service line, you may also want a piece that talks specifically about "show specials" or special deals that are being offered at the show. If you are going to offer a show special it's a good idea to provide some kind of a "take away" that the customer can look at later when they're (hopefully) reviewing all their trade show materials.



### Printing & Shipping of Printed Materials



Get quotes and make sure you order what you'll need for the show with plenty of time to get the items before the show. Again I can't stress how big of a pain in the rear it is to try to drag in 10 boxes full of heavy brochures onto the trade show floor either by hand or with a dolly. Do yourself a favor and plan this in advance with enough time to have your materials shipped in with your trade show booth. That way the items will all be brought in by fork lift and you won't have to break your back doing it by hand.

#### **19. Shipping Materials**

How much time will you need to get your trade show materials created and shipped to the show? Here's a chart outlining the general time requirements for most of the items you'll need for a trade show: As far as printing your materials, consider hiring a print broker who knows where to get the best and lowest cost printing for you. A print broker can save you as much as 85% of what you're currently paying for printing and they often don't mind if you're not printing large quantities of something. Just keep in mind that the difference in pricing between 250 pieces and 5000 pieces can be negligible. One of the biggest problems I see when clients try to print their own jobs is that they think any printer can print any job, and this just isn't true. Oftentimes printers specialize in certain aspects of printing, so if you take a job to a printer and ask for "UV Varnish" then they will have to outsource the job and often you'll pay more for it as a result. A print broker can help you find the right printer that has the equipment needed to print your job in house and that does wholesale printing. There are a lot of other reasons to use a print broker but the bottom line is that print brokers can help you get BETTER printing and better prices.

### Price Sheets – Creating, Printing & Shipping

Do you need to do a price sheet just for the trade show or does your standard price sheet suffice? If you need a new price sheet allow plenty of time to discuss pricing issues with the corporate management team. Depending on how many price sheets you'll need you will either photocopy or offset or digital print the price sheets. It's cheaper to print offset or digital if you need anything more than a handful of printed prices. Ship to show with trade show booth or send UPS in advance? Or ship Fed Ex (depending on time)



## Tradeshow Materials Timeline

Item	Minimum Time Required	Preferred Time
<u>Invitation</u> to send to existing distributors or retailers	2 weeks	1 month
<u>Direct mail piece</u> to send to trade show attendees	2 weeks	1 month
<u>HTML email</u> to email before show to remind attendees of promos and booth #	10 days	3 weeks
<u>Ad</u> (for trade show directory)	2 weeks	1 month
<u>Brochure</u> to hand out at the show	1 month	2+ months
<u>Catalog</u> to hand out at the show (depending on products sold and size of catalog)	2 months	4 months
<u>Press kit</u> (with press release, photos, press event invitation, social media campaign)	1 month	2 months
<u>Direct mail Piece</u> for show follow up	2 weeks	1 month
<u>Sales letter</u> (show follow up)	1 week	2 weeks
<u>Trade show booth</u> – design and development	3 months	6 months
<u>Trade show promotions</u> (contests, giveaways, etc.)	1 month	2 months
<u>Video</u> (to play during the show)	1 month	2 months
<u>Powerpoint presentation</u> (for sales guys to use during sales meetings)	3 weeks	6 weeks
Please keep in mind that any and all of these pieces can vary in size greatly and a small catalog can be completed faster than a long one (of course). Also, a great majority of the time these time lines are delayed due to a delay in getting the required materials needed from the client in order to START the project. These deadlines CAN be met if the client provides us the materials we need in an unformatted, digital, pre-vetted (ready to go) format.		



# Advertising

Are you planning on advertising in the show magazine or in any other related publication? If so, check with the show to see what advertising options they are providing to all the show exhibitors. Obviously you don't have to advertise with them and you may want to consider doing some local advertising that is not "sanctioned" by the show management. You will just have to determine the pros and cons of each option and decide if it's worth the extra price to advertise via the "show" channels.

- Show directory – Does the show provide a listing for your company indicating where you are in the show? If so has your information been submitted to the show directory? Make sure your information is correct especially if your booth number been changed since the initial show sign up (that happens sometimes). I
- Show website - review the web related advertising options offered by show management including website ads, email marketing and digital show book listings.
- Other marketing options – see show book for other advertising options such as bill boards, radio ads, magazine ads, local TV, press conferences, show news releases, editorial content that's being distributed in advance of and during the show, etc. Remember that your potential clients are going to be out at local restaurants and clubs and there may be a number of ways to “reach” these people with your advertising messages.



**20. Show Photographer**

## Photographs

### Booth Photos

Over my career of 30 years I cannot tell you how many trade shows I've been to and how many exhibits I've designed, constructed and put up that I have NOT photographed. Quite frankly it was often because i just didn't have the budget for that when all things were said and done and in those days we didn't have camera phones! However, of course I should have done it myself for a hundred different reasons. Decide if you should hire the show photographer to photograph booth, hire a "non-show" photographer or photograph your booth yourself – even if you take a snap shot yourself at least you'll have a record of all the hard work you've done!

If you photograph your booth yourself, be sure and bring a camera (phone, at least). Take photos of your customers and any events you have at the booth. Make sure you integrate any photos you take into a press program and social media marketing efforts.

# Press Package

Trying to get publicity for your trade show booth and products has an entirely different set of rules and really requires someone with some knowledge about handling the press and writing press releases. There are about a thousand rules that need to be considered when trying to get the show magazine or local newspaper to write a story about you - too many to list here. BUT here are a few things to consider before you try to create your first press kit:

The first time I did a major press release that went out to all the major media it was quite a learning experience. I had released information about a product that helped parents to restrict access to TV violence (this was before these features were integrated into the television itself). I sent out press releases to all the major TV stations and Magazines around the time that the US Senate was legislating about TV Violence....so really the timing was perfect and as a result TV, Radio and Print media people were looking for a story that related to what was going on in Washington. As a result I woke up one day to an absolute barrage of calls from The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox news and on and on and on....I was literally freaking out trying to talk to all the media representatives and must have done a hundred radio interviews just that day. The reason that press release did so well is because it had a hook...a hook is something that is happening in the news that your story supports. If you make a product for women, then your hook might have something to do with Breast Cancer or some other feminine related issue. If you time the release of your information to coincide with National Breast Cancer Awareness week – you will be 10,000 times more likely to get interest from the press. Try to think of something outside yourself and your business that might be of interest to the news media. And remember, the press only writes what they think will be interesting to their audience. So if you're releasing a press release to a Car Enthusiast magazine, make sure your release has something to do with cars! If not your release will end up in the circular file and you will be disappointed.

## Timing as it relates to Press Releases

One word about timing – when I had that great press coverage I learned some lessons the hard way. I spoke to this guy that used to be on NBC who had a spot called “The Gadget Guru”. That would have been perfect for my story – but I had already given my information to USA today and so many other reporters that by the time I got on the phone with this guy, he was totally rude to me and said “why should I release anything about your product now that everyone else has already done so? I apologized to him and essentially told him I was totally wet behind the ears and he softened up a little. But he still didn't run the story. When it comes to public relations it's important to go after the press you want most, first. Otherwise you might lose your opportunity to talk to the press people that are most important to you.

## Why won't anyone run my stories?

At all costs avoid coming off like you are SELLING SOMETHING (even if you ARE selling something!). Press Releases are supposed to be LIKE they are coming from a reporter NOT like they're coming from the owner

of the company herself. One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they write press releases is that they brag about their products. When you write a press release you're supposed to be "editorial" meaning you're supposed to be LIKE you are an outsider giving an unbiased report about your product. The readers of the publication that you're submitting the press release to don't want to be "sold," they want to have an neutral report about your product so they can make their own decisions. If you want to brag about your products you'll have to buy an ad because this rule is carved in stone. So try to stay away from immodest comments about your product or the reporters who read your press release will know right away that it's been written by YOU and not by some impartial outsider.

A few more things to consider when you're writing a press release, compiling a press package or having a press event:

- Hooks – Start by creating a list of possible "hooks" for your press releases – as I've mentioned, a PR hook is something that ties your press release into current events, show happenings and other events & issues that will make your press release more than just a sales pitch.
- Press releases - Write at least one press release per product you are releasing as well as some background releases (stories) about your company or product history. Every show has a "Press Room" where exhibitors take their press kits to and leave (to hopefully be picked up by interested reporters). These days press rooms are usually digital or online, but sometimes tradeshow still have physical rooms where reporters can sit and write and have access to the "show news". Think about how many press kits will you need and prepare these in advance of the show.....be sure and deliver your press kits to the press room first thing because reporters often go early to snoop around and see what stories they can pick up on. Better yet get the press attendee list from the show management so you can send your press releases out to the reporters BEFORE the show. Keep in mind if you are talking print – the deadlines on these things can be MONTHS prior to the show so think about who you are targeting so you can figure out when you need to get your story to them.
- Press release distribution – As mentioned above you can still print your press releases out and leave them in the press room (preferably in a folder aka "Press Kit") but most writers get their press information online so you'll need to distribute your press releases digitally if you want to get in front of the right reporters. To distribute your press information digitally, consider using an Internet press distribution company such as "PR Newswire". These services aren't cheap but they are very powerful and usually worth every penny (as long as you aren't distributing a sales brochure to the reporters and as long as you are providing them with information that's genuinely interesting to THEIR READERS.
- Photos –Be sure to include digital photos with your press release? – Reporters are more likely to look at a story that has some kind of supporting images. If so provide a flash drive or some other digital method of transmitting your photo to the press staff.
- Folders – check with your show management to see if the attending press wants printed press materials or if they will only accept digital press materials. If you need printed materials, consider printing professional portfolio folders with your company logo or at least buy a pocket folder at an

office supply stores and print labels (that latter option is pretty crummy....so in that case you don't have the budget to do a custom folder, you may want to just do a digital press mailing prior to the show).

- Print lists – to distribute any press materials you'll need a press list. If you have been compiling a press list over the years – GREAT! If not you'll have to buy one or "rent" one. Better yet use a professional PR agency that knows these reporters and can talk to them one on one to pitch your stories to them. If you have something interesting to the reporters' readers and pitch it to them in the way they want to hear it, you'll be able to get the press coverage you want and press publicity has catapulted many a business into the success limelight.

## Web site

No one should go to a show these days without a website and preferably you need at least a few pages dedicated to the show you'll be attending. Your customers or potential clients need to be able to go to your website and quickly and easily access information about where your booth is, the dates of the show, when you'll be there, when your staff will be there, what they can expect at the show, etc. If you're having an event such as a "sales meeting" this would be a good place to list the event location /address, event time, etc. If you are hip enough to have a website with a content management system (such as a "WordPress" website\*) you can go in and edit your website's content yourself and perhaps even publish a daily show "blog" or conduct a promotion that would encourage show attendees to visit your site. Why not consider having some kind of a web based "giveaway" promotion (gift card or iPad?) for any visitors that go to your booth and meet with a sales person? \*a WordPress website is one that lets you edit your own content. Please feel free to inquire about this with us (see below).

- Promos - It's a good idea to do some kind of promotion at the show and tie it into your website. There are a million



21. Website for Tradeshow

things you can do and what you do depends greatly on what type of product or service you sell, your target market, your completion and many other factors. For this reason I highly recommend you hire someone creative to help you think of something

imaginative and memorable for your show.... and most importantly hire someone who knows how to handle web marketing & social media. If you go to a show without conducting a web marketing program you won't be taking advantage of a very powerful lead generating resource.

- Products & Services - Do you need to add new products or services (or the new show special) to the website? If you are introducing new products or services at the tradeshow make sure you have

this new information posted up on your website the day of the show. Timing is really important here because you may not want to post this information prior to the show – so you'll need someone who can do this for you the morning of the show. Nothing looks worse than going to all the trouble of conducting a great tradeshow and then leaving your website unchanged. Clients will check you out online and need to know that your website coordinates with whatever you are doing at the show. And anything you do at the show – that you post on your website – will be considered “current” information and will help your company's standing in the search engines.

- Sales Support Website – Consider creating a sales support website for your sales staff or an area where your staff can access all the new product information, for example. If you have computers at the show itself, then sales staff can access this information if they are confronted with questions they don't know the answers to. Additionally you could have sales schedules or sales training information on line that will really make your show a success.
- Other Site Changes - Other items may need to be changed or added to the website such as instruction manuals, show event calendars, booth staffing schedules, etc. If you have a section on your site for reps or salesmen, do you want to announce a sales meeting at the show? Make sure all the show related information is on the site for both your customers AND your staff. This is a lot to plan and think of by your self – so it's not hard to see the value of working with a company that specializes in making these things happen.
- Website Press Portal - If you're having a press conference, consider posting the press releases and the conference information on the website. Providing access to your press package online is just professional and classy and shouldn't be a big deal to do if you have a WordPress site.
- Show Specials – the website is an obvious place to list the info about any show specials you might be planning on having at the show; perhaps you could coordinate a daily show special with some other “give away” promotion in an effort to get your clients to visit your website?

## Products for show use

If you are selling a product you'll need to consider how many samples you need to bring and how many displays you'll need in order to show them.

- In Booth Inventory - Think through and inventory what you'll need for the trade show (i.e., how many products and how many groupings of products are needed? How many display areas will you need in the booth? Do you want to make grouping on the table where the company's president is meeting with clients or perhaps on the reception desk where clients first interact with your staff?
- Ordering Inventory - Do an order form to your warehouse/order department for the inventory that will be needed for the show; remember this inventory needs to be re-checked in upon return so save all packaging at the show.
- Point of Purchase Displays (POPs) - Get a matching number of point of purchase displays (if the product that's displayed at the show has such an item) and don't forget to develop any signs that you'll need to describe what your products are, the prices, etc.?

- Brochures for POPs - Also, get quantities of the brochures for each item on display, which can be set next to the product. (Do you need [plexi]-stands to display these brochures? If so, how many will you need?) Depending on the type of product you have, these items may not ship very well; these products may need to be taken to the show by hand or have them shipped directly from the manufacturer to your hotel. Be sure and conduct an inventory prior to the show and when you are done.
- Batteries/Power - Do your products require batteries? If so order in advance and ship them to your hotel to make sure you have plenty before and during the show. Alternatively if your products require power you'll need to plan in advance where the jacks are going to be and order the show "electricians" to come in and install those jacks prior to the show.
- POPs for Services vs. Products - if you sell a service rather than a product consider treating the service LIKE a product in that you'd create a point of purchase display (POP) for each service with the same types of signage and brochures that you'd put next to an actual physical product.

## Hotel, Airline & Car Reservations

- List of Employees - Create a list of all the employees attending the trade show and assign someone the task of researching airline & hotel reservations for these people – if hotels are held with a credit card, put last day to cancel on computer reminder system so you don't forget to cancel and get charged for rooms you don't need. (who, if anyone, can be doubled up and bunked into one room?)
- List of outside reps that will be attending – hotels & reservations for them? If so, who will be paying for that? Get approvals from management on this.
- List of customers attending show – are you paying for any of them to attend? Hotel? Airline reservations?
- Itineraries - Send out itineraries to anyone going to the show
- Auto reservations – for all of above (reminder: send out memo to employees reminding them to bring their proof of auto insurance and a credit card with space for a deposit to rent a car).
- Auto shuttle from show to hotel - Rent a nice car and use it to shuttle your show guests from the show to their hotels. That way they won't have to stand in the Taxi lines (like everyone else), they love you for it and save them a lot of stress. Also this will conveniently make all of your NON-customers take notice and wonder why they're not your client.
- Give out "invitations" to the above shuttle – Tell customers where to find your shuttle and use this in your show promotions; advertise the shuttle and tell visitors to stop by your booth for a ticket for a free ride in your company shuttle.



22 Travel Sites

# Tickets

- Order tickets - Order show tickets in advance to include in the mailing you're doing to the customers & others that you're inviting to the show. If you can get as many tickets as you want, then ask for them in advance so you can send them out to **EVERYONE!!**
- Other tickets – consider giving out tickets to your press conference, your party for your customers, sales meetings and any events in the destination city for top customers (football games, baseball, see if there's a special



Figure 24 - Waiting for the bus after the show!

exhibit in the local museum and get tickets to that).

- Ticket Ideas - At one show we did our booth like a



Figure 23 Creative "tickets"

"1950's diner" – we hired a beautiful, convertible 50's car that was color coordinated with our booth (naturally) and had magnetic signs made for the side of

it that had our logo and name. We used it to shuttle our show attendees during and after the show and handed out "tickets" to all our customers using those old fashioned diner receipts – you should have seen the looks on people's faces as they were standing in the bus line with over 300 people as we pulled up and picked up our clients to whisk them off to their hotels! It was worth every penny, believe me!

# Badges



25 Exhibitor Badges

- Employees - Get badges for everyone attending the show from your company and of course everyone who's working your booth, including your sales reps and other invited attendees.
- Customers - Don't forget to get badges, if possible, for your top customers.
- Vendors - Also, you may need a few spare badges to get vendors/service providers into the show to deliver flowers, supplies, furniture (if those suppliers are NOT the "show" suppliers).



## Booth work schedule

- Employee schedule- Do yourself a favor, schedule your workers to work shifts, and include your outside reps. Otherwise, the employees will end up having to work the whole show and be too beat to go out a night with customers and the reps will drift in and out of the booth and not be there when you need them. That way, if key customers show up, you can tell them the exact time when someone will be at the booth to meet with them.
- Dividing work into shifts - I recommend that the incoming morning staff be in charge of setting up the booth in the morning and the afternoon shift be the people most needed to wine and dine important customers. That usually means the marketing staff is there in the morning and the executive staff can show up a little later (after all they may have been out all night partying anyway and need to sleep in a little!).
- Schedule in advance - Make sure your employees and reps understand that you need their help BEFORE the show so they can work your schedule into their schedules. Obviously your reps and sales staff will need to have free time to meet with important clients and take them out to schmooze, but don't let them use this as an excuse to not help you at all during the show. Letting them know when you expect them in advance prevents you from being "left at the altar."
- Schedules to clients - Also be sure to send a schedule out to your customers before the show (perhaps when you send them their badges, tickets or invitations) so they can find out when their reps will be in the booth. Make sure this information is also online so any last-minute editing can be easily viewable by your clients and staff.

## Hotel Suite

- Off-site events - Consider renting a hotel suite to hold customer meetings/press meetings. Schedule beverages & food; arrange for catering if so. You can usually find event spaces at the exhibit hall but sometimes it's good to just get the heck out of dodge for a change in atmosphere.
- Off-site event products - Make sure you have product or service displays (point of purchase displays) for whatever events are being held in this room. Don't forget to include products that can be taken to this room to be put on display.
- Save money using employee rooms - You can use one of the employees' rooms as a "suite" if you're on a tight budget (but be sure to make your employees promise to keep the room clean for when the guests come over).

## Press Conferences

- Press conference or not? - Decide if you need to arrange to introduce our new products and service at a press conference. It's only a good idea to do this if you have something really newsworthy and interesting to say to the press....be careful not to gather a bunch of press together for no reason or your first press conference will be your last.



**26 . Press Conferences**

- Press conference support materials - If you decide to hold a press conference consider invitations, catering, press folders, press releases, press conference announcements, online press releases and all the other things that go along with any press event. Don't forget you'll want to have products or services with POP displays at the press event.
- Press list & announcement - Get list of press attendees to send a mailing to them in advance of the show. Make sure the event is listed on your website and consider releasing a notice of the event via PR Newswire.

## Other things to remember

- Take sales materials for use at a "reception desk" in your booth.
- Take a cooler or buy at location to hide drinks under the reception desk (unless you're getting the drinks from the show caterer and then you don't have to hide them)!
- Buy flowers at show destination (at an outside flower shop, so it's cheaper) – or if you're short on time, use the show florist.
- Put a garbage can in one of crates for booth
- Take a vacuum cleaner
- Batteries and cell phone chargers
- Cleaning materials, paper towels
- Consider having a place for people to drop their business cards
  - possibly hold a contest if you don't have some better promo figured out.
- Get the show badge scanner - it's worth it to collect the data on the people who visit your booth in an organized manner.
- Schedule meetings in advance with Press and Advertising sales people as well as the trade show management to discuss next year's advertising, press coverage & booth space.



**27 . Flowers for the Booth**



**28 . Your Finished booth**

If you are going to a show, as you can see, you may be better off hiring a professional to help you with your event. I cannot stress enough that you don't have to feel like you can't afford to hire someone like this. You seriously can't afford NOT to hire someone like this because of how much they can help you to gain as well as save. Feel free to contact us any time at [emily@mdept.com](mailto:emily@mdept.com) .