

BE AN EXPERT AT TRADE SHOW EXHIBITING!

By Steve Stepinoff President/Partner

Welcome back! Below is your very own Trade Show Exhibit Time Line Checklist, Secrets of Producing a Successful Exhibit; tips to avoid costly mistakes and a Detailed Checklist, not to forget anything!

Enjoy the tools and have a great show:

TRADE SHOW EXHIBIT TIME LINE CHECKLIST

6-12 months before show

- Register and reserve a booth space with the event sponsor and request full details on exhibit requirements.
- Develop a trade show marketing plan that uses a mix of promotional methods to reach prospects.
- Forecast your return on investment.

5-8 months before show

- Pinpoint the part trade shows will serve, as part of your overall marketing and sales strategy.
- Develop a detailed trade show budget.
- Determine the literature and marketing materials you will need at the show - and begin design and printing work.

4-6 months before show

- Determine your exhibit design, lighting, layout and graphics needs.
- Write your 30 Second Sales Message.
- Launch pre-show marketing initiatives to your internal staff first then your customers and prospects.

3-4 months before show

- Make travel arrangements, including airfare, hotel and car rental reservations and Passport/Visa's, if required by each country of origin. I.E. Brazil requires a Visa.
- Order your giveaways and promotional items.
- Settle on staffing requirements, develop booth schedules, and plan training sessions with your staff personnel.

1-3 months before show

- Put together follow-up packets to send immediately after show to leads
- Schedule staff training.
- Schedule dinners or other meetings to be held at the show with prospects, distributors and/or customers.

1 week before show

- Complete staff training.
- Confirm shipping arrival dates for your booth display, promotional items and materials.
- Double check that all action steps on timeline have been covered.

During the show

- Get there the day before to set up; two or three days if it is an International show to set up.
- Make sure all brochures/beverages and give-a-ways are ready to place out then stored locked up each night.
- Make sure your stand is clean each day before the exhibit opens.
- Make sure all your exhibit personnel are ready and there on time for each shift.
- Remind your staff to not use their computers and cell phones on at the booth.
- Keep track of all prospects with your exhibit show scanner, if at all possible.

Day after the show

- Work with your trade show company through teardown and ensure all exhibited products/brochures, give-a-ways left over are secure and freighted back to your company with tracking numbers.
- Ensure all loose ends are complete before you leave the site.

1-7 days after show

- Analyze leads, send follow-up packets, and make contact as appropriate. Most leads are converted into sales after the show with the follow up appointment.
- Evaluate success of trade show participation compared with objectives from your trade show plan.
- Have your sales staff follow up with the leads.
- Review your budget compared to your actual expenses for the show. Determine your return on investment.

12 Months before next show

- Make recommendations whether to participate in the same trade show next year.
- Include suggested changes, enhancements, and other trade show ideas.
- Schedule next year's exhibit space to maintain your space.

SECRETS OF PRODUCING A SUCCESSFUL EXHIBIT

You may have the trade show basics down, but to truly get the most out of a trade show, there are a few secrets that help you have a better experience.

Anyone can take on a trade show and measure their results by sales made, contacts received and a number of other data-minded successes. But there are multiple secrets to maximizing a trade show effort that don't necessarily tie directly into the sales of a given trip. These preparatory suggestions can help your brand walk away from a day or weekend trade show with important feedback, connections and business growth.

Have a Goal

Although there are many benefits of attending a show, you need a primary goal. A goal helps you make the decisions below and provides a yardstick for whether the tradeshow was "successful," and therefore whether you should do more.

- Make a sale on the tradeshow floor.
- Get at least 20 genuine prospects.
- Talk with 10 industry leaders.
- Find 10 good recruiting prospects.
- Find 3 serious investors.
- Ask potential customers 3 specific things for your market research.

Decide on your main message.

Just like your home page, you get 3 seconds to convince someone to stop at your booth. You'll need this message elsewhere (e.g. banner) so you need to decide what it is early on. Remember the goal is to get people to stop, not to explain everything about who you are and what you do! Boil it down to a single, short sentence.



17515 Spring Cypress Rd.
Suite C312
Cypress, Texas 77429
office 713.701.1728
fax 281.817.5478
stepinoff-crosier.com

Competitive Analysis

Your brand is going to be covered up by a number of competitors packed into a trade show's conference or exhibition hall. Whether your company is a first time exhibitor or a veteran industry leader, knowing what you're up against can be amazing preparation for building up a successful booth and experience. Analyzing similarities and differences between your brand and the competition can lead to insightful information that can be used to help your booth become a standout. Highlighting what makes your company memorable and unique is a great way to keep from blending in when surrounded by your competitors. Time to be different.

Network

While each trade show may be industry-centric, not every brand is pushing the same product or even pursuing the same type of customers. There are a number of ties that can be made on the trade show floor that could lead to innovative collaborations and exciting projects. Having allies within the industry is important when you're battling with a handful of competitors that do promote the same type of products and offerings.

Create Interest

Part of the focus on making your brand a standout stems from differentiating yourself from your competitors. However, another focus should remain on the potential customers themselves. Providing them with an intriguing overall booth experience can work wonders on your sales numbers at, and after, the trade show. The best booths understand that creating a great presentation and earning a great reputation can be just as promising as sales on the initial floor. The best relationships are formed organically and genuinely, thanks to an authentic interest in what makes your business (and booth) compelling. Working in conjunction with a reputable exhibit company together with a design marketing firm is a recipe to a successful exhibit.

Be Open

Plenty of business is done in person and after the trade show, but don't stress to be so limited in traditional sales or relationship building opportunities. Trade shows usually span a number of activities and days, so take every chance to connect with potential customers and clients wherever the opportunity may lay. You never know who you'll meet at check-in, lunch or the after-party, and it is the person you may least expect could be your best prospect.

Do not procrastinate

If you follow the above checklist then you should be in good shape. It is only when you have to enter into a show at the last minute could be much costlier. Last minute rush charges for late fees, printing of brochures, ordering your give-a-ways to get there in time of the show and airline tickets, not to mention availability of hotel space close to your exhibit hall. It is easy to forget something important at a last minute situation.

Schedule a Vendor Presentation

Most shows allow vendors to give presentations. Always do this. Even if just 20 people come to your talk, that's 20 people you get to talk to in depth for 45 minutes — far more valuable than talking to 100 of people at your booth for 5-60 seconds. I frequently get a few sales just from the presentation.



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Pick your Booth

Booths go fast, and location does matter. Booths next to the bathroom are good even though they're "in the back" because everyone's going to hit the head. Booths near the front doors are good. Booths nearer to the center of the room are better than the ends. Booths at the ends of isles are good because you have a "corner" which means more traffic and your stuff can spill out over the edge.

Design your Banner and Handouts

Printing takes longer than you think. Consult your in-house graphic department or outside design agency to keep you out of trouble and adhere to your company's graphic design standards. Plan on at least 3 people. You need two people at the booth to allow for busy times, to restock items, and to take breaks. Then you need another who can be walking around and going to meetings. Doesn't have to be a strict separation of powers, just need enough people to do all of the above simultaneously.

Finish all the travel arrangements

Airplane tickets, hotels, rent cars. Fares are cheaper and there's no last-minute surprises with things being full.

Decide how your booth will be different

Attendees will see a ton of booths, all essentially identical. A logo, a banner, some "clever" phrase. You have to do something different. It doesn't have to be amazingly unique, just different.

Buy shirts for each exhibitor personnel

With customization (i.e. your logo on a shirt), it can sometimes take a while, so get this done early.

Get Inspired

As much as you may be in rivalries with your competitors and industry colleagues, there's no denying that if they're keeping up with your business, they're talented. Use your trade show experience to soak in and absorb as much new and exciting information as possible. If another brand and booth is doing something unexpected and innovative, don't get discouraged by it - get inspired! Some of the best ideas can come out of being challenged and feeling the pressure of excellence around you.

TRADE SHOW EXHIBIT CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist to help you plan and prepare for your next trade show and make it great!

Booth Planning

- Contract with Show Management for booth space. Pay deposit.
- Submit EAC (Exhibitor Appointed Contractor) Form to show contractor.
- Contact exhibit house for floor plans, list of equipment needed.
- Submit Electrical order to show contractor.
- Order any specialized lighting.
- Order carpet, rental furniture, bag and coat racks.
- Order phone lines, internet connection.
- Order card reader.
- Order wastebaskets, booth cleaning service.
- Order water cooler, catering if needed.



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- Order any special handling, like overhead hanging signs, from show management.
- Get permission for unusually large or tall signage.
- Place flower/plant order.
- Order AV equipment rental.
 - o Flat-panel monitors
 - o Computers
 - o Modems
 - o Printers
 - o Sound systems
 - o Microphones and lavalieres
 - o Speakers

Booth Graphics

- Graphic Panels, vinyl signage, posters.
- Dura-trans (back-lit transparencies).
- Banners, flags.
- Booth property repairs, décor.
- Desktop signage, plastic sign holders.

Collateral

- New product brochures.
- White papers.
- Data Sheets.
- Catalogs & price lists.
- Ad reprints.
- Business cards for all personnel with your company at the booth.
- Schedule meetings with key industry analysts and editors.
- Build Press Kits and press releases for booth meetings and show press room.

Public Relations

- Order "gifts" for key industry analysts and editors with whom you have scheduled meetings.
- Have product samples available for media testing and review before and during show.
- Line up company executives for at-show media broadcasts.
- Get CEO or company executive a speaker role at conference (long lead-time).
- Set up a hospitality room for special VIP executives for a more personal selling.

Show Logistics

- Place staff housing order.
- Make transportation, rental car and airline reservations.
- Order name badges from Show Management.
- Contract with carrier for shipping materials from company.
- Contract with Van Line for shipping exhibit booth property.
- Arrange for staff dinner, luncheon or breakfast event.
- Order booth giveaways, bags, gifts.
- Contract for photographer (can be arranged through show management, or you can hire your own talent).
- Order booth uniforms.



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- Arrange for booth "talent" if needed.
- Create demos, PowerPoint customer presentations.
- Schedule pre-show staff training meeting.
- Create show binder for all company attendees which includes staff cell phone numbers, city and convention center maps, booth diagrams, restaurant lists, hotel diagrams, flight arrangements for all attendees, press releases, city information/sights and any information that company attendees might need during the event.

Advertising and Promotional Activities

- Run ad in show program.
- Web-site ads on show web site, major sponsor sites, your own company site.
- Investigate sponsorship opportunities at convention center/expo like badge lanyards, shuttle bus signs, attendee badge inserts, bellybands, message center sponsorship, coffee station sponsorships, attendee show bag sponsorship, kiosk advertising panels, etc. Each show will have different opportunities based on the city location and show management.
- Send pre-show mailer to attendee list.
- Run ad in national trade magazine for month of event (often 3 months lead time).
- Explore off-premise promotional opportunities, like local transit ads, in-hotel closed-loop TV ads, sponsored entertainment events, graphic decals on rental cars, movable billboards, banners, signs, giant inflatables, etc.

If you would like to learn more about **Trade Show Exhibit Time Lines, Secrets of Producing a Successful Exhibit or more tips to avoiding costly mistakes**, please contact me at **713.701.1728 ext.101** or steve@stepinoff-crosier.com and ask for Steve Stepinoff, Partner and President at **STEPINOFF + CROSIER**.