

Exhibitor Institute

Creating Successful Exhibitors Since 1989

Developing an Effective Pre-Show Marketing Strategy

By Fred Fox/ Executive Director/ Exhibitor Institute

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“With a show of hands, how many of you have a strategic pre-show marketing plan”? This is a question that I ask during every seminar that I present.

Almost no hands are ever raised. Most exhibitors don't see the need or the value in pre-show marketing.

As a matter of fact, many think it's someone else's job (show management) to bring the prospects to their exhibit.

Let's begin with a fundamental philosophy.

It's your job to get your prospects to your booth. Nobody else can, will or wants to. You need to. What if your competitors are planning their pre-show strategy?

Only you can specifically identify the unique characteristics of your prospect.

Only you can develop the compelling presentation that will reveal the benefits of dealing with your organization.

In the 'show' environment, most exhibitors are willing to settle for the fact that their best prospect may just accidentally stumble into their booth.

We need to take steps to *insure* that our best prospect shows up at the booth.

I believe that 15-25 % of your qualified leads should be developed through your pre-show marketing efforts.

Creating a Pre-Show Marketing Plan

- 1) Set an objective
- 2) Determine a budget
- 3) Create a profile of your 'Perfect Prospect'
- 4) Gather your qualified visitor lists.
- 5) Determine the type of campaign you will utilize.
- 6) Select the delivery vehicle's.

Set an Objective

As in any strategic plan, you need to have some sense of your end goal prior to entering into the plan. This number will be a reflection of your company's size, its market share, length of time in the industry, the quality of your data base, the ability and experience of your sales people and many other factors.

This is not an exact science. If you are creating your first pre-show plan, then you'll have to take a stab at some numbers. The key here is that, in the beginning, you start with some objectives that you feel are attainable and in the end you will have quantified data that will show your actual results. You keep building on this information from show to show. It's amazing how quickly you will be able to predict the results. Of course, the results will be a reflection of your execution.

My advice here is not aimed at the giant corporation that appears to have unlimited human and financial resources. Although these strategies would be just as effective for them; I'm aiming at the small company, the company that just needs to make this show work to sustain their sales.

Maybe I'm talking to your company.

Here's how I would start.

The pre-show campaign often has two target categories to contend with. One is an "awareness" component, where the objective is to raise the awareness levels of many of the attendees of the show to the fact that your company is in the show. This component can be rather difficult to quantify, but undoubtedly will have a positive spin-off effect.

Another category is the 'Top Prospect' component. This is the prospect that you can target and quantify and rejoice when they show up.

It's nice to be able to do each of these components, but if money and time are an issue, and quantifiable results are the goal, then I would opt for the 'Top Prospect' plan.

Let's set the scene. You're a small manufacturing company that has a 10' x 20' booth in the show. You have four salespeople and a sales manager that will be working in the booth. You can draw from a variety of pre-show vehicles to carry your message.

Developing a Budget

A lot of money can be spent on an extensive pre-show marketing program and I'm going to outline many of the vehicles available to you. You need to take a look at the resources available and what strategies would fit your companies needs and come up with a budget. This number can be tweaked as you go and based upon your results you will have a better idea what was effective and what was not.

It has been my experience that the most effective strategies are the least expensive but they require direct involvement from your salespeople.

Determining Your Perfect Prospect

Creating a profile of your Perfect Prospect is one of the most important exercises you can do. It will assist you in several ways:

- 1) Qualifying 'drop in' booth traffic.
- 2) Focusing your pre-show marketing efforts
- 3) Selecting the proper shows for your organization
- 4) Evaluating your performance.

It always surprising to me, how many companies participate in shows without knowing their prospect's profile. In many of the corporate seminars I present, we go through an exercise where we have all the booth staff write down the attributes that would describe their vision of the ideal prospect. Rarely do you ever get a consensus. I understand that there may be differences in the way prospects are described, but many companies appear to have no idea who they are looking for. When going through this exercise, don't assume that your booth staff know who they are looking for.....when I visit a show, any booth staff that I encounter, I ask them to give me a description of their 'Perfect Prospect' . I rarely get a clear, concise answer.

Here are some of the characteristics you should be using in your development of your 'Perfect Prospect' criteria.

- 1) What type of companies are you targeting?
- 2) What size of company can you service best?
- 3) What job descriptions are you targeting within those companies?
- 4) Does it matter where the company is located?
- 5) What other factors may effect this decision?

You can spend some valuable time discussing this. As you begin to see some differences show up, you may decide to begin to categorize your prospects into A, B & C categories. No matter how you do this, in the end, everyone needs to have a clear vision of exactly who they are looking for. In the case of pre-show marketing, any dollars you spend will be lost if you have targeted the wrong prospect.

Gather Your Qualified Prospect Lists

Once you have your 'Perfect Prospect' profile, you can begin to search for this person from within a variety of sources. Build your prospect list from these sources.

- 1) Your company client list.
- 2) Your salespeople's individual prospect lists.
- 3) Your company's marketing database
- 4) The pre-registration visitor list from the show or conference you are attending.
- 5) The post show attendee list from the show or conference you attended.

All these sources should be searched for prospects that fit the criteria set in your 'Perfect Prospect' profile. Ultimately it is your decision about your final pre-show marketing list.

Be it large or small, there is going to be a cost associated with delivering your message to each person on that list. The better the list, the more effective the results will be.

Delivering Your Message

Let's return to our small manufacturing company example and play out the scenario. One of the points to note here is: Pre-show marketing does not have to be delivered by the hundreds or thousand's, it can be very effective (often more effective) being delivered by the dozen. The decision as to how many are targeted may be a function of budget or the resources that are available to you to actually implement various methods.

About 2-3 months prior to the show, the salespeople in our manufacturing company are each asked to target their top 10 prospects and submit this list to their sales manager. This sounds quite simple, but in reality, many salespeople find it difficult to come up with their top 10, so to do this, they're going to have to dig.

After this exercise, we will have 40 names that we will direct our attention towards and our goal will be to have 25% of these prospects (10) actually show up at the booth. I know that 10 doesn't sound like a lot, but when you realize that this is 25% of the companies top 40 list, you can see how productive it would be if any of them showed up.

There are common elements that need to be a part of all pre-show messages, regardless of how they are delivered. These are:

- 1) The name, dates & open hours of the show
- 2) Your companies name and some information
- 3) Your booth number

There are also some other rules you need to be aware of:

Deliver your information to targeted, qualified prospects only and do not invite them to come and buy something. You need to involve their ego. Ask them to come to evaluate or give you feedback on certain elements of your products. At this point in the relationship, most prospects are more likely to come to help you than they are to come and buy from you.

When they do come to help, reward them for their time and effort with a nice gift. This is where a 'giveaway' really becomes a strategic tool not just something that is passed out to just anyone.

There is a great example of this strategy in the pre-show marketing video segment of this Exhibitor Success Center.

Now let's explore the delivery options. That is, how we are going to get our information into the hands of a targeted prospect.

Personal Prospecting

View the example in the Pre-Show Marketing Video segment. Having utilized this strategy with my clients hundreds of times over the past 25 years, I find it to be the most successful and the most cost effective. We rarely have less than a 20% response rate and in many cases much, much higher.

Telemarketing

Use your in-house telemarketer (this could be one of your marketing or sales staff that has a great phone presence) or outsource the project. Develop a script and a compelling voice mail message because in today's world it's hard to get anyone 'live' on the phone.

Direct Mail

Send a letter or post card to a targeted (properly spelled) name.

Email

Can be very cost effective, but with developing 'spam' and privacy issues it is becoming harder to utilize. Can be very effective with existing clients or others that have given you permission to send. Always give an opportunity for them to 'opt out' of your list.

Your Web Site

Be sure you put your show schedule on your web site. You may also wish to offer a 'Show Special' that prospects can receive if they bring a coupon or other certificate that has been downloaded from your website and printed.

Fax

Make it a 'one pager' offering a 'Show Special' and again, give an 'opt out' opportunity.

Advertising in Trade Publications or Exhibitor Guides

Can be effective and often best if used in conjunction with other strategies in an "awareness" campaign.

Brochures, Flyers & Coupons.

Can be effective in an "awareness" campaign if included with client communications such as newsletters, invoices, etc.

There are other delivery options discussed in the video segments of your Exhibitor Success Center.

Conclusions

Whatever Pre-show strategies you employ, you need to track and quantify the results. However complex or simple your strategies are, they will have no longevity if you can't build on the results.

If you have questions on the development of your strategies, please contact me through the "Access e-Coach" component on the Exhibitor Success Center.

Fred Fox