

# SMARTER HOME SHOW MARKETING... FROM NAHB

Trade show marketing can be a very valuable tool especially if you develop a plan. Before getting into the steps of a plan, let's first review the strengths and weaknesses of trade show marketing, and identify the problems it is best suited to solve.

## STRENGTHS

- Concentrates many face-to-face contacts in a short time
- Provides access to decision-makers
- Cuts through the marketing communications clutter

## WEAKNESSES

- Expensive, relative to other marketing media
- Dependent on sales lead management systems and the communications capabilities of your representatives at the booth

## BEST APPLICATIONS

- Prospecting among qualified audiences
- Moving prospects along in their decision to join
- Retaining and cross-selling current members
- Industry/competitive positioning and research
- Rolling out new products or services

**Now – let's get to the plan!**

## I. Select the right trade show

The first step is to find out which trade shows are out there. Once you can weigh and compare the demographic characteristics, location, timing, pricing, and other pro/con features, common selection criteria that exhibitors use include:

- Audience quality
- Qualified audience quantity
- Cost per qualified attendee

Before committing your money to a show, talk to the show management. They are the best source of information concerning their shows. Also ask to see the survey results of the previous show.

Questions to ask show management:

- Total net attendance in past 3 yrs
- Promotional budget/plans for the event
- Exhibitor satisfaction metrics
- Top-10 exhibitors and square footage of exhibit space

## II. Develop your objectives

Having clear objectives of what you expect to accomplish at a trade show will help you spend your trade show money wisely and effectively. Your objectives should be personalized to meet your unique needs and solve your problems.

Decide what you want to achieve before you plan to exhibit at a trade show and determine the metrics you'll use to measure success. This step is important. Having clearly defined measurement criteria will give you something to work toward once in the show floor frenzy.

Don't put all your eggs in the trade show basket. A trade show cannot do everything. Select one or two strategic priorities for each show and measure them well.

Here are some common objectives that will help you begin to think about your own:

- Generate qualified leads
- Introduce a new benefit or service
- Enter a niche market
- Build awareness
- Recruit affinity partners
- Recruit new employees
- Conduct market research
- Influence community
- Retain customers

## III. Promote the event

Some pre-show marketing will help you achieve the objectives you set and multiply the impact you're able to make while you're there, however studies show that this is one of the most under-leveraged opportunities in trade show marketing. Don't wait for people to stop at your booth – reach out to them before they arrive. Make them eager to come see you. Doing this can markedly increase your success. Some pre-show strategies to begin with:

- Communications to current customers and others in your database as well as lapsed customers
- Stickers or electronic taglines added to all business communications including letters, invoices, emails, etc. (ex. "See us at the X")
- Send press releases, related announcements, speaking engagements, schedules, etc.
- Some shows will provide an exhibitor with free passes to give to clients to attend

## IV. Optimize booth traffic

Increase the possibility of getting people to stop at your booth with your layout. Design the booth to be open and attractive and create on-site reasons for people to stop by including premiums, information items, contests, giveaways, eye catching videos, etc. If the audience is more diverse, you may find it works better to have a "storefront" area and dedicate a part of your booth space to a more closed environment where you can sit down with your prospects at a table area, and really focus on the advance appointments.

The signage of your booth is more important than you may realize. Think of your signage as the first impression you make on the audience. Your goal is to have signage that attracts the type of people you want to meet. Some guiding principles are:

- No ugly signs
- Additionally, no bad design
- Typeface should be legible at 30 feet
- Message should be short, clear and easy to grasp
- Eliminate buzzwords - industry jargon
- Stress benefits with words such as new, easy or proven
- If you have a headline that works well in your direct mail or other marketing materials, it might make a good headline for your booth signage

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# SMARTER HOME SHOW MARKETING... CONTINUED

A word on booth staff: select them with care. Like your signage, they help to project your company's image out to the crowd. Make sure everyone that works at your booth can communicate your organization's message articulately. Some suggestions:

- Select staff who are outgoing, personable, polite, well informed and professional aware of the interests of the attendees
- If possible, have a mix of people with product knowledge as well as technical skills – for instance at NAHB we like to mix membership staff with subject matter experts to provide a dimensional skill set
- Whomever you choose, train them in booth communication techniques and be sure they look sharp

## V. Capture leads

Once people arrive at your booth, you will want to capture information about them for follow-up and cultivation. You have about 30 seconds. Therefore, it is best to go for quality rather than quantity of information.

Consider the information you are gathering now as introductory data. This is not the time to get every possible detail. Your time would be better served to gather overall information and follow-up after the trade show.

There are several ways to capture the information you need. Which works best is a personal opinion. Sometimes the simplest ways are best. What you want to avoid is the goldfish bowl of business cards or slips. The minimalist approach includes things like:

- Contact information
- Show name, location, date
- Name of the rep
- Follow up plan

## VI. Follow up

Following up with your shot contacts is crucial. Post-event is where the real activity happens. If you have gathered sufficient information in your lead capture process, you are in a position to follow up with those people who visited your booth such as:

- Personal email thank-you note from the booth person
- Personalized letter with the information requested at the show
- Invitation to subscribe to the organization's e-newsletter
- Personal thank you letter from your president
- Reprint of an article
- Reminder of the final expiration date for the trade show special offer
- Always make the communication personal

Another savvy strategy would be to check your contact list against the attendee list and contact those attendees who did not get a chance to make it to your booth. Give them the opportunity to get the information and ask you questions after the show.

Here's a post-show follow up fulfillment checklist:

- An outer envelope noting the arrival of the materials they requested
- A short, personalized cover letter that acknowledges the prospect's interest, provides a brief summary of what's included and tells the prospect what to do next
- Your business card
- An involvement device, like a survey or a checklist of main areas of interest
- Packaging that encourages your prospect to hold onto the information, like a file folder

Ongoing involvement and follow up is important, too. Some simple nurturing tactics of your prospect list may include adding them to your newsletter distribution list, event invitations, announcements, etc.

## VII. Evaluate the event

Key metrics that have stood the test of time. Some are results-based and others are activity-based.

**Cost per lead** – Use the fully loaded investment as the numerator. This includes all the costs of the trade show including travel, hotels, entertainment, booth construction and related. Use the number of leads as the denominator.

When you analyze the cost per lead over a consistent period of time you'll be able to benchmark future event-selection decisions.

## Activity Based Metrics

- Number of visits to your booth
- Booth visitors by target audience
- Number of leads
- Number of current members met

**NOW IT IS UP TO YOU...HOW  
ARE YOU GOING TO MARKET FOR  
A SUCCESSFUL HOME SHOW?**

**THANK YOU!**

