

# Tradeshow Tip Sheet

## Tradeshow Attendee? Get the Best Out of the Show

Even if you're usually an exhibitor, chances are that you'll eventually attend a tradeshow without exhibiting. It's like living on the other side of the city. The experience is similar, but there are different goals, challenges and objectives. Let's look at several reasons why you'd want to attend a show, and a handful of things that you can accomplish while attending. And keep in mind that these tactics can work to a large extent as an exhibitor, too.

Some tasks and goals you'll want to do as an attendee include networking (always!), checking out the competition (naturally), looking over the hottest products in your market, evaluating how other companies are presenting them-



selves in a tradeshow situation and prospecting. Even if you're not on the sales staff, you should always be prospecting for the company!

To do all this effectively means more than showing up, grabbing your badge and walking on to the show floor. Nope, you'll need to create an Action Plan that can guide you through the show jungle and to the promised land. What's the promised land? More leads, more connections, solid information on competitors and products, of course. And a boss that's glad she sent you. And of course, you'll want to come back with an enjoyable experience right behind you so you can go to more shows!

## Create an Action Plan

All good things come from a plan. Well, at least that's the theory. To start with a plan, write down your major objectives for attending a show, such as 'finding new products for retail store,' 'going to three workshops related to business,' 'networking with 6 major industry suppliers.'

Whatever those goals are, make your list. Then add in sub-goals, such as what new products you're looking for, which workshops to attend and who you want to connect with.

Once you've determined your main objectives, make a list of secondary objectives. These could be items such as spying on your competition (even taking photos of their booth with permission), connecting with second-tier people that you may not have met before or making a list of competitors at the show (and what they're exhibiting), or even possible joint venture partners.

Then create a plan that you can follow, whether on your PDA, notebook, 3x5 cards or sticky notes. Just make it easy so it'll work for YOU.

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*Make a plan...  
But be prepared  
to make a  
mid-course  
correction*



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## Spying on the Competition

Spying on your competition goes into high gear at a tradeshow. Now, of course, it's all pretty much above board and out in the open, but it goes on at every show. Your company wants to know what the guys across town are releasing this year, and the company on the other coast is interested in your upcoming product or service releases.

Sometimes the best way to find out what your direct competition is doing is to walk right into their booth and take a look around. Of course it won't take long for someone to spot you (and your badge) and determine who you are and where you're from – so don't try to hide it. This way you'll get the standard 'company line' about their new stuff – a line that's been polished by their PR department.

But even this is informative. And there's always a chance you'll find a talkative employee who loves the sound of his voice and doesn't know when to shut up – and spill the beans on a lot of stuff. Hey, it happens all the time.

Another way is to ask people from other companies that you feel might be familiar with your spy target.

If you have a specific company in mind to investigate, it also doesn't hurt to check their website before the show for press releases or other info relating to any new product release. With current information, you're better prepared to know what to look for and ask about.

## Networking

There's no other place in business where clients, prospects, industry experts and consultants, management, interns and the like all get together at one place like what happens at a tradeshow. The larger shows are usually several days long, which affords you plenty of opportunity to spend time and get to know people better, whether a current or future client. Before the show, schedule dinner, lunch and breakfast meetings with folks you want to get to know better.

And during all of this 'work,' make sure

you plan a little R-n-R for yourself. After all, chances are that you're in a big city that offers entertainment you may not have in your town. Plan at least one night out with co-workers or industry colleagues if you can. Dinners are always great, especially if you're heading for an unusual restaurant, it will usually afford you plenty of time to get to know each other better in far different circumstances than you've experienced before.

## Bottom Line

With a little planning ahead, your tradeshow can bring you a windfall of contacts, news, prospects and even new business.

Face it: almost every one at the show, from competitors to clients, from colleagues to the press – are worth spending at least a little time with.

Attending a tradeshow is a bit like a hunting expedition. Line up all the ducks you can and pick 'em off



one at a time.

Oh, and keep good notes. Otherwise you'll forget ninety percent of the information you took in by the time you land at your desk a few days later!