

Tradeshow Tip Sheet

This month: Tradeshow Staff Training

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Tradeshow Staff Training

"Staff training? We don't need no steenkin' staff training!"

That may be. Is there more to being a good booth person than just standing there and smiling, no matter how long you've been there and how much your feet hurt?

"And beyond that," you say, "why would you want to bring in an outside trainer? Hey, they must cost thousands of dollars and gee whiz it's the stuff that we already know. And besides, with a new staff member, our Tradeshow Manager can just show them how it all works, right?"

As Billy Joel sang, "You may be right!" (he continued, "you may be crazy!")

You may not need anyone to train your staff. It could be that your staff is just you and one or two other people, and you've done tradeshow for so long you can set up the booth in your sleep. However, consider what a professional staff trainer might bring to you. Think about the variety of experience and background someone else brings. They probably have a perspective you don't. They may understand

the psychology of the tradeshow selling environment more than you and offer unique insights into how to take advantage of the situation.

In other words – perhaps you do need some 'steenkin' staff training' – let's find out, shall we?



What's the gain of gathering 100 leads vs. 50 leads? A well-trained staff can qualify more people by knowing how to engage visitors

Justifying the Cost of Bringing in an Outside Trainer

The most obvious element you have to overcome when it comes to deciding whether or not to engage a professional staff trainer is the cost. If you're hiring a pro from the other side of the country to come in for a day seminar, there's the cost of the trainer and of course all the associated travel costs. If you can find someone local, you could get by for several hundred dollars – if travel costs are low – but chances are you're looking at spending at several thousand dollars to bring someone in. So how can you justify the cost?

Tradeshow staff trainer Doug MacLean asks: "What's the cost of not succeeding as well as you'd like at a tradeshow? If you could bring in 100 leads vs. 50 leads, what's that worth to you?" MacLean says that with companies spending tens of thousands of dollars on the exhibit itself, and several thousand dollars on travel for every tradeshow, the amount invested in staff training is a very small portion of the overall investment.



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What Does a Trainer Provide?

Now you've decided to bring a professional trainer on-board for a session, what elements will a good trainer cover?

Most start with the basics: boothmanship skills, having an informed booth crew, and knowing when to talk and when to listen. A professional trainer can also provide company-specific insight into the proper approach to clients and prospects at the next show. This may mean that the trainer will spend time with the tradeshow organizer to determine exactly what those issues may be.

Tradeshow staff trainer Julia O'Connor says that "training builds on the basics of boothmanship and involves the process of a tradeshow, psychology of the environment, determining the ROI, the purpose

of participating, and the strengths and weaknesses of your staff." She adds that with staff training averaging about 5% of a company's tradeshow budget, often it's a 'no-brainer' when it comes to making that training investment.

Training gives all staff members an overall view of the entire process and helps them to understand how they fit into the unit and what makes them important. At a tradeshow, with so much invested in bringing each person to the show, the importance of each position is magnified.

Every company's reason for going to a show can be different with each show, even if only by degree. A tradeshow staff trainer can help illustrate to a staff how to get the most out of each specific show.

Defining the Job Description of the Booth Staff Person



Part of the job of the tradeshow staff trainer is to help the exhibiting company define what exactly each person at the show is doing. For instance, a high-tech company may have a software specialist that can address questions about how a piece of software works with a specific computer system. A food company may

have an extroverted staff member who's job is to hand out delicious samples and invite people to hang around and learn more about the company.

When each staff person is aware of their role in the team, the whole team can function like a well-oiled machine. It may mean spending time defining the set of job skills required for that position and writing a job description so that the right person is assigned to the position.

Training your staff can pay huge dividends after the show



A typical trainer investment is about 5% of your overall tradeshow budget

The Bottom Line on Tradeshow Staff Training

So—do you need a trained staff? Ask yourself: how is it going to benefit the company? If you think it's worth considering, take time to go over the following: who's on your staff, what their roles may be, how much time and money you're going to invest to prepare them and bring them at the show and what it will take to get the most out of that investment. These are real people you're dealing with, and the best way to get the most out of those people is to educate, inform and inspire them. Show them the

whole picture. Once they've seen the entire picture and not just their small corner it'll help them become the team player that you really need for the show.

A good staff trainer can help both the tradeshow organizer and the staff to recognize how the whole team functions – and that little bit of enlightenment can help the team improve by increments each show – which is where the payoff comes.