

# Tradeshhow Tip Sheet

This month: How to Pick the Right Shows

## So Many Shows, So Little Time

Before you start picking a show for your next exhibit, be clear on WHY you're exhibiting. Are you going to sell products? To pick up distributors regionally or nationwide? To promote your new brand? To do market research? You won't know what shows work the best until you actually talk to people that have been to the shows.

So get on the phone and do a little research. It doesn't take much work to find a list of previous exhibitors at a targeted show. Once you've done that talk to a handful of the exhibitors to find out why they go, what they accomplished, what they liked about the show, what they disliked. It won't take more than a handful of calls to get a really good feel for a show and determine if it's right for you or even close.

There are three basic types of shows: public shows, industry shows

and association shows. Public shows target consumers and are usually held on weekends. Industry shows are limited to industry folks and usually are held on weekdays. Association shows are often held in conjunction with conventions relating to that association (such as dentists, automotive workers, doctors, etc.).



## Show Information – The Basic DNA

As you dig into each show, you'll find a lot of basic information: who attends, how many attendees, how many exhibitors, the cost of exhibiting, and so on. Next, you'll want to determine the location of the show: does it exhibit at the same place every year, or does it move around? Is there just one show, or do they hold regional shows? Why do the attendees come to the show? Are they looking to buy something? Are they looking for education – to attend conferences? Most shows will also offer a breakdown of the various types of attendees, whether they are management, executives, decision-makers or influencers.

Once you've compiled your "Show DNA" crib sheet on the various shows you're considering, you'll be able to compare them individually. At this point chances are very good that you'll have a well-rounded understanding of each show. The next move would be to do a little more legwork on the shows.

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*To start your show selection, gather the show's basic DNA—the nuts and bolts of who's attending, who's exhibiting, basic costs and more*



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Location, while important, is NOT everything!  
More important: pre-show promotion, staff training and lead gathering, and post-show follow up

## Show Research

To continue your show research, it'll take some reaching out. The best way – if you can fit it in your budget and if you have time – is to attend the show or shows of your choice. By taking a couple of days and walking the floor, you'll see who exhibits and attends, how your booth might fit in the mix, what kinds of attention-grabbers are being utilized, and so on.

If attending a show is not feasible – or if you need that kind of information sooner – try calling some of the exhibitors. Most are willing to discuss their experiences. In fact, by talking to previous exhibitors, you'll get a lot of the inside stuff you might not find out as an attendee. They might reveal how their experi-

ence was with the show organizers, how well they did, what they saw as the pros and cons of the show, and perhaps even what results they got. The best bet to get this kind of information is to call a business whose product or service does not directly compete with you, but is more complementary. This way the odds are diminished that they would perceive you as a threat or a spy!



## Location, Location, Location?

It's been said that in real estate, the best location is worth more than anything else. Is that true of tradeshows? After all, you're renting a prime piece of real estate for a few days and you want to make sure it's got the best location you can get. The right location can enhance your traffic. And the best location is typically where people HAVE to pass – such as to restrooms, concession stands, entrances and exits.

To get the best usage out of your traffic, an island booth is the top choice. However, an island booth is the most expensive, too, so that's got to be part of your equation. An island booth will attract traffic from all four sides. The second best location would be what's called an 'endcap,' of the end of a row of aisles. Ideally, this will leave three sides of your booth open. Third best would be an inline booth at the end of a row, so that the traffic from two rows

would have access to your booth.

Chances are good that you can improve your location by getting to know the event manager (if it's a small enough event). Stay in touch and let him know you're looking to upgrade your location. You can also ask the manager when you arrive (before you set up) if there have been any cancellations. If so, review the space and determine if it really IS any better than the one you already have booked.

However, LOCATION – while important – is NOT the only consideration. More important is your pre-show promotion, staff training and lead gathering, and post-show follow up. That's what will determine your bottom line results.

## Now That You've Picked Your Show...

So you've chosen a few shows. Now's the time to make the commitment. Create a year-long calendar and schedule you company in a few shows that you feel are the best choice for now. Plan on exhibiting at perhaps no more than 2 or 3 if you're a first-time exhibitor. At the end of each show, do a thorough analysis to learn your strengths and weaknesses. If after a year of exhibiting you're showing

good results, look to ramp up your exhibiting efforts.

Remember that your plan can – and should – evolve as your information and experience change.