

12 Tips for Increasing Your Trade Show Success

Trade shows are a great way to get to know your market and introduce your product or service to a wide audience. But they can also be expensive and time-consuming. To make sure you get the most return on your trade show investment, use these easy and low-cost ideas.

- Attend a few shows before you exhibit. This is especially helpful if you don't have a trade show budget right now, because you can study competitors' exhibits and swag to see what people respond to.
- Be a speaker or panel expert – whether you exhibit or not. This builds your credibility and is a perfect way to meet colleagues and clients.
- Before you sign a contract, talk to businesses who have attended the show before. While trade show companies hype their events, past exhibitors will tell you the truth.
- Don't exhibit at a new trade show. Because they're untested venues you can't know how many people will attend.
- Exhibit at an unlikely trade show, like NordicTrack. Rather than exhibit at fitness shows, where they'd be one among many with similar offerings, NordicTrack sets up at dental trade shows. They really stand out and offer an alternative to the "same old same old" of the other booths. They know their target demographic is very similar to the dental shows' and take advantage of it.
- Let people know you'll be at the show. Announce the show to clients, vendors, partners, even family and friends. They may attend the show or pass on the information to those who will.
- Be prepared. Trade shows involve sales, and because attendees move from booth to booth you have to know how to quickly qualify people and generate leads.
- Follow-up with leads immediately after the show. If you wait more than a few days your leads may not remember you and their interest in your product or service will have waned.
- Use excitement to make your business stand out. Joseph Cossman, inventor of the toy Spud Gun, ordered hundreds of pounds of potatoes and invited kids from an orphanage to come and play at the trade show. Needless to say, the Spud Gun was the hit of the show.
- Seek advice from trade show veterans, websites, and books.
- If the show is out of town, arrive a couple days early to network with fellow exhibitors and the show's organizers. Ask the organizers if you can help – it will make a positive impression. Arriving early also means you'll be rested and rarin' to go!
- Take care of yourself while you're exhibiting. Drink lots of water, wear comfortable shoes, eat well, go to bed at night, and avoid alcohol (these last two go hand-in-hand; going to bed means you won't be at the hotel lounge!).