

Trade Shows: Good or Bad for New Vendors?



By Anthony Raissen

Industry trade shows present a great opportunity for manufacturers and entrepreneurs to meet with — and to present their products to — retail stores. Over the years, I have found that many companies put all their efforts into getting ready for a show, making sure that they have an attractive booth with great graphics and all the hoopla that they can put together. By the time the show arrives, they are usually relieved that the deadlines are over, and they can focus on the task at hand: pitching accounts to buy their products.

Unfortunately many companies just don't know how to maximize trade shows and work with retailers, each of which has different requirements.

Take a quick look at some things every product marketer needs to focus on in order to maximize the potential and opportunities from participating and exhibiting at a show.

Pre-Show:

- › Invite buyers to your booth through clever E-mails and interesting formal invitations
- › Have enough samples, selling materials and business cards for both the show and social events
- › Participate in pre-show seminars and events
- › Prepare a concise pitch for your product: imagine you are being interviewed on national television and have 60 seconds to tell the entire country why they need to buy your product
- › Be prepared to pitch your item(s) at a moment's notice
- › Have samples and a one-page sales sheet/leave-behind at your fingertips
- › Attempt to close the order by getting a response
- › Use the new item/new product showcase available at most shows to present your item(s) in a unique, attention-grabbing manner

- › Create your marketing and advertising plans well ahead of any such shows or retail presentations in order to answer the first question you will be asked: "What are your marketing and advertising plans and budgets?"

- › Plan for follow up ahead of time
- › Have a sales force and broker network in place ahead of time, which will help you to hit the ground running when you are ready to proceed

At the Show:

- › Prepare your booth by making the best use of the space you have
- › Present yourself and your product in a professional manner; be confident that your product is a winner
- › Don't make commitments or deals that you will not be able to live up to after the show
- › Don't slouch in a chair and give the appearance that you would rather not be bothered, but rather be prepared engage people in conversation
- › Show enough products to get the message across of who you are and what you're selling
- › Make the booth inviting by using props that are relevant to your product
- › Keep your booth uncluttered and not over-crowded with extra non-essential people
- › Make sure buyers are able to leave with a sample and selling material if they desire it
- › If you don't have brokers or a sales force in place, the show is a great venue for meeting with and selecting potential brokers and salespeople
- › Use every opportunity to engage potential customers before the show doors open, as well as after the show, if there is an industry gathering
- › Be persistent without being too pushy: there is a delicate balance of knowing when to back off

Post-Show:

- › Follow up in a timely manner with the right communication for each account; wait a few days for buyers to return to work and then start following up, making sure you respond within two weeks
- › Don't be discouraged if you do not receive a response to your follow-up — be persistent
- › Make follow-up appointments
- › Send out samples to interested parties
- › Keep potential accounts informed when you get orders from other accounts: success brings along more success ■

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