



The Single Most Important Factor Impacting Exhibiting ROI: Pre-Show Marketing

By Jefferson Davis, Competitive Edge

Most exhibit marketing managers I speak to today are concerned about the cost of exhibiting. And many are facing increased pressure from senior management to justify the exhibiting investment.

While many factors contribute to exhibiting ROI, the single most important factor that determines whether your exhibit delivers value, and therefore ends up as a “productive investment”, or just an “expensive appearance” is your ability to attract and interact with enough of the right attendees.

At the end of the show, it really doesn't matter how big and pretty your booth is, how great your products or services are, how knowledgeable and friendly your booth staff, or even where you're located on the show floor. If you don't get enough of the right people to your exhibit, odds are high that you're not going to get the value and ROI you want.

One of the biggest mistakes I see exhibitors of all types and sizes make is what I call “exhibiting by hope”. This means just renting space, showing up, and hoping attendees enter the exhibit hall, pass their booth, and stop.

According to CEIR research, the average attendee only stops at 26 to 31 exhibits during their time at a show. And over half of their exhibit stops are planned before they get to the show. The single most important thing you must do to ensure your exhibit delivers value and return on investment is develop and execute a targeted, integrated pre- and at-show marketing campaign.

To make sure your exhibit program is positioned to deliver ROI:

1. Start off by investing at least 15% of your total show budget into promoting your exhibit to drive qualified traffic.
2. Develop a crystal-clear value proposition giving attendees specific reasons why to put your exhibit on their “must-see” list.
3. Communicate your value proposition through as many different marketing media as your budget, skill set, and bandwidth allow.
 - Start by promoting your participation on your website and through sales and distribution channels. Use social media, email, direct mail, PR, and print advertising in trade journals and show publications.
 - Then, think about the attendee journey from when they land at the airport, to when they enter the exhibit hall. Look for every visibility opportunity that fits

your budget. You might use signage in baggage claim and on taxis. Consider billboards, hotel signs and room drops.

- In the convention center, there may be digital signage and meter boards. Consider sponsoring high-visibility events. Invest in show sponsored products like lanyards, badge inserts, and attendee bag inserts. Don't forget to carry your social media activity at the show site.

If ROI is the name of your exhibiting game, then developing and executing a targeted, integrated pre-and at-show marketing campaign is the playbook.

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