



How Sales Reps Can Better Use Shows to Achieve Sales Goals

By Jefferson Davis, Tradeshow Turnaround Artist, Competitive Edge

On a recent flight to a show in Chicago, I had a conversation with a gentleman sitting next to me that was eye-opening, and unfortunately all too common.

I began the conversation by asking him, “Are you going to the show?” He replied with a not too enthusiastic “yes”. I asked, “Are you an exhibitor or attendee?”. He said, “Exhibitor.” I asked, “What does your company do?”. He said, “We sell medical devices”. I followed with, “And what do you do with your company?”. He said, “I’m in sales”. I finally asked, “And what are you doing at the show?”. His reply was, “I am going to go do my time in the booth.”

So I carried on wanting to learn more about his company’s presence at the show. I asked, “How large is your booth?” and “Do you demonstrate product in your booth?”. He said they had a large booth and they do demonstrate the product.

Based on this brief conversation, I was able to make a few quick observations:

1. His company was spending a lot of money on this show.
2. He was not excited about going to the show.
3. With his perspective and attitude toward the show, he was not going to deliver much, if any, value for his company.

The truth is this gentleman would have been better off staying home and not wasting his company’s money.

Unfortunately, because this type of conversation has happened so many times over the years, it made me ask a very important question: “Why is it that so few sales people really like working tradeshow?”

While there are many answers to this question, let’s instead focus on a **perspective** and a powerful **strategy** that can help more sales people understand the value they can receive from shows.

The Perspective:

Sales people understand that face-to-face contact with customers and prospects is critical to acquiring, keeping, and increasing the value of a customer. They also know it is getting harder and harder in the field to get quality face time with customers and prospects. And, to make matters worse, they are getting face time with fewer people per day or per week than even a few years ago.

Given the importance of face to face contact and the fact that it’s getting harder to achieve this contact in the field, some sales people need to re-evaluate how they view tradeshow and develop a specific plan to take better advantage of the tremendous opportunity a shows present.

Sales people need to realize that shows present the opportunity for them to get face to face with:

1. more people in an hour than they see in a week,
2. more people in a day than they see in a month,
3. more people in four days than they see in a three months in the field.

Couple this perspective with the fact that the customer/prospect comes to you, with a relatively open mind, in your booth (an environment hyper-conducive to talking and doing business), and your sales people should start to see real opportunity shows offer them.

Still some salespeople will say, “Those may not be the right people.” To them, say “Why not? They could be if you wanted them to be.”

The Strategy:

Here’s a proven strategy you can use to help your sales people take better advantage of the show’s opportunity and achieve their sales goals.

Step One: At least eight weeks before the show, sit down with your sales people and create a contact list of at least ten customers, ten prospects and ten suspects that they really want to see at the show. Be sure to include complete contact information with email, telephone and cell phone, if possible.

- **Customers:** You are already doing business with them. There are four powerful reasons to engage customers at the show: 1.) relationship management, 2.) cross or up selling, 3.) keep your ears to the ground for change and 4.) advocacy. For each customer on your list quickly review their history and set one or more objectives for the visit.
- **Prospects:** You are actively in the sales cycle with them. The primary reason to engage prospects at the show is to advance them to the next step in the sales cycle. Maybe even closure! For each prospect on your list identify where you are in the sales cycle and determine how you can use the show to move them forward.
- **Suspects:** You know they could benefit from your product or service, but you have no meaningful dialogue or relationship with them. The primary reason to engage them at the show is to open the door and begin the sales relationship.

Step Two: Develop a personalized, multi-media and multi-touch marketing campaign to get them to the show and to your exhibit. Strive for at least three touches and ideally five touches in the days and weeks leading up to the show. The objective is to secure a confirmed appointment or a verbal agreement to meet at the show. Here’s a sample five-touch campaign with media and timelines;

1. 4-5 weeks prior: Personal Letter of Invitation by Fed-Ex, Express or Priority Mail
2. 3-4 weeks prior: Follow-up Email
3. 2-3 weeks prior: Personal Phone Call
4. 1-2 weeks prior: Reminder Email
5. First day of show: Reminder E-Mail or Cell Phone Call

If the salesperson on the flight next to me had the perspective described above and executed five touch points with his customers, prospects and suspects, I am confident we would have had a whole different conversation. He would have been excited to go the show knowing he would be investing his time with thirty high-value visitors of which he was already “in their mind” and “on their agendas”. Now that’s what I call a tradeshow turnaround!

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