

## TIDBIT CORNER

# 9 Steps to Revitalize Your Conference Marketing Strategy

### MARKETING

B2B marketers continue to rate in-person events as their most effective tactic (71%), according to the [2013 B2B Enterprise Content Marketing Report](#). However, to make the most of an event, and see real return on your (substantial!) investment, you need to create a solid strategy and execute it properly.

If you've been to a tradeshow/conference, you've seen the disparity. Half of the booths seem to be lively, attracting large crowds, generating buzz and full of energy. The other half seem to generate no interest and are filled with employees who look bored and envious of the booths around them.

So while some companies seem to benefit from tradeshows, many come home wondering whether their time and money was worth it. With some proper strategizing and planning, your tradeshow efforts can get the buzz and results that you need it to. Here are 9 steps to revitalizing your tradeshow/conference marketing strategy.

#### **1. Plan way in advance**

Many times companies either register far in advance for the tradeshow, and then forget about it; or they're last-minute and reactionary with picking the tradeshows they participate in. Either way, to do tradeshows right, you need to begin your planning long in advance. Planning for a tradeshow isn't just about booking flights and hotel rooms for your staff. It should be a very strategic process, where every aspect of your tradeshow: pre-show, during-show, and post-show are all meticulously thought-through and tied back to a strategy and aligned with your business goals and objectives.

#### **2. Determine tradeshow/conference goals beforehand**

What are you looking to accomplish at the tradeshow? What's your purpose for being there? For some companies it may be simply about generating buzz and awareness for the company itself or perhaps for a new product you're launching. For others, there might be specific sales-related objectives such as generating a certain number of leads and opportunities, or capturing as many target-rich contacts as possible for your email database. It may be a combination of all of these objectives.

The point is, determine in advance, long before the event, what it is you actually are looking to accomplish because EVERYTHING you do related to the tradeshow should be connected back to accomplishing your event objectives. Be sure to set specific, quantifiable metrics for measuring the success of your tradeshow.

#### **3. Be a speaker, don't just exhibit**

Having a booth is great, but the platform that being a speaker provides is tough to beat. Speaking on a topic of expertise to a targeted audience provides instant credibility. It also provides a great opportunity to cross promote your booth happenings as well as giving your booth staff something to talk to visitors about. The slide deck from your presentation can also be used as content to nurture leads and prospects after the tradeshow. Most tradeshows have a process for finding speakers, so you need to look into it and submit a proposal long in advance.

#### 4. Spread the word in advance of the event

Don't wait until the tradeshow to start generating buzz; get buzzing before the event. You could host a webinar as a countdown for the show, post on social media channels, or publish a press release online about what your company will be featuring at the show. For larger tradeshow, consider writing a series of blog posts as a guide to the event, like:

- Speakers not to miss
- Sessions to attend
- Breakout sessions that employees are leading
- What you're featuring at the show
- Other important event info

In addition, take the opportunity to personally invite prospects and customers to meet you at the tradeshow. Based on what you've planned for the show (presentation, promotion, new product launch, demos, free consulting time, etc.), give them a good reason to show up to your booth or session. Some shows offer private meeting rooms, so you can work ahead to schedule appointments for demos or other meetings.

#### 5. Design your booth and messaging to make an impact

In a sea of booths, often on either side of crowded aisles, you have mere seconds to attract a passerby to your booth. So, creating a powerful visual impact with simple and clear messaging is very important to lure people in. Your booth is intended to be a backdrop, not a brochure. This can't be overstated: people walking by should be able to **instantly** recognize who you are and what you do. It's your booth staff's job to take it from there. Also, be sure your brand is prominent and consistent with your other marketing materials.

#### 6. Make your booth space open and inviting

Know your booth setup in advance: the dimensions of your space, where it is in the room, ceiling height, access to lighting or electricity, etc. This will determine how you set up your presence. Having a table across the front of the booth space can make it appear closed off and uninviting. Instead, create a space where people can enter without feeling trapped. You can create different stations in the space for people to learn about your company and products or services.

#### 7. Develop an engagement plan

Your booth should be staffed with energetic and enthusiastic employees who enjoy connecting with tradeshow attendees and are implementing the strategy you defined long before they arrive. Working on laptops or tablets, scanning emails on smartphones and sitting down in chairs sends negative signals to a passerby. Your staff is there to work the booth, so that should be the primary focus.

In addition to having engaging conversations, consider something else to lure in an audience and create some hype. Contests, promotions, giveaways and other creative methods have all been used to help companies achieve their tradeshow goals. But it's more than just swag and iPad giveaways, you need to have a plan of action for generating conversations, identifying legitimate leads and capturing their contact information through a scanner or landing page. This will be helpful when beginning the lead nurturing process after the event.

## **8. Create a post-event follow-up strategy**

Just because the tradeshow is over, that doesn't mean your work is done. This is where many companies' tradeshow efforts miss the mark. Follow up with the attendees that visited your booth and gave you their contact information. However, don't mistake all these contacts as warm leads and try to immediately sell to them. Send them an email to thank them for stopping by, offer them a free download of your presentation and try to gauge their interest. By the number of unsubscribes you get from your initial email, you'll pretty quickly know who was interested in your company and who just wanted that iPad you gave away.

For those contacts remaining, set up a lead nurturing campaign. This will help determine which prospects are worth pursuing and save your sales team a lot of time and energy. Keep the buzz going by generating post-tradeshow content on your blog and social media channels. And lastly, measure the results of your efforts according to the goals you set for the show and do so for several months after the show is over.

## **9. Set up a post-mortem debrief with the sales and marketing teams**

After you return from a tradeshow, it's critical to promptly set up a post-mortem debrief meeting with members of your sales and marketing teams. It's important to get a 360-degree download of the show: successes, failures, shortcomings, the good, the bad and the mediocre. The reality is that sometimes your best ideas may fall flat when put into practice or your team is forced to improvise or adjust for one reason or another. Or an improvised, ad hoc process may work brilliantly and deserve a place in your canon. Post-mortem debriefs are helpful to identify any lessons learned and action items that need to be taken to improve the success of the next tradeshow.