



# LAST MINUTE ADVICE

There is no better way to generate new relationships and sales for your company than meeting prospective clients face to face. Tamsin Higgins from exhibition stand designer and maker Tom Higgins offers tips on exhibiting at trade shows

To exhibit at a trade show or exhibition, you will be spending time and money so you really need to make sure you understand why you are there and what you'd like to achieve by being there.

There may be a number of reasons you are going to exhibit. For example, to build your brand and company image, market test a new product, to build relationships with customers, or generate sales leads and, obviously, make sales.

Identify those elements about your products and services that make you stand out from the crowd and create a short, compelling message that you

want visitors to remember about your product or service.

Plan your presence at the exhibition, including how you will engage visitors, how you will work with the media, working out breaks, having a contingency in case some things don't go according to plan, and having an immediate follow up plan for contacting people you have met.

While it is up to the organisers to ensure the right type and number of visitors walk through the doors, there is no reason why you shouldn't make the most of the opportunity to ensure your existing clients come to visit your stand at the exhibition. Letting people know you will

be there and inviting existing and potential clients to the show will help to create a good atmosphere and encourage business, giving you the best chance of success.

Use all of your marketing channels to create interest – put details of the event on your website, emails, social media sites and press releases.

Try to create an incentive for people to attend. Send out invitations and perhaps run a competition and let them know they can enter by visiting your stand at the show. If you are launching a new product, let people know it will be there for them to see.

The more you do to generate your own visitors to the show the more activity you will see on your stand. This is a key activity that will help to ensure that you have the busiest stand at the exhibition.

Before the show make sure your staff are briefed properly on your exhibition objectives and fully understand your product or service.

Make a list of everything you will need to take with you. For example, who will be responsible for making sure any company literature and products get to the exhibition on time? Your stand suppliers can do this for you but make

# FEATURE EXHIBITION TIPS



**V**aluable information can be gained from your experiences so have a debrief to discuss what worked well and what didn't

sure you let them know you need this service from them as early as possible to ensure there is space on their lorry.

Put together a job kit – everything you might need to keep the stand tidy and running smoothly. This should include pens and paper, scissors, cleaning cloths, surface cleaners, rubbish sacks and so on.

Create a document with exhibition opening and closing times, stand staff contact numbers and any other important information relevant to the show. This can be circulated to all stand staff or pinned on the wall inside the storage area on your stand.

## During the show

First impressions really do count in an exhibition or trade show environment. With potentially hundreds of exhibitors, all trying to catch the attention of as many people as possible, you need to make sure you really do stand out from the competition.

What makes the difference between your audience stopping

and being captivated or giving you a cursory glance before they walk on by?

Nobody likes to be sold to but at the same time they don't want to be ignored either.

Feeling like nobody is interested in helping you is almost as bad as the prospect of being cornered by a pushy salesman. If you are working on the stand, the most effective approach is to be friendly and engaging, to understand the product or service fully and to be passionate about what you offer. All stand staff should be proactive and enthusiastic about meeting people, after all, that's what they are there to do.

Throughout the show make sure someone regularly refills literature holders, sample bowls and any other giveaway items. Keep the stand in top condition by cleaning work surfaces and computer screens regularly, specially touch screens where finger marks will make your stand look messy.

Make sure furniture on the stand is tidy when not in use and

if you have a coffee area keep this clean and tidy at all times by clearing up used cups, regularly emptying rubbish bins and wiping up any spills.

Visitors will be happy to spend time on your stand and talk to you and will want to return if you create a welcoming and interesting space for them.

Make sure you collect contact information for anyone who is interested in your product or service or may be in the future. Failing to capture those leads and contact information will mean everything you have put into creating the best possible exposure for your business will not benefit you as much as it could have done.

Find as many ways as possible to gather names but try to make sure the contacts you collect are quality contacts – those people who are genuinely interested in your products.

## After the show

Pack everything carefully. At the end of an exhibition it's usually quite chaotic with

everyone trying to clear up as quickly as possible. But taking time to dismantle and package everything at this time means your stand items will last longer and you will be able to use them again next time. Your stand builders will be responsible for dismantling your stand and loading the lorry, but you need to make sure any leftover literature or giveaways are packaged and transported back to your office or storage facility. Remember your job kit (the stationery, cleaning supplies etc.) and collect those items together for future use.

You may feel you have completed your task once the exhibition is over and you are back in your office, but if you don't follow up on the leads you collected at the show and contact people after the event, a huge amount of the effort you put in at the show will be wasted. It is absolutely important that you follow up and contact people and the sooner you do this the better. Not following up will mean you lose possible business and valuable contacts, but following up promptly will ensure your time, effort and money invested in exhibiting really pays off.

After going through the whole process of exhibiting it's a great opportunity to look at how well it all went. Valuable information can be gained from your experiences so have a debrief to discuss what worked well and what didn't. Agree what you would do again next time and what you would change. Give feedback to your stand supplier so they are up to speed and ready for next time. Working as a team will help you to make sure each time the results from your exhibition presence will be a great success. ■