

Presentation Strategies That Impact Trade Show ROI

By Bob Garner

"Are these leads any good?" is probably the number-one question that event managers hear from exhibitors at trade shows. To get leads that turn into gold (or leads that turn into sales) requires a joint effort between marketing and sales. Often a good presentation strategy can make all the difference between a booth that generates real leads and a booth that's treated like an open house. No matter how well known a company is in its industry, the days of "we just show up and attendees always stop by" are over. After 20 years in the trade show and meeting industry, I have seen this form of arrogance destroy many companies.

"At a show, you go to battle with your competitors to capture the mind share and dollars of the attendees at the show," says Steven Levin, senior marketing programs manager at Avocent Corporation, headquartered in Huntsville, AL.

Sasha Boehling, event marketing manager at Irvine, CA-based Quest Software, agrees, adding, "You can't stand back and wait for attendees to drop by your booth. You have to be proactive and get their attention."

Being proactive doesn't necessarily mean having the largest exhibit or employing expensive giveaways. It means bringing excitement

and energy to an exhibit that draws current and potential customers. Interactive presentations that combine information with entertainment have always worked well, if done correctly. The "attraction" should capture the attention and interest of the attendees, while simultaneously delivering the sales message. The company should also be able to pre-qualify attendees and get those leads into the exhibit.

Here are some of the most common interaction strategies:

■ Theater-style presentations, where attendees sit down and watch an in-depth presentation for a giveaway, allow exhibitors to deliver a detailed sales pitch in a controlled manner. However, it's best to keep these types of presentations brief. Remember that attendees may have been in educational sessions and the last thing most want to do is sit through another long presentation.

■ A drawing for a large prize may also generate traffic, but exhibitors who employ this strategy must be

sure they have a dynamic message to deliver once the crowd arrives, or they face the danger of being overshadowed by the promotion. Attendees who are more focused on the drawing than the sales message will usually leave the exhibit after they've filled out the entry form. The challenge with a drawing is separating potential buyers from those just entering the contest or waiting for the giveaway.

■ An interactive presentation that effectively combines the exhibitor's customized sales messages with some form of continuous entertainment such as magic, mind reading, or humor is an extremely effective way to attract traffic to booths for the entire time the trade show floor is open. Exhibitors just need to make sure the entertainer they hire

TEACH 'EM WELL

Most sales reps are more interested in learning closing techniques than they are the learning to qualify leads.

Each exhibitor should always give his or her reps a refresher course in how to qualify leads before they hit the trade show floor.

understands the main goal, which is to get qualified leads to talk to sales reps. Part of the entertainment should include some verbal interaction with attendees that identifies the qualified buyers. The conclusion of the entertainer's performance should always result in either letting an unqualified lead walk away, or getting those qualified leads deeper into the booth to talk to the reps or see a demo.

Bob Garner delivers business, sales, and motivational presentations that are creatively enhanced with sleight-of-hand magic, mind reading, and audience participation. For more information go to www.bobgarner.com or call (805) 534-1576.