

The 10 Questions You Should Ask Before Attending Any Trade Show

By Barry Siskind

Shows are often misunderstood, and their benefits sometimes seem obscure. But, if the statistics are correct, more companies can credit their success to participating in shows than any other marketing tool. Before you take the plunge, here are 10 basic questions that you need answered:

1. Why am I considering doing this show?

Each show you participate in should complement your overall marketing plan. There should be some solid rationale to exhibiting which will complement other marketing strategies such as advertising, direct sales, direct mail and telemarketing.

2. What do I want from this show?

Every show has a separate business objective which should be well thought out ahead of time. Your objective might be to gather leads, create an image, meet the media, introduce new products or services, find dealers and reps, or to conduct market research. The trick is to pick one objective and focus all your efforts on achieving it.

3. Is this the best show for my market?

Have you checked out the alternative shows in this market? The biggest shows are not always the best. Today there are in excess of 20,000 shows worldwide. Don't limit your exhibiting opportunities by jumping at the first show that comes along.

4. Who are the other exhibitors?

Who is exhibiting at this year's show, and who has exhibited in the past? The answers not only let you plan your exhibit properly, they are a good indicator of what the visitors expect.

5. What do I know about the show promoter?

A lot depends on the expertise of the show manager. A well-run show is the first ingredient to your success. Check their experience carefully. Do they have the credibility to deliver what they promise?

6. Are my products and services ready for this market?

Have you done your homework? This is particularly important when you are entering new markets. For foreign markets, price should include freight, insurance, duty, and brokerage. You should also understand terms of credit, packaging and labeling requirements as well as when customers can expect to receive their orders. You will have to understand how business is conducted, all local customs, and environmental considerations.

7. Do I have resources to do the show properly?

Unless you are prepared to do the show properly, don't waste your time. A proper "resource check" includes such things as money, time, personnel and product readiness. Unfortunately, show participation is not always viewed seriously by senior management. To be successful, you must have a commitment from all areas of your company including product development, marketing, finance, and sales.

8. Do I have a follow-up plan?

Most shows are not "writing" shows. This means that you will need to have a follow-up plan in place before you exhibit. In addition to personal visits, you should consider follow-up through direct mail, telemarketing, electronic media, or personal visits. Your first contact should be within 7 - 10 days after the show.

9. Is my staff show-ready?

Your best people will not perform at their peak unless they understand the unique challenges of working a show. This means specialized training. Exhibitor training is different from sales training because it focuses on an environment where thousands of prospects come to you in a short period of time.

10. Am I show-ready?

All too often exhibitors work a show with the same skills they use in other areas of marketing. Shows are different, requiring a unique set of skills. Honing your sales expertise to a situation where time is an obstacle is the real challenge, and, unless exhibitors understand this, trade shows won't work.

Show biz has reached a level of sophistication that has left inexperienced exhibitors in a quandary. Some are disillusioned, some unsure where to turn, and others limp through the exercise and never realize their potential. For the prepared, a well-planned show can put the world at your doorstep.

Barry Siskind, President and Founder of [ITMC](#), is a trade show consultant, trainer, speaker, and an internationally recognized expert in trade and consumer shows. Each year, he addresses numerous conferences and association meetings around the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, Barry has traveled throughout the world working with thousands of public and private sector clients in virtually all industry groups. He creates, facilitates and delivers a wide range of services to companies involved in exhibit marketing. Barry is also a best-selling author of trade show business books: The Successful Exhibitor, The Power of Exhibit Marketing, Making Contact, Bumblebees Can't Fly, Eagles Must Soar, and his latest book Powerful Exhibit Marketing.