

# **The Secret to Trade Show Measurement: Consistency**

**By Marilyn R. Kroner**

Years ago I took a marketing class from a wise teacher who was also was a marketing consultant for businesses. Everyone in the class had experience, but we all learned a lot. My most important take-away was her constant mantra of “track everything.”

Many event marketers think that because their budgets are limited or they work for small companies, they couldn't possibly accomplish any measurement. I'm happy to say from experience that you most certainly can, and I can give you examples from my own career.

We all know that all good results start with measureable objectives. Measuring your company's trade show Return On Investment (ROI) can sometimes be tricky, especially if you work for companies that do not have a direct sales model. But there are other ROI objectives that can be easily measured in addition to actual orders/sales, like the following:

- Lead quantity: Simply track the number of leads acquired at each show.
- Lead quality: How many “hot” or A leads, B leads, and C leads did you get at each show?
- Cost per lead: Eventually, you close the budget on a show, and you know how much you spent. From there it's easy to determine your cost per lead.

You have a lot more leeway when you develop criteria for your Return On Objectives (ROO). For example, I once worked for a start-up and my number-one objective was to measure brand awareness. Of course, another critical objective was to justify my budget to the company's executive team. At every show, we simply asked everyone who came into the booth if they had heard of our company. The answer was, of course, either yes or no. We could have even tracked it with tally sticks if necessary. At the first show, no one had heard of the company. By the end of the year, that number had risen to over 50%. That simple measurement was one important element in justifying my marketing communications budget for the next year, because I had proven that our marketing communications initiatives were working.

Other examples of ROO objectives are:

- Competitors – I used to give my booth staff “reconnaissance” assignments, where they went to our competitors' booths and reported on what they saw. Questions like, Was the booth crowded? Was the booth structured in a way that was inviting and welcoming? What products did they show? Were the products working or just on display? Did the booth staff appear professional and knowledgeable? When smart phones became ubiquitous, we captured photos. Believe me, that was one of the most popular parts of my post-show report. Everyone who couldn't go to the show – including the executives – wanted to see what the competitors were doing.

- Of course, you want to track those same things about your own booth.
- The answers to some of this will be subjective, and it's important to understand that as being a part of doing your own measurement.
- Messaging – Listen to your booth staff talk to prospects. Did they stress the key messaging points that were drilled into them at the pre-show training?
- Staff numbers – Are there enough or too many staff at certain times during the show?
- Social Media – Do you want to increase followers or engagement?
- Press Relations – Adding PR to your trade show presence can add measurable value. Can you get a press list from the show? If so, how many press interviews do you hope to set up? How many articles do you hope will result from those interviews?

Many tactics can be applied to accomplish your objectives, and that is the next step. Be as original as your creativity and budget allow. Let everyone get involved in ideas at your pre-show meeting. That will increase their buy-in, and they will truly become stakeholders and supporters of your trade show strategies. Just keep three things in mind:

1. Always tie tactics to objectives. A great idea that doesn't help accomplish your objectives has to be discarded, no matter how much fun it would be to try.
2. Keep your target audience/attendee in mind at all times. Devise the best ways to reach the people you want to reach.
3. All information-gathering strategies must be consistent throughout your budget-year. If you are doing surveys, ask the same questions at every show. Some shows might be targeted more vertically, in which case you might want to gather more industry-specific data, and it's OK to add more. Just keep the basic questions the same.

When I worked for a large company that had a decent online presence, my challenge was to learn more about the booth visitors, especially because the company used a distribution model and did not sell direct. Trade shows were a rare opportunity to learn more about our customers as well as prospects. Our objective was so learn more about the products they were using and what they planned to purchase next. We decided to have a booth raffle, but we only gave away one prize and the winner was not announced at the show. It was announced on a special page of the company web site. As soon as the show was over, all of the leads got an email that gave them a link to the raffle results. That got them to our website, which was one of our objectives. Instead of going straight to the page announcing the winner, they were asked to take an optional, short survey. Most did. By year-end, we had compiled a lot of information about the attendees. In addition, I added a couple of questions like, "On a scale of 1-5 (1 low, 5 high) how would you rate the knowledge of our booth staff compared to other exhibitors?" and "After visiting our booth are you more inclined to purchase our product? (a) yes (b) no (c) about the same. Of course, it's always best to have a third party do a survey, but the results of our consistent questions resulted in relevant feedback that influenced the way we did future trade shows and marketing in general.

I have been privileged to work with [Exhibit Surveys Inc.](#) for many years. I have been their customer, and now they are my customer. The kings of measurement in our industry, Exhibit Surveys is deeply committed to helping event marketers learn about measurement, even when they aren't in a position to purchase Exhibit Surveys' research and measurement services. Joe Federbush, Exhibit Surveys' Vice President of Sales and Marketing, has agreed to share his recent presentation, "You Know What to Measure, but How Do You Actually Measure It?" with you. There are some useful templates and measurement protocols that you can immediately begin using, and of course the presentation goes much deeper than I have been able to do here. Email me ([Marilyn@kronercommunications.com](mailto:Marilyn@kronercommunications.com)), and I'll send it to you.

In the meantime, go to <http://roitoolkit.exhibitsurveys.net>. This website includes a series of simple tools (called the ROI Toolkit) that will help you plan and measure performance in delivering ROI. Funded by a grant from the PCMA Education Foundation to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, this web-site was developed by Exhibit Surveys, Inc. in conjunction with the ROI Task Force of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events. And it's FREE!

I also encourage you to check out the trends section of the Exhibit Surveys site, where you can find all-show averages for the last 15 years, including info like net buying influences, average hours spent viewing exhibits, total buying plans and other useful, free information:  
<http://www.exhibitsurveys.com/trends>

As my marketing teacher once said, track as much relevant data as you realistically can as consistently as possible, and you will accomplish a lot, even with a very limited budget.

*Ms. Marilyn R. Kroner, Principal at [Kroner Communications](#), managed marketing communications for a variety of Technology companies, including Quantum, Storage Technology, Exabyte, and Benchmark Storage Innovations, that range in size from start-ups to Fortune 1000. She is a member of the Business Marketing Association (BMA) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). She's a past member of the Exhibitor Conference and Exhibitor Magazine advisory boards, and a past president of the Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA). Current industry clients include Exhibit Surveys Inc., AllianceTech, The Hughes Group, and the EXHIBITOR Media Group and EXHIBITOR conferences.*