

The Only Metric that Really Matters

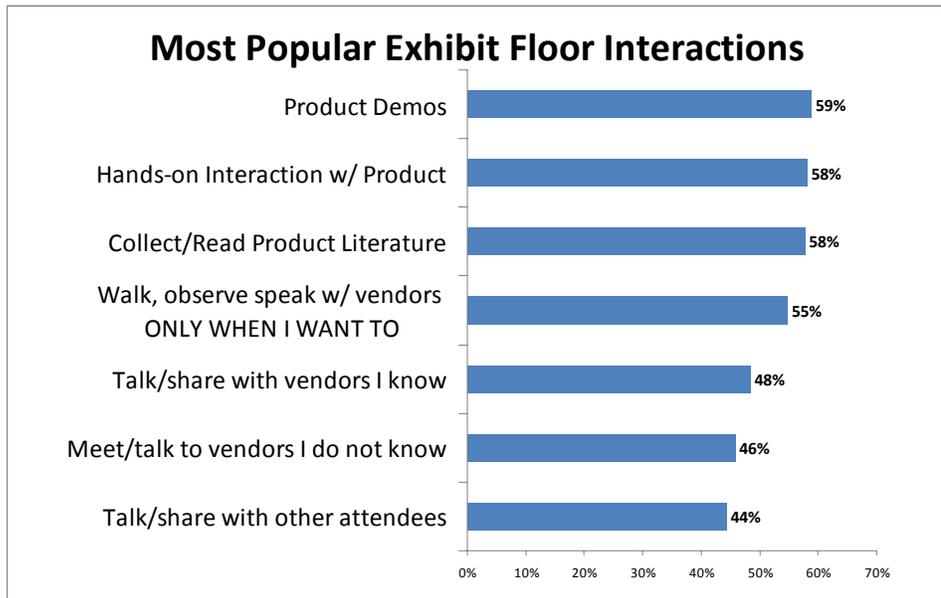
By Barry Siskind

In an attempt to face the challenge of accountability for the exhibition investment, many exhibit managers find themselves overwhelmed by answering the questions, “What’s the most effective metric?” and “How do I measure it’s affect on budget?” The key and underlying issue they need to prove is the value of the exhibit investment.

Measurement is not easy. There are so many things that can be measured: the number of quality leads, the number of booth visitors, increased website or social media activities, interest in a new product, enhanced recognition of brand message, or just being seen and present in an important industry-related event. In fact, if you look hard enough, you will undoubtedly uncover over 100 valid metrics for your trade fair presence.

The next dilemma is to understand how many of these metrics are converted into provable results. The literature is filled with tips on how to calculate ROI (Return on Investment) ROO (Return on Objectives) and ROT (Return on Time). These helpful tools often leave the exhibit manager scratching his or her head wondering what effect these metrics have had on the corporate bottom line.

The challenge now is that there are too many possible metrics and very little evidence that they have a direct affect on corporate profit. The starting point is to step back and look at what exhibitions are in today’s world. The best place to start is by examining what it is about an exhibition that appeals most to visitors.



¹ CEIR – Most Popular Exhibit Floor Interactions Study, 2013

The conclusion that this chart found was that visitors want information about products and services but without the pressure that is normally associated with the sales process. This makes sense, as for many exhibitors, selling is not their primary focus. But in today's world, where visitors have more information at their disposal through their online activities, spending time at an exhibit focused on the purchase is a waste of everyone's time. It's the process of engaging customers and potential customers in an open and honest dialogue that is closer akin to what these visitors need.

The next, obvious question in the search for the Holy Grail of metrics is to ask, "Which visitors?" Rarely will one product or service be of interest to all visitors. The strategy is to create a profile, in advance, of those visitors who will benefit most from learning more about what you have to offer.

Establishing a profile of your high-value contacts isn't as easy as it sounds. It takes time to consider the variables that make up the key characteristics of your most valued customers, but taking the time is worth the effort. Here are some of the characteristics you may consider:

- Buying authority
- Current need
- Past history
- Industry
- Budget
- Decision-making cycle

These are but a few examples of the characteristics that will help you define your high-value contacts. With some thought, this list can be greatly expanded. Being as clear as possible about who you are attempting to attract helps you establish realistic objectives, develop a focused exhibition plan, choose the right shows, create proper displays, have booth staff present meaningful information, implement a winning follow-up program, and establish the most meaningful metrics.

Where does all this leave us? If visitors want to engage at a deeper level with the acquisition of solutions, and we can identify the visitors who are of high value, then it stands to reason that the number of contacts with these people at a show is the bottom-line for most of your exhibition program.

The focus on high-value contacts does not preclude the ability of a corporation to measure the affects of their exhibit investment on ROI or on other variables such as brand recognition. However, the nexus for all metrics is based on the exhibit plan's ability to connect with the right people. That's the only thing that really matters because without this, nothing else makes sense.

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*.