

Sales Tip Sheet 3 – Making Your Exhibition Successful

- Exhibitions, like advertising, direct mail, PR and direct selling, are a strategic sales and marketing tool. They should be used as part of an overall marketing strategy, not in isolation.
- Exhibitions are suitable for a wide range of specific sales and marketing goals, of which the most widely used are:
 - Generating sales leads
 - Launching a new product or service
 - Penetrating a new market
 - Building customer loyalty
 - Positioning/repositioning a company/brand
 - Market research
 - Building media relations
 - Recruiting new agents or distributors
 - Obtaining competitive intelligence
- Be realistic about your expectations: exhibitions generate millions of pounds worth of business every year – but it is unusual for exhibitors to do so during the event. For most companies, the orders will come in the weeks and months after the show. You must be prepared to pursue your leads vigorously, and to track them on an on-going basis, so that they can trace as many sales as possible back to source.
- Don't underestimate the amount of planning and preparation required to exhibit successfully. Effective planning and follow-up can mean the difference between a bad show experience and a good one. But it can also mean the difference between a good show, and a truly exceptional one.
- Put one person in charge of the project with overall responsibility for planning, budgeting, stand management etc – someone with authority who can see the project successfully through to its conclusion.
- Appoint a reputable stand designer: draw up a shortlist of suppliers and put the job out to tender. Insist on seeing a portfolio of each company's work. Talk to previous clients and ensure they are capable of working on time and within budget.
- Set achievable targets against which to measure your success. If generating sales leads, for example, base your target around your potential audience, number of stand staff and total number of opening hours.
- Publicise your presence: prepare your press release(s) and catalogue entry and submit them by the deadline date. Mail out invitations to your prospects, giving them an incentive to visit your stand.

- Don't leave expensive brochures on the stand for all and sundry to pick up. Produce a concise sales leaflet for general distribution and keep the glossies back for those with a genuine interest.
- Exhibits should be presented as solutions to specific needs and problems. Don't bury benefits in a long list of features. If your products are the fastest, quietest, most durable or economical on the market, say so. Keep detailed technical data to hand in a brochure.
- Keep your stand messages brief: visitors are bombarded with information at exhibitions and can only take in so much. Where possible, stick to bold headlines and, if necessary, bullet points.
- Appoint a Stand Manager: Stand Managers need to be efficient, flexible, and diplomatic to deal with the many responsibilities at show, from motivating stand staff to liaising with contractors and welcoming important guests.
- Ensure the right balance of sales and technical staff, as well as senior managers. One of the greatest complaints from visitors about exhibitions concerns the lack of knowledge of stand staff. Buyers attend exhibitions with very specific questions on product performance, price and delivery. Make sure you have staff available who can answer them.
- Pick staff who are willing and able: A positive attitude is vital if staff are to make the most of the event, and not undermine the enthusiasm of others.
- Hold a briefing session before the event, covering exhibition and personal objectives, exhibits, enquiry handling procedures, dress code, logistics, catering etc. Give each team member a written summary for reference on the site.
- Give staff adequate breaks to avoid fatigue and boredom. 2-3 hours is about the longest most people can sustain their energy levels. Copy the rota to all team members, so they know who is on duty at any given time.
- After the show, tell your team what was achieved, and ask their opinions on how the results could have been bettered. Repay their effort and commitment with a small token of thanks. If they feel appreciated they'll be much more likely to try even harder next time around.
- Set a deadline for making initial contact, and a system for ensuring that ALL leads, not just the hottest, are pursued to a conclusion. If you don't have the resources in house you should consider using the services of a mailing house or telemarketing agency.
- Categorise all enquiries as soon as possible – preferably as they are taken on the stand. For example: A (definitely interested/immediate buying intention); B (actively considering purchase within the next six months); C (gathering information for future reference.)
- To maximise response you need to strike while the iron is hot. Category A leads should be dealt with immediately. Have a fax machine or office-linked computer on your stand, so they can be relayed to the office for immediate action. ALL leads should be responded to within a week, two at the most.