

MAXIMIZING YOUR TRADE SHOW ROI

Before
During
& After



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Introduction:

How much should I spend? How much can I expect to get in return?

Trade shows are tried and true marketing tool for getting in front of a concentrated segment your target audience live and in person. This presents many unique opportunities that most exhibitors don't take full advantage of. The nice thing about that little fact is knowing that it won't be overly difficult to rise head and shoulders above your competition. It simply takes a proper game plan executed **BEFORE, DURING & AFTER** the tradeshow.

Trade shows are expensive, requiring exhibit fees, trade show displays/marketing materials, and paid time (and possible travel expenses) for employee participation. Yet they're still a very popular means of marketing because of their effectiveness. If the average expenditure for attending a certain event is say, \$5,000 to create an average presence, then it makes sense to wisely invest another \$1000-3000 to ensure an outstanding presence.

If marketed properly the return on this investment within twelve months should be at least triple what you invested. Anything less means poor execution and/or follow through... or you simply don't have a product or service with an appropriate profit margin for the given audience.

Calculating your potential return on investment

As stated above, different companies have different profit margins. If your company sells gift baskets in a B2B market at a \$5 profit margin each, and you're contemplating buying a 10' booth space and accompanying display totalling \$4000, then you'll need to sell 800 baskets just to break even. Depending on the show's target audience, it MAY

be possible. If your product is amazing and you secure one client with a strong national presence, it may be the ticket to scaling your company the way you always dreamed. But, these are the factors that need to be considered.

Let's use another example: you have a ten year old company that provides event management services for small to mid sized businesses. Your average event's profit margin has been \$15,000 to this point. Investing \$4000 in the same show as above is a no-brainer assuming you are in front of your target audience. One sale provides great profit (275% ROI). Two or more and you just enabled your company to scale with a new project manager.

Most of us will fall somewhere in the middle with an average profit margin for our products or services ranging anywhere from \$300 - \$3000. Making sure our trade show investment has the highest return possible means getting the maximum quality exposure possible.

And as with most marketing efforts... it means generating a great "A" (HOT) list. The following chapter provides tips on what to do **BEFORE, DURING & AFTER** in order to secure a great A list and get your best ROI from your trade show investment.



1. BEFORE the tradeshow

Prepare your exhibiting space

If it's your first time exhibiting at a particular venue, do a little research to find out who is standing out and taking full advantage of the opportunity. Google images and YouTube videos of the show. See who catches your eye and why. Chances are it's because they were well-prepared with an engaging trade show display and charismatic staff.

Even if it's a venue offering only 6' tables, make sure that you have a well-branded table skirt and matching marketing literature.

If the trade show accommodates 10', 20' and up displays, then it's time to enter the

big leagues and put together a well-branded, professional display that will give you the look and confidence to rise above the competition.



The bottom line - you want to stand out, not be dwarfed by your competition. Take an hour or so to evaluate the show and generate ideas. Don't hesitate to contact the trade show presenters to ask appropriate questions.

Prepare your lead generating strategy

If your lead strategy is putting out a fish bowl to accumulate business cards, then your competitors are getting a better ROI from the show than you. Putting a little effort and funds into your lead capturing process will easily double your return or more.

Set up your lead tracking and lead magnet

Perhaps you already have an attractive **eBook**, **podcast**, **video series** or **webinar** to offer. Promote this at your booth and drive them to your newly prepared landing page where you will capture the lead and enter them into your sales funnel.

Pros: Having and utilizing a great lead magnet provides a very filtered list - they won't sign up to get your educational offer if they're not truly interested in your product or service. Also, your lead magnet can be used over and over again in various marketing efforts.

Cons: Developing a high quality lead magnet can be time consuming.



Run a contest with a giveaway

If you're not ready for a lead gen campaign as stated above, but you know you have great potential ROI at a particular trade show, it will be well worth constructing a fun contest or drawing with a really attractive gift... like an iPad. Use a QR code to send them to a sign up form on your website (capture the lead) to enter the drawing.

If you do the drawing(s) live during the show, you can make a big deal about announcing the winner at a specified time at your booth. It's almost an unfair advantage!

But, I would suggest that you offer the contest only to those that you are sure you want on your "hot list" to market to after the show. Advertising this to everyone will dilute the quality of your list.

Pros: It's a relatively quick and easy solution to creating engagement with those you want on your "hot list".

Cons: A little expensive. The leads are only as well-qualified as your strategy.

Attention Getters: Games and entertainment

Another option is to create a carnival type of environment and give away lots of cheaper, promotional items ([see this Pinterest page](#) for ideas).

Instead of one or two big hits, as in the case of the iPad contest above, you'll get a steady stream of constant engagement.

Pros: A fairly quick and somewhat inexpensive way to create engagement. Promotional items also help with brand recognition long after the trade show.

Cons: With this method, it's more challenging to qualify how "hot" or just "warm" the leads are that you're getting, but it will drive interested parties to learn more about you.



Examples:

Outlandish lights

If you're in the entertainment industry to some degree or another, than being a little more bold than the other guys is usually a really good thing.

Perhaps a siren, strobe light or "bat signal" would suit the purpose. Let attendees know that you spin the spinner, or do a drawing upon your light signal and give away something of appropriate value. You'll be the center of attention during these intervals.

But, we don't suggest the obnoxious siren wail to go with the light show. You probably wouldn't make the kind of relationships desired.

Mini contests

Work the floor outside your booth with quick mini contests based on commonly known game shows. You can pit two or three attendees against each other for a quick round of

Mini Jeopardy or **Family Feud**.

Do these at random times in random areas throughout the show, but have them well branded with your logo and colors.

Live video

We all have a video camera in our pockets these days. [Add a \\$60 shotgun mic](#) to your smart phone and you have all you need to produce some quality "hidden camera" moments, or occasional Facebook Live posts.

Both of these tactics can produce fun, engaging interaction and will make you the center of attention in your neck of the woo... tradeshow.

Get the right people to man your booth

Don't let this be an afterthought. Having the right people and process to interact with your audience is imperative to leaving with quality leads.

A common misconception at trade shows is that hiring young, attractive girls will yield a great return. This will work to varying degrees if your audience is young males. But, it won't benefit you if you have a more sophisticated product or service and target audience.

It's important to have an extremely knowledgeable and personable "**Alpha**" heading the booth. Two or three of these would be even better. But, if there's only one **Alpha**, then you can streamline your engagement process with a couple of "primers" – booth partners who are very personable and have been trained to quickly identify:

- **"A" list prospects.** Hot leads which must be funneled to the **Alpha(s)**. If not possible, every effort should be made to get their contact information and a few notes as to why they're an important lead.
- **"B" prospects.** Warm leads can be turned over to the Alpha if available, but every effort should be made to get them on into your opt-in list.
- **"C" candidates.** These are browsers who attend trade shows looking for free stuff and a field trip from work. If they want to put themselves into your lead generation pipeline, let them, but otherwise the priority is to keep the flow going and look for better prospects.

Have your team organized and trained for show day

- Do test runs of your contests or games
- Make sure your primers know how to identify and differentiate A, B and C list leads
- Make sure they know the documenting process for A listers, signup process for hot leads
- Be sure to have an alternate in case someone bails on you.

Post photos, press releases and video to your social media channels

Remind your fan base of the show and your exciting presence there. Show thanks and gratitude to the presenters and sponsors with hashtags. Capture the excitement and let people know they're missing out. Make this an advertising opportunity to prospects that aren't even attending.

Preparing for a fun and engaging event can lead to at least five times the return on its investment. Remember the tried and true saying, *"To not prepare, is to prepare to fail"*.

2. DURING the tradeshow

Lay the groundwork for a highly profitable show before it even starts!

Arrive early as possible!

Obviously, you want to leave yourself time to head off unforeseen obstacles while you're setting up your display and marketing materials. But, it's also a great opportunity to mingle with the other exhibitors, presenters and speakers (players in your industry).

Now that your team is set up and stress-free, see where you can lend a hand and build relationships with your peers. Like a networking meeting, we tend to gravitate to the shelter of those we know. This is a perfect opportunity to make new influential friends while you all work toward the common goal - putting on a great trade show!

Leveraging other exhibitors and presenters

This could very well be the single most important thing you do at a trade show

People do business with those they like. We all know this, but seem to forget it. Getting to know influential presenters and speakers can help your marketing efforts in many ways - first and foremost - referrals. But, just building relationships (enhanced and maintained with social media) can greatly extend your reach in your industry.

During the show, you are going to spend a lot of hours in the vicinity of fellow exhibitors that share your industry and drive. The social atmosphere provides many natural conversation starters with exhibitors who may actually need your product or service. Your product or service may serve as an extension of their line.

It's also very possible to find a rising talent that may want to come on board with your more established organization, opening up a new market for your company.

Securing one excellent exhibitor lead may be worth much more than obtaining 500 attendee business cards. Make sure to evaluate which exhibitors you'd like to partner with and add them to your A list!

Don't forget to post social media updates during the show

Make sure your social media followers and influencers see you as a player! Post pics, vids and Facebook Lives as often as possible without it becoming a distraction.



3. AFTER the tradeshow

Leads: Follow up promptly

The next day! The sooner you follow up with your **A List**, the better chance of retaining that relationship. If you're a trade show vet, then you made a few notes about your **A List** prospects that help you remember who that person is exactly, and you're going to reference that personal touch in your follow up call or email. The sooner you do, the more chance they have of remembering you.

Utilizing your lists properly

Ideally, you should come away from a trade show with 3 lists: Attendee and **Exhibitor** lists supplied from the show presenters and your own **A List** of attendees (and hopefully a couple exhibitors). You should already have many B listers on auto-pilot (in your email campaign from the show).

Attendee and Exhibitor lists supplied from the show presenters: *Note that loading these into your email campaign program of choice and mass emailing is spam - it will probably get you blacklisted from that program and it will turn off the people you are trying to turn on.*

However, using a virtual assistant to personally email these individuals can lead to finding a percentage of hot leads. The trick is that the initial emails must be personalized within the body copy and the copy must be friendly, engaging and should offer something for free - such as a free eBook or webinar invite.

Your A (hot) List: You worked hard for this and now it's time to make it work for you.

You've marked these select few (maybe 5-35... depending on size and scope of the trade show) as hot leads. Hopefully, you put a couple notes on the back of their business cards, so that you can personally recall and address them. Now, it's time to engage them!

Reach out to them with a personal email referencing an item or two from your notes, so they know you remember them. Ask them if there's anything that you can help them with.

Nurture the select few that readily engage with you and secure sales. Finally, add them all to your existing mailing list (the existing Prospect list that you had B and C listers sign up on).

Utilizing your email campaign program, mass email them an update article (preferably with video) referencing the rewarding time at the trade show along with, perhaps, a very attractive one-time offer (probably a one time deep discount on your product or service).

Reward your mail list with regular well-written articles that reinforce your expert status in your niche, and they will reward you with customer loyalty.

Post photos, and video “thank yous” to your social media channels

Make it personal. Show yourself with your new friends. Hashtag them. Keep the excitement going and be a leader doing it. This is a reinforcer as you follow up with your new prospects. If they're interested in doing business with you, they will check out your social media presence - make sure it's professional and engaging.

Post Show Meeting

Schedule a meeting with your team and discuss what went well and what could be improved upon for the next show.

Over the next few months, you'll have a pretty good idea how successful the show is turning out monetarily, but you also need to evaluate brand exposure.

- How was your presence as compared to others?
 - Do you need a more professional display?
 - Marketing materials?
- Rate the execution of your lead generating method. What could be done to improve your acquisition of A (hot) leads?
- Would advertising or sponsorship opportunities have been advantageous?
- Was there a speaking opportunity or article submission opportunity not taken advantage of?
- Did you promote your presence on your social media channels before, during and after the event?

With your first trade show behind you, you should now be aware of your strengths and weaknesses. Your goal for your next trade show should be to double your previous ROI.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Edwards is the principal and creative director of **Edwards Communications**. EdwardsCom has been providing clients with branding, marketing and lead generation solutions for over 20 years.

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