

The Do's of Trade Show Exhibiting

Following are 10 examples of things you should do while hosting a trade show exhibit:

- Prepare 3-6 engaging questions before the show
- Create the right first impression
- Encourage visitors to want to spend time with you
- Be friendly and non-threatening
- Build rapport
- Ask questions that stimulate thought and encourage conversation
- Ask open-ended questions - beginning with who, what, where, when, why or how
- Relate questions to the industry, product/service and its benefits, or to a specific situation
- Avoid trite questions, such as: "Can I help you?" ; "How are you doing today?"; "Are you enjoying the show?"
- Practice, practice, practice

The Don'ts of Trade Show Exhibiting

Following are 15 examples of things you should NEVER do while hosting a trade show exhibit

- Sit, read, smoke, eat or drink in the booth
- Ignore prospects by forming a cozy cluster and chatting with colleagues
- Use the (booth) telephone while visitors are around
- Leave the booth unattended or leave without informing colleagues
- Be late for booth duty
- Close off conversation by crossing your arms
- Stand with your back to the aisle
- Say "Can I help you?"
- Lean on booth furniture
- Drink alcohol or eat garlicky or spicy foods during the day
- Use inappropriate language, complain about the show or about being at the show
- Wear new shoes or high heels
- Badmouth your competitors
- Let the booth get cluttered, untidy, and unorganized. Be unprofessional

The most important thing to remember when you are staffing a trade show booth is that **you represent your company**. Everything you do and say, even if it is not in the booth, reflects upon your company. You are an ambassador, and your behavior should be above reproach. Your attire and hygiene should be clean, neat, and professional. A trade show is not a vacation, even when it's in a FUN place like Las Vegas or New Orleans. Remember that you are on a business trip. Showing up drunk or hung over for booth duty is never appropriate and will not only put off customers, it may get you fired. It is OK to have fun, but know your limits, and know when to go back to your room to get some sleep! Booth duty is hard, tiring work, and you will need to pace yourself in order to have energy on the last day of the event. The following are recommended behaviors for company staff working a booth.

SMILE at your customers. This may sound like I'm stating the obvious, but you would be surprised at how many booth staffers I have seen looking bored, tired, and generally unapproachable. You must look alert, helpful and interested, so the booth visitor will feel comfortable approaching you.

Watch you body language. Folding your arms in front of you is a "closed" body position that appears to say to the customer, "don't bother me". Leaning on counters should be avoided too, as it makes you look bored or tired. Stand up straight, look your customer in the eye, and keep your arms relaxed.

Always stand facing the aisles. That way you can see when a customer is approaching the booth. If you keep your back to the aisle, you look like you are sending a message to the customer that says, "I'm busy", or "not interested".

Greet customers at the edge of the booth rather than in the center of the booth. This helps you draw them into the booth. If you can engage them in a conversation, you stand a better chance of getting them to stop, enter your booth, and learn about your product. If you stand in the middle of the booth, they may not be motivated to enter.

Never eat or drink in the booth (except water). Eating in the booth looks tacky, makes the booth smell bad, and can often make a mess. It is totally unprofessional. Even coffee should be avoided, as it is easily spilled and can ruin equipment, clothing and/or your rug. Having a water cooler in your booth is a good idea, as it gives customers a reason to enter your booth and hang out for a few minutes. Be sure to keep the water cooler well within your booth, so the customer will have to come into the booth to get a drink.

Dress professionally, either in booth "uniform" or business attire. A business suit is always the best solution. But many companies now use "booth uniforms" that usually consist of a nice polo shirt, or long-sleeve shirt emblazoned with the company logo, and semi-causal Docker-type slacks and comfortable shoes. Either solution is acceptable. Mini skirts, shorts, jeans, sneakers, leggings, sandals, tank tops, or high boots are not.

Do not "customize" your booth uniform by cutting, tying, or trimming. Believe it or not, I have seen booth staffers cut off the bottom of their company shirt, tear out the sleeves, tied the shirt in a knot to expose their mid-section, and "pegged" the pants so that they were skin-tight. The point of a booth uniform is to present a consistent, PROFESSIONAL image to the customer. When you have your company name plastered on you, you are a walking billboard for the company, and you need to act accordingly. Exposing too much flesh or appearing raggedy or tacky and unacceptable.

Do not chew gum in the booth. It looks tacky.

Don't stand in groups, talking to each other. Groups of company staffers talking together sends several bad messages: too many staffers assigned to the booth at one time; not enough booth traffic; you are ignoring customers in order to chat with your buddies. Not to mention that

potential customers are usually shy about interrupting a huddle conversation to ask a question. Remember that you are there to sell your product, not to socialize.

Don't have personal conversations or phone calls in the booth. If you must make or take a personal phone call, leave the booth. If a friend from another company stops by, make an arrangement to see them later, after the show or on your lunch break, and politely get them to leave the booth.

Don't sit. Any chairs in the booth are usually for client meetings or booth visitors to take a quick rest. Sitting makes you look bored and tired, which you may very well be, but you don't want your customers to think so. If you need to take a break, do so. Most shows have an exhibitor lounge, often with free sodas and coffee, where you can relax for a short break.

Be punctual for your booth duty shift. Your teammate is waiting to be relieved, and is probably tired and hungry. You would expect the same courtesy. If your shift is the first morning shift, it is even more important to be punctual, as the booth needs to be prepped for show opening. Brochures should be refilled, computers turned on, card reader tested, water cooler filled, etc.

Never leave your station unattended. If you have to leave the booth for a customer meeting, or a break, get someone to fill in for you. Also, let the booth manager know you are leaving. She/he is responsible for booth staffing and will be held accountable there is not sufficient staff to man the booth.

Always wear your name badge where customers can read it. Hanging it off your purse or your belt makes it difficult for your customer to see and read your name.

Do not show up in the booth drunk, hung over or over tired. Again, this may sound like the obvious, but I have seen it happen. The person drags into the booth smelling like a distillery, with red eyes and a blistering headache. What kind of an impression does this make to the customer? Or your boss? And once I had a booth staffer who was so drunk he was missing in action and never showed up for booth duty the entire day. Employees who act this way on a business trip run the risk of being fired. PLEASE be moderate in your partying and show up in the booth bright eyed and ready to meet customers.

Watch your behavior after hours. Even when you are out to dinner or at a bar after the show has closed, you are representing the company. Remember that someone ñ a customer or a competitor ñ may notice you if you are engaged in inappropriate behavior. Another example from my book of horror stories happened in New Orleans ñ a very party-oriented and seductive city ñ especially to first-time visitors. Several of my booth staffers went to Bourbon Street and got caught up in the "Spring Break" type party atmosphere and ended up embarrassing themselves. The woman exposed her breasts and was caught on film by a competitor. And the guy ended up on a balcony flashing people in the street below. Wouldn't that make YOUR boss proud?

Trade Shows are very hard work. You spend long hours on your feet, talking to customers and generally being "on". The days are long and the nights are too, with company entertainment, customer entertainment, and sometimes staff meetings. It is important to be able to relax, see the sights, and have fun too. Just keep it in moderation and you will be fine.