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INTEGRATED MARKETING

Trade Show Secrets

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Despite the economic slowdown, trade shows continue to be a popular venue for face-to-face marketing. So the question becomes: How do you provide a greater ROI, generate more sales success and capture a bigger chunk of market share with your show investment?

The two word answer: lead management.
It is said that 79% of all leads captured from the show floor go unfulfilled. Think about that. Companies that participate in trade shows are turning away nearly 8 out of every 10 potential customers. Does that make any sense?
Based on the money that you are spending to be at the show, you should rethink the process and move some of that funding from the exhibit to your lead response campaign.
Here are the 13 trade show secrets that can make that shift in investment pay big dividends:

1. **Plan, plan and plan.**
   How will your sales team respond to the leads; with emails, letters, or calls? You just cannot leave this decision to your sales team it is the joint responsibility of the Marketing and Sales departments to define the post show strategy prior to the show.
   Many trade show lead programs are based on some sort of electronic scan provided by the show company or exhibit manager. Sure you get the files, the files are important, but they may not be the most important item in the plan. What is most important is what you do or don't do with these names.

2. **Qualify your leads.**
   You need to know more than just the name and address, you need to know about the lead, a demographic profile of who the lead is, where they are in the buying cycle and where they fit in your firms plans. Defining the lead is a job for your sales department; they and you need to have a clear understanding of what criteria will be used to qualify a lead.

3. **Rate the leads.**
   Not everyone who stops by your exhibit, drops a card or is scanned into the system is worthy of a second look. Many firms have developed a rating system that based on the information provided and the firm's specific products and sales guidelines, against which each lead is measured and categorized. Traditionally you had three levels of sales: Hot, Warm and Cold. Today these three levels have been honed to a more scientific approach. You may need to develop your own rating system.

5 **Who is in Charge?**
   Yes, you will need to appoint a person to run the lead management effort. No you can't leave this to your sale force. They will cherry pick the leads based on their specific needs and desires, which may not always be in tune with corporate objectives. Have your Marketing or Sales manager run the program and use online technology to track any sales activity.

6. **Communicate with your leads.**
   It's worth saying again, because it's such a startling statistic: Some 79% of all show leads go untouched. Truly a shame and a massive business error, keeping in touch with these leads can help you qualify and categorize the lead. Emails, letters, and yes, phone calls are considered "touching" your lead. Today text messaging, social networks, business groups such as LinkedIn all add in helping you keep in touch with leads generated at trade shows.

7. **Personalize the reply.**
   Survey after survey indicates that personalization increases responses and brings you closer to the sale. Personalization (and survey) technology is gaining traction and the level of personalization is no longer limited to names. Photos, objects and nearly any other thought or concept can help drive a personalization program.

8. **What is your ROI?**
   Starting any program without an understanding of the potential ROI is a major risk to your continued employment. Ask your marketing services provider for a reverse return on investment analysis or RROI. If they can't give you one, consider a change to different supplier. Linked to ROI is accountability and full online tracking dashboards.

9. **Make the Cold Call a Warm Experience.**
   The more you know about your leads and more you have communicated with them adds warmth to the meeting. Walking into a meeting with just a name is sales suicide. What you need to develop is a detailed understanding of the prospect's needs. Not only will this save you the cost of a cold call but it will prove to the prospect that the sales call has value and is not going to be a fishing trip.

10. **Survey your leads.**
    In today's world of costly sales visits, the more you know the better you can determine if the lead is worth following up. Online intelligent survey tools and select downloads provide you with an inside look into the mind of the prospect

11. **Track your leads.**
    You need to track the lead from the capture right to the sales meeting and beyond. Knowing what to say, what to send and what position to take at the meeting is part of the tracking effort. Understanding why some sales people are setting up meetings and others are not can be more clearly understood if you track the program's progress. You may discover that those salespeople with higher rates of conversions to sales are using sales techniques that could help you entire effort.

12. **Take Action.**
    Does the sales call close the effort? No, an ongoing sales effort needs to be developed. Customers like to be kept informed; they want to understand your products and the benefits that those products provide to their business needs. If you are not telling them, they are not going to know about your summer sale, your next show or a new product offering. Action can be defined and linked to secret number six. But communication alone does not make the sale. Follow up, cross selling and up selling are all actionable items.

13. **Call me.**
    Now that you reviewed the 12 points above, you may have some questions, comments, and concerns or just need some advice. Call me. I will ask about you, your needs, and your job. I will ask for your email address and your phone number. Why? I practice what I preach.

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