

Tuesday 5/22  
mail invitations  
send e-vites  
blog-it

PERFECT!  
traffic driving  
giveaway



LOGO

- couple
- of
- bullets

LARGE!  
Attention  
Getting Graphic

message overall theme!

refine  
after-show  
follow up plan



staff:  
- polos, lanyard's,  
namebadges  
- update script

# BOOTH! There It Is

## HOW TO BUILD AN AWESOME EVENT MARKETING PLAN

- Objective:** Why are you exhibiting? What's the point? [p.2](#)
- Strategy:** Achieving the objective [p.3](#)
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*\*Need more statistics on exhibits? Visit CEIR at: [www.ceir.org](http://www.ceir.org)*

**SIMPLY  
SHOWING UP  
WON'T CUT  
IT. YOU NEED  
A PLAN.**

Trade shows and exhibitions provide businesses and organizations with a valuable opportunity to see a large number of people, face-to-face in a short amount of time. Customers, prospects and the public can interact with your brand in a personal way. This human element allows marketers to use a variety of sales tools such as personal interaction, demonstration and sampling to deliver the brand message, promote their cause and attain valuable leads.

Whether they're at expos, trade shows or career fairs, attendees visit these events to hear what you have to say. Over the past few years, reports from the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) state that attendees come to these events intending to buy. The CEIR found that 91% of visitors feel that they get their most useful buying information by attending a show and that 75% buy as result of the information gathered at a show.

While those numbers are enticing to any business, exhibiting at a show is a large investment and just showing up and setting up a booth won't cut it. To get any return from exhibiting at an event, a well-executed and integrated marketing strategy must be implemented. That means determining your objectives, creating a strategy to achieve those objectives, formulating tactics to carry out the strategy and evaluating the results to measure your return on investment.

## WHY ARE YOU EXHIBITING?

*Simple or complex, your answer to this question will be the key to building a cohesive marketing strategy.*

### a. Objective: Why are you exhibiting? What's the point?

Your objective for exhibiting at an event needs to be specific and measurable. The particulars of the show will help shape your objective. Order-writing shows, like garden, boat, and home shows are events where exhibitors are expected to sell their products and services. On the other hand, missionary shows like career fairs and health and wellness expos focus on educating, informing and building relationships with attendees.

Attendee demographics also play a role in determining achievable objectives. An event that is open to the public makes it more difficult to identify prospects prior to the doors opening. For open shows, objectives would place a stronger emphasis on at-show tactics. Closed shows for a specific industry or membership group have audiences who are more focused and prospects who are easier to identify. For these shows, objectives can focus more on gathering leads and moving prospects down the sales funnel.

The overarching goal of any exhibition is to build your brand, but that alone won't translate into a return on your investment. Consider the show type and audience demographics to determine what a successful show looks like. For an order taking show, the objective may be generating a certain number of leads or converting a certain percentage to sales. For shows that are focused on education and relationship building, objectives would revolve around booth visits, collateral distribution, business cards collected or list sign-ups. Once defined, these objectives will drive your strategic development.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE AUDIENCE.

### b. Strategy: Achieving the objective.

Use your objectives for exhibiting at an event, to develop a strategy to guide your marketing activities before, during and after the show. In determining your approach, always take the audience into consideration. The audience needs to be narrowed and segmented to be sure your marketing activities are attracting the right attendees to your booth. Attendees fall into one of two categories – customers and prospects. Each has a different reason for attending the event, so each will require a different marketing strategy.

Customers, as you might imagine, are those who are currently using your products and services or have in the past. When engaging this group, the goal is to continue building the relationship to keep them as a customer. Your marketing should treat them as honored guests with exclusive activities and gifts designed just for them. When they visit the booth, address any concerns, as well as find additional business opportunities and any other information that will lead them to continue a profitable relationship.

Prospects at the show can be divided into two subgroups – identified and unidentified. The identified prospects are those you have engaged previously or are specifically targeting. At the show, your goal will be to push identified prospects closer to a sale. Unidentified prospects are those who stop by your booth and are interested but haven't been targeted. For either group, keep in mind the specifics of your event; your presence could be their first impression of your brand.

### STAY ON BRAND

*Your company's current branding and marketing collateral are great resources for your booth's design.*

The second component to the marketing strategy is your brand message. Since, again, the overarching objective of any exhibition is to build your brand, your booth should be an extension of your brand communication plan. The message should be aligned with your show objectives, i.e. rolling out a new product, bringing awareness to a cause or increasing your marketing share. Since you will be side-by-side with competitors, your value statement and points of differentiation need to be well-rehearsed by staff and clearly and creatively displayed on signage, collateral, samples and giveaways.

## DATA COLLECTION & EVALUATION

The final step is to decide what information needs to be collected to determine if you have achieved your objectives. Will you measure visits, leads, or conversions? Outline benchmarks that will be used to identify qualified leads, so as staff engage visitors, they know what questions to ask. Consider incorporating a survey or other attendee feedback mechanism to help evaluate your exhibition's performance from a qualitative standpoint. Once you've finalized the strategy, it's time to outline the steps for executing that strategy.

### c. Tactics: Let's do this!

76% OF  
VISITORS  
PLAN THEIR  
VISITS IN  
ADVANCE.

#### Pre-Show

You've outlined your marketing strategy, now it's time to put actions to it. Your marketing strategy needs to be executed long before the event date. Why? According to the CEIR, 76% of attendees plan their booth visits in advance. Likewise, the CEIR also found that pre-show promotions have proven to increase booth traffic by 30%. Convinced you need to do pre-show promotion? Thought so.

The minimum pre-show marketing that you should conduct is to invite attendees to visit your booth. Attendees won't know you are going to be at the show unless you tell them. Use multiple channels and touches like a pre-show mailing and e-vites. Add a message to your email signature lines. Use your social media accounts (personal and/or corporate) and your website to give them a tease of what they will see at your booth.

For a more targeted approach, consider direct mail. If a list of registered attendees is available, you can simply invite everyone on the list. Or identify customers or high value prospects and send them a special invite with an exclusive offer. Regardless of whom it is going to, the piece should include the event date, booth location, contact information, marketing message and a call to action. With either a general or more targeted approach, including a promotional product boosts open rates and retention.

#### ALL MAILERS AREN'T CREATED EQUAL

*A 2015 study by the Direct Marketing Association found that dimensional or lumpy mail elicits a response rate that is 50% better than traditional flat mail.*

## INCENTIVES GET VISITORS MOTIVATED.

Invitations are great, but to take it a step further and drive traffic to your booth, consider an incentive. These can be structured several ways, but the goal is to motivate the attendee to take action. If your objective is to get as many people as possible to your booth, including a simple card to redeem at the booth for a drawing or gift will suffice. If you are taking a more targeted approach and want to move prospects closer to a sale, have them earn the redemption item by listening to a presentation or watching a demonstration.

Another incentive is the companion gift. In this case, send out one promotional item and invite the attendee to pick up the companion item at your booth. An example could be sending a coaster and having the attendee bring it to your booth to pick up the accompanying mug. As this tactic can have a higher price tag, it should be reserved for high-value prospects or customers. Also, don't just give away the companion piece. Encourage the attendee to have a conversation with you first.

In addition to being great motivators and traffic builders, redemptions are also an easy way to track the effectiveness of pre-show marketing efforts. Keep in mind that a giveaway's perceived value must match the attendee's perceived cost in obtaining it. If it doesn't, your offer will be ignored. Likewise, the cost of the giveaway must match the value of the intended prospect's activity. If it doesn't, you are throwing money away. Remember that pre-show mailings and invites should be sent no later than two to three weeks prior to the actual event.

### At-Show

Now that you've got attendees excited and motivated to see you at the event, the next step in carrying out your show marketing strategy is your activity at the show itself. The hub of your activity will be in your exhibition space or booth. It will most likely be the first impression attendees, particularly prospects, will have of your brand. The layout of your space should be inviting and give a visitor the ability to maneuver through it with ease.

### CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA EVENT

*Creating an event on Facebook or LinkedIn is a good way to measure interest.*

**THE DECISION TO STOP IS MADE IN SECONDS.**

**Left Banner:**

*This banner has a simple, main focal point that is recognizable from a distance. Curiosity draws the viewer closer to see the branding and message.*

**Right Banner:**

*This banner leaves the viewer unsure of where to look. Large blocks of text overwhelm the viewer with information and are often ignored.*

You have only a few moments to grab the attention of and leave an impression with attendees, even ones that you have invited and incented. They will be pre-qualifying you and making decisions about your brand from 15-20 feet away. Creative, innovative graphics should tell attendees quickly who you are and what your value proposition is. Simple is better as displays with too much information often overwhelm and turn away visitors. (But don't leave your prospects guessing about what you do.) Since you are literally competing side-by-side with your competitors, solid design is critical.



Staff at the show are the face of your company and could be the first personal interaction that a visitor has with your brand. They should be well-versed in your messaging and know how to guide attendees to the next step. Communicate clearly with your staff about the information needed for follow-up after the show. They should have a cohesive, brand conscious, professional look and should be easily identified even if they are not at your booth. The type of apparel worn by staff leaves an impression. A t-shirt or athletic apparel says something completely different than a performance polo or dress shirt – but each can be effective if branded properly and used in the appropriate context

Giveaways, usually a sample or a promotional item, are universally expected at a trade show. A promotional product that is relevant, unique and fun can create buzz around your booth. The right item can create envy among other attendees and become a viral, word-of-mouth component to your event marketing plan. Your promotional items should reflect your brand and have value so attendees will keep it. Since the average promotional product is kept for 8 months\*, choosing the right one will carry your message long after the event.

*\*2016 ASI Global Advertising Specialties Impressions Study, Advertising Specialty Institute, ©2016, All Rights Reserved.*

### **GIVEAWAY DESIGN:**

*While your signage needs to stay on brand, giveaways are where you can have some fun. The giveaway that has a clever and thoughtful design will have a far greater impact than just your contact information.*

**DON'T JUST  
GIVE IT  
AWAY.**

Another traffic-building idea is to hold a drawing or drawings. The prize could be retail merchandise or your premium product or service. The merchandise may grab the attention of the general attendee, while using your own products or services creates customer interest for your offerings. To get the most traffic possible, hold the final drawing during the show and, of course, the winners must visit the booth to enter.

When deciding giveaways and the budget for them, consider the audience segments that you outlined in your strategy. Higher value giveaways or gift for high-value targets make a stronger statement and move those prospects closer to a sale. While the cost may be more than your generic giveaway, the likelihood of a return is also greater. Whether you have a drawing or giveaway, make the visitor do something which directly contributes to your exhibition goals, in order to receive it. Have them talk to staff, watch a demonstration or at the very least, complete their contact information on an entry card.

Use social media to drive traffic and enhance your presence at the event. Live updates from the show remind people to stop by your booth. To get attendees to pay attention to your social media activity, hold social media-only discounts or giveaways within a specified time frame. Find relevant hashtags on Twitter and participate in discussions to share your expertise and draw attendees to your booth. Post pictures or video from activities at the event so those who could not attend can still experience it.

Many exhibitions or shows have more going on than what's happening on the show floor. Get involved in education sessions, socials and media activities. This may include participating, hosting a session or sponsoring an event. These are great opportunities for you to interact with industry influencers, show your thought leadership or simply share your passion. It's one more way to build your brand at the show.

**80% OF EXHIBITORS DO NOTHING AFTER THE EVENT.**

### Post-Show

After the event is where the money is made yet, according to the CEIR, 80% of exhibitors do nothing. After investing in driving traffic to your booth and connecting with attendees, it would be a tragedy to waste that effort by simply packing up and going home. Follow up on those leads and contacts you made.

At the very least, send a thank you note to those you and your staff spoke. If possible, personalize the note by mentioning something that was discussed at the booth. This will help them remember your conversation better. This extra step requires excellent note taking at the booth and should be part of your staff's information collection training.

Your follow up correspondence should start one or two weeks after the event. It's a short enough time frame so the information is still fresh, but long enough that your messages aren't lost in their post-show catch up. If part of your objective was to gather leads, start qualifying them as soon as possible. Follow up with those who are most qualified first, to strike while the iron is hot. Post-show communication can also be another qualifier. Their response to your follow-up can help you frame your pursuit of their business.

After the show and your follow up, it is important to measure your results to determine the success of your exhibition. Measurements should be based on the objective that you previously outlined. Take a look at booth visits, presentations or demonstrations conducted and literature given, to determine the interest you were able to create for your brand or cause. If your goals were related to sales, track the leads that were generated and how many were converted. This information is important for the final step in the marketing plan – evaluation.

**STAFF  
FEEDBACK  
WILL HELP  
SHAPE  
FUTURE  
EVENTS.**

#### **d. Evaluation: How'd we do?**

The final step of any marketing plan is to evaluate the results of the campaign. Start by reviewing the performance of the marketing plan itself. Determine if the pre-show marketing drove the desired amount of traffic and if it was the right traffic. Of those visitors, how many turned into leads? Track post-show communication to determine the quality of those leads. Finally, look at the sales conversions to ultimately determine the return on investment.

Next, you will want to evaluate the show experience itself. This requires talking to booth staff about their observations regarding the booth, visitor feedback, industry trends, how well the branding and promotions were received and thoughts on the competition. Ask staff what they would do differently at the next show. Taking their experience into account for future show planning will help your exhibition perform better.

Use qualitative and quantitative information to determine the effectiveness of your plan and if your presence at the event was worthwhile. Also keep in mind outside factors such as the weather, can affect the performance of your exhibition. This information will help you improve your marketing plans and choose which events you will exhibit at in the future.

#### **e. That's a wrap.**

A trade show or exhibition is an excellent opportunity to present your brand and message in a personal way to a large audience. While much of the information and examples mentioned in this white paper are geared more toward trade shows and a for-profit business perspective, the same principles apply toward any situation that involves exhibiting. Objectives and a strategic marketing plan before, during and after the show must be carefully considered and measurable. Strong visuals must grab attention and creatively and clearly state your message. And, of course, you should always be building your brand.



### About HALO Branded Solutions

Headquartered in Sterling, Illinois, HALO Branded Solutions is centrally located in order to support a national client base. In addition to our 100,000 square foot, state-of-the-art distribution and processing center, we maintain regional sales offices in key corporate markets.

HALO employs 300 corporate service team members with decades of knowledge and experience who support the over 900 creative and resourceful Account Executives across the nation who focus on implementing effective marketing solutions for over 40,000 satisfied clients each year.

HALO is a global leader of promotional solutions, combining creativity, innovation and the most sophisticated technology for dynamic results. As a "full-service" promotional products distributor, we offer:

- Company stores and fulfillment services.
- Industry-leading customer service from over 900 Account Executives throughout the United States and a support staff of over 300.
- Competitive pricing, including our popular Best Sellers and BrandED merchandise programs.
- Secure Source, HALO's comprehensive product safety and social compliance program.
- Award winning marketing support for your internal and external branding campaigns.
- Brand management expertise to create consistency in logo use throughout your organization.

With top-quality products, over six decades of branding expertise and efficient operational processes, HALO offers unmatched reliability and unique solutions for every client, on every project.