5 Trade Show Marketing Mistakes
John M. Coe

The U.S. trade show industry is BIG. The 2015 data from CEIR showed continued growth even in a somewhat sluggish economy. While the overall industry has grown, not all shows have seen this increase. Many are not growing and/or seeing a decrease in their margin/profit. Part of the challenge today for trade show marketers is to cost effectively attract attendees.

Traditional marketing approaches such as direct mail and email are becoming less effective due to both clutter and poor targeting. This is evident by declining response and sign-up rates when sending communications to last year's attendees list. Little, if any, in-depth data analysis of campaign effectiveness is being done even though the show organizer has the data in their registration system. Unfortunately these systems are nothing more than repositories of registration data, and do not provide the capability to perform analytics on the campaign results of cross channel and multiple communications.

Therefore, trade show marketers are missing the boat to analyze what has not worked, and most of all what has produced the most cost effective results. To meet attendance goals, satisfy exhibitors and increase profits, trade show marketers frequently just "send more" to make up for the decrease in registration rates. In essence, they are using last year's registration as just a list, and not transforming it into a marketing database that allows analytics to improve their marketing campaigns. Here are 5 of the most common marketing mistakes from looking at last year's trade show campaigns with input from Steve Juedes, President of Direct Hit Marketing a trade show data science firm that provides in-depth tradeshow marketing analysis for over 35 shows.

1. **Not creating a master marketing database**
   The data in the registration file is only a response list. If, in the registration process, a few other questions are asked they are only a few, as attendees do not want to fill out long registration forms. The value of the registration data is its recency and accuracy, which is usually a problem with many B2B data sources. By enhancing this accurate registration list with firmagraphic data, title/function classification, and self- reported attendee information, the opportunity for profiling and segmentation is dramatically enhanced. This leads to better targeting, improved measurement and a stronger return on promotion. The information gained from a well-segmented master marketing database will also aid in selecting the best partner and prospecting segments.

2. **Looking only at cost per impression and not cost per registration**
   This is the classic activity vs. result trap. Many marketers choose to judge and select their marketing communication tactic based on a cost per impression or CPM. This does not take into account the multiple contacts and media that trade show marketers launch before the show. As an example, I attended the DMA Annual Conference I received 5 brochures and multiple emails, all sent to generate one registration. I'm sure the DMA knows how much each communication cost, but do they measure how much in total was spent on me to generate one registration? Likely not! It is now incumbent for trade show marketers to measure across all communication channels to determine both the combination that worked, but also the total cost per registration.

3. **Not segmenting the registration list creatively**
   Segmentation comes from two sources – existing knowledge of the market segments or data analysis that identifies new ways to segment. Do not get me wrong, trade show marketers do know the general segments their show attracts, as frequently the show is organized around industry groupings. An example is the largest US trade show - ConExpo-Con/Agg convention - referred to as the equipment show, held in Las Vegas every two years. Logically, their campaigns are focused on potential attendees by past attendance and industry definitions. While that is fine, it could go much further by using some creativity based on the existing registration list and data. Here are other segmentation approaches that they could consider:

   - Registration type by date and discount for early registration
   - How many attendees are from same company and/or location
   - Conference behavior such as educational seminars attended
   - Analysis by title level and/or functional area
   - Based on attendance dynamics – years attended or if they attended the last show
   - Attendance patterns if alternating venues are involved.
   - Key self- reported demographic data from the registration form
   - Combinations of the above

   A direct marketing truth - the more relevant the message the higher the response rate.

4. **Not analyzing the results of cross channel communications**
   As mentioned in number 2 above, most trade shows calculate cost per impression of the outbound communications as the primary criteria for media selection. Therefore, we see a continual shift to lower cost digital and e-mail communications. Unfortunately, this misses the real issue. That issue is knowing the CPR (cost per registration) performance for each direct marketing campaign and segment. An accurate CPR (cost per registration) may only be obtained by using a cross-channel attribution model that is

built, with the actual cost of each direct marketing touch. Two significant results from Direct Hit's marketing analysis of 35 plus trade shows held in 2015 and 2016 were:

- Multi-channel and multi-touch communication produced a more cost effective registration vs. only e-mail.
- Direct mail outperformed e-mail by 3 to 1 in verified registrations and related revenue. Direct mail, as a single direct channel, has been more effective than an e-mail only approach.

In other words, cost per impression is the wrong criteria for media selection.

5. **Not up-selling educational events to increase value per registration**
   Many shows offer educational seminars for an extra fee, and can produce very significant incremental revenue. While there is a focus on the educational content in the initial communications and brochures, marketers are often missing the opportunity to dynamically up-sell upon an individual's registration. Two recommendations are:

   - Quickly follow up in the confirmation with a special offer for the conference events – be creative and test offers.
   - Determine if more than one person per company is attending, and offer a company discount to the most senior title and have this communicated by a capable telemarketer. Script testing is recommended.

   In essence, do not stop selling when the individual registers!

While there are more than 5 mistakes, start with these and pocket the profit!

John M. Coe
VP Business Development & Marketing Strategy
John has collaborated with Direct Hit Marketing and is responsible for adding new trade show clients and thought leadership. John is also Co-Founder and Partner of B2BMarketing.com. His background includes experience in both sales and marketing. On the sales side, John was a field salesman, national sales manager and executive in charge of both sales and marketing for three major B2B firms. On the marketing side, he was president of a B2B direct marketing agency for 10 years, was National Campaign Manager at IBM, Sr. VP of B2B at Rapp Collins Worldwide and President of Protocol B2B. John is also the author of *The Fundamentals of Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing,* published by McGraw-Hill. John's next book co-authored with Steve Juedes, President of DHM is titled *Data-Driven Trade Show Marketing & Sales for Organizers and Exhibitors* is due for publication in early 2016. He can be reached at johnc@directhitmarketing.com or by phone at 602-402-6588.