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WHAT EXHIBITORS WANT?

By

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Your sales team deals with this issue daily when calling current and prospective exhibitors. They need to be confident in their approach to convince exhibitors that “it is worth it” to exhibit and/or sponsor at your show. Exhibitor marketing executives along with the CFO want to manage their tradeshow marketing spends effectively.

So here are few proven tactics that the sales staff, (and perhaps the marketing team) should use when selling exhibitors.

So what sells exhibitors?

First, we recognize that there are **two types of exhibitors – new and current**. While the sales issues are a bit different for acquisition vs. retention, there are always four common needs in decision making that must be satisfied before a B2B purchase decision is reached. From the B-2-B buyer’s perspective they are:

1. **Does the product or service fit** my company’s needs, problems, or objectives? Will the purchase benefit my company in either reducing cost or increasing revenue or meeting some other identified goal?
2. **Do I feel confident** in doing business with the seller, and do I believe the information given regarding the product/service is accurate? Will they help me be successful? Are others in my company in support of my decision?
3. **Are there potential risks** or uncertainties with the purchase that could be an issue? If so, can I manage them or will any one of them be a significant problem for either me or others in my company?
4. **Will I gain personally** in my job, career and position in my company? On the other hand, if the purchase causes a problem will it negatively impact my position within the company?



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These four needs are general and not trade show specific. So let's translate them into our industry and under each suggest what could be done to more effectively sell exhibitors. Here are these same four questions relevant to the exhibitor, and below each are suggestions on what you might do to answer them and sell your show – as a new or repeat exhibitor.

1. **Does your trade show align with my target market(s)**, and are there enough attendees that fit my buyer profile to make the expense and effort worthwhile?
 - a. Provide a more detailed analysis of prior year attendees that could include more in-depth statistical profiles and quantification of what industry, size of company, titles and other profile information on those who attended.
 - b. Offer pre-show marketing help to attract the right attendees to the exhibitor's booth. This should include a pre-show registration list, possibly even profiled, to assist the exhibitor to pick out and communicate to their targeted attendees.
 - c. Develop a post-show data sharing program that gives exhibitors data on attendees who did not visit their booth, but fit their target audience. This list then could then be used to increase lead generation results for exhibitors.

2. **Do I feel confident** that your show will deliver the projected attendee number?
 - a. Provide more than a year's historical data. A 3-5 year history showing a continual growth and/or steady attendance will assure the exhibitor that registration goals should be reached. This historical data is even more convincing if the attendees are profiled in-depth.
 - b. Testimonials or videos from other similar exhibitors on how they succeeded at the show are more believable than the sales person promoting the show. Possibly offer contact information on these other exhibitors so a conversation between the two would be possible.
 - c. A program to identify and communicate to others in the exhibitor's organization that are involved and/or need to support the decision. This approach is now called Account Based Marketing and increases the depth of contact within key accounts.
 - d. Develop an "On Boarding" program for new exhibitors. This program provides special care and handling of new exhibitors. It reduces the fear surrounding their



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decision making process, and will encourage new exhibitors to sign-up as this type of “hand-holding” assures them of special treatment.

3. **Are there risks** in exhibiting at your show?

- a. The primary risk for a trade show manager is if the promised quality and quantity of attendees does not materialize. What guarantee is provided if attendance levels do not reach promised numbers? As these managers are usually in the marketing or sales department, they are likely familiar with the TV “make-good” guarantee, if viewership drops below a certain level. By offering a similar guarantee not only are you decreasing the perceived risk, but also showing confidence in your promotional promises for attendance.
- b. The other risk falls into the category of uncontrollable events such as weather and facility problems. These should be also spelled out as to the remedies if such a natural and facility disasters occur.

4. **Will I gain personally** from this decision in my job and career?

- a. Managing a successful trade show exhibit is a difficult assignment for even the most seasoned marketing person. Success in achieving the show’s objectives, particular in producing leads, will give any marketing person a big feather in their cap.

So what can organizers do to insure that the exhibiting show manager feels they will succeed? One idea is to provide more knowledge and data to help them generate leads. The data to offer has been detailed above, and more knowledge on lead generation, qualification and conversion that is orientated to trade shows will also be greatly appreciated. White papers, webinars and even pre and post show meetings will add to their ability to achieve show objectives. Using an industry expert to hold the webinar or write the white paper would be smart as this outside expert will be believable.

- b. Creating an exhibitors council is always a good idea to not only receive valuable feedback but also recognize top performers. In addition, video the exhibitor show managers as that will provide visibility and credibility for career advancement either inside or outside of their current firm.



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To Sum Up:

The sales process between the organizer's sales staff and exhibitor is both old and new. **Old** in the sense that trade shows have been an important marketing tactic for years and continues to account for a large percentage of the marketing budget for many companies. **New** in the view of all the other options companies now have to connect with their targeted audiences, generate leads and revenue. Need I say social media, SEO, technology stacks, retargeting, AI or Account Based Marketing as other ways to generate leads?

There is no question that marketing departments are enamored with and continually chase “**the new shinning object in the sky**”, in search of the “silver bullet” solution. This pre-occupation with the new tactics relegates trade show and events to “old hat” status, and therefore places increasing pressure on the decision to exhibit. The question we hear is often phrased as “can't we use our trade show budget more cost effectively for (fill in the blank)?” It's difficult for exhibit managers to not only answer this question but prove a near term ROI as they defend the trade show budget.

Therefore, your exhibitor sales team needs to be prepared and supported to confidently answer the question “Is Your Trade Shows worth It?”

The best sales **B2B process always addresses the four common needs and questions** outlined above.

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John has partnered 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 2019. He can be reached at johnc@directhitmarketing.com or by phone at 602-402-6588.