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WHY TO SELL THE EXTRA VALUE OF TRADE SHOWS

By

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Exhibitors Want Leads!

The overriding reason B2B firms' exhibit at trade shows is to find qualified leads – some studies have documented that it is as high as 80% of the reason. Of course, that depends on the firm's marketing situation. The other primary reasons are branding, customer relationship building and competitive analysis – important, but not easily measureable, and marketing needs measuring.

So how do trade shows stack up today in comparison to other lead generation tactics? To sell exhibitors on your show, you first need to understand the current B2B lead generation environment.

21 Lead Generation Tactics

There is no shortage of lead generation tactics. While many are traditional methods, some are relatively new. Here's a list of 21 tactics used today by B2B marketers. I may have missed one or two, but in any case, the take-away for organizers is that there are many competitors for marketers to spend their lead generation money, and trade shows is only one! Here's the list of 21 in no particular order:

1. Trade shows – still leading with an average of 22% of the budget, but in danger.
2. Space ads in trade or business magazines (many remain in print)
3. Banner ads in a wide variety of online placements
4. Mass mailings to compiled and response lists that fit a defined profile or criteria
5. Emails to compiled and response lists
6. Intent data that identifies companies who have shown interest by their internet behavior
7. Impact/3-D mailings to a well-defined targeted list as they can be expensive
8. Cold telemarketing – B2B is not restricted by the Do-Not-Call regulation
9. SEO – organic search
10. SEO - paid search
11. Social media outreach combined with blogs – this includes LinkedIn
12. Retargeting those who click or download from an online activity
13. Landing page optimization with sticky content and strong calls to action for web visitors
14. Webinars – either solo or joint
15. Content marketing - white papers, reports, blogs, articles in trade magazines
16. Self-published e-books – as giveaways or to sell on Amazon
17. Speeches at conferences or other industry gatherings
18. Event marketing – solo seminars, networking, entertainment at events, etc.
19. Customer referral programs if the customer and sales situation is right
20. Influencer marketing – more of a B2C thing, but can work in B2B
21. Account Based Marketing – the latest rage



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Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

How do trade shows stack up?

Overall trade shows have several advantages, and in addition to the usual ones organizers promote here are three that exhibitors do not understand well and therefore an opportunity for organizers to use as extra value for exhibiting and generating leads:

- **A face-to-face environment that marketers understand, but sales values more.**

A lot is written on how buyers start looking for products/services on Google. On the other hand, recent B2B studies have shown that a personal meeting at the beginning of the buying process for a complex sale is not only desired by buyers, but also gives a significant advantage to the seller. These same studies have also shown that it is critical to have a personal meeting to close the sale.

So where can these in-person meeting take place – trade shows of course. In fact, many companies arrange for the final sale/contract to take place at shows, and then celebrate at night with dinner. One additional sales advantage offered at trade shows is that executives from both the buyer and seller attend the show, and it is an opportunity for them to meet each other, which bodes well for long-term relationship building.

- **Sales productivity leverage**

Sales productivity has become one of the most challenging areas for sales managers to improve. The cost of a B2B sales call ranges from \$350 - \$500 and averages \$425/call. This does depend on the coverage model, but regardless all sales managers are looking for any way to both reduce this cost and/or make calls more effective.

Many approaches are deployed, but one that has not been optimized is the “one-to-many” advantage of trade shows. If one of the show’s objectives is to maximize the number of meetings with prospects, then marketing and sales will focus on this outcome and work for more face-to-face meetings with prospects.

So how might this translate into sales productivity improvements? Here’s an example:

- Cost of the attendance of one sales person at a 3-day show – salary (\$1,200) plus expenses (\$1,300) for a show total of \$2,500 for each sales person.
- During the show, the sales person has 4 meetings per day of significance with prospects for a total of 12 during the show. Using the \$2,500, then each meeting costs \$208 vs. \$425 or a reduction of \$217/call and \$2,604 total savings.



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Clearly, this is only an example and real numbers need to be used for each company, but the outcome will be similar in the reduction of the cost of a sales call. Most exhibitors intuitively know this, but have not put it into the financial justification for exhibiting. This is an opportunity for organizer sales people to highlight this major benefit.

- **Improved and faster lead qualification**

One of the most difficult steps in the lead process the step between inquiry and qualification. For most B2B companies that are active in lead generation, many inquiries result, and they need to be qualified before passing to sales – actually, the process is more sophisticated than this, but that’s another blog! The average B2B conversion rate from inquiry to qualified lead is only 10% – a surprisingly low percentage.

Not surprisingly, significant time and expense are used to qualify leads. Much of the difficulty is the ability to personally communicate with the inquiry to ask the qualifying questions. This is very frustrating for the inside business development reps, and it’s not unusual for weeks and even months to elapse before an inquiry is engaged in a conversation and qualified or not.

Contrast this to when a sales person is face-to-face with a prospect at the show. Asking the qualifying questions is not only possible, but also obtaining answers that are more accurate is also likely in a face-to-face setting. In essence, two steps in one – finding the prospect (inquiry) and qualifying them into a lead or not. This has many benefits including a much faster process, and all studies indicate that the firm first to the lead usually wins the sale over competition.

To Sum Up

Organizers have been selling the traditional FAB’s of trade shows for years, but the game has changed on the marketer’s side when it comes to lead generation. Not only are there many more methods to generate leads, but they are threatening the traditional reasons firms have used to exhibit. This calls for increasing the value proposition to exhibitors for lead generation. The more value delivered the better trade shows will stack up against the alternative lead generation tactics. The three “extra values” described above are not normally documented by organizers, so here’s your chance to move beyond the traditional reasons and add more value to the justification to exhibit at your trade show.



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

Direct Hit Marketing

Direct Hit Marketing (DHM) based in Lafayette, CO has been providing data analytics to the trade show industry for 28 years with its 360 Registration Data Analytics Program™. This data service starts with the show's registration data and combines it with the targeted mail, email and phone communications that were used to drive registration, and returns to the organizer up to 35 reports of what worked and what did not. The cost savings in mailings alone typically more than offsets the data analytic fee and provides insight in how to improve future marketing programs as well. For more information visit www.DirectHitMarketing.com or contact Steven Juedes, Jr at stevenj@directhitmarketing.com or (303) 666-0798.