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Marketing to the Attendee Mindset

By

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What's Done Now

Marketing to attendees and increasing registration is the primary concern of trade show marketers and consumes the majority of each show's budget. Having stated the obvious, a primary goal in this post-pandemic era is to discover ways to spend the budget more wisely or in other words, **how to drive more registrations with the same or fewer dollars.**

To that end, here is what we see as standard marketing practices across most shows:

- Develop a theme and/or promotional copy platforms for the new show that will attract, if not excite individuals to register.
- Promote the benefits of registering early, communicate often with email and yes, direct mail. It is having a bit of a revival to house and partner lists.
- Use the online, digital, and social media channels that seem to work, and double down on the ones that work.
- Segment past from potential attendees and email each group with a different message and frequency giving greater attention to past attendees.
- Sub-segment past attendees based on different criteria including geography, years of attendance, education/seminar attendance and other data available in the database to develop micro-segmented messages and offers.
- Encourage and/or facilitate exhibitors to market to their customers and prospects.
- Offer exhibitors and sponsors a pre-show and post-show e-mail program to past attendees.
- Increase frequency and urgency of messages as the show approaches and send a "last chance" communication to everyone.
- Other approaches specific to the show.



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What do all these marketing approaches have in common? Several things, but universally our **message development uses information we know and not the individual's mindset – which we do not know.**

The Buyers Mindset

We make most, if not all, decisions using a **blend of Rational and Emotional** aspects of how we view the attendance decision process. We do not think of making our decisions in these terms, but it is true. Some decisions are almost all rational – buying office supplies. Others are mostly emotional – the clothes we wear, but it is always a blend.

So what might we define as the basic mindset of the potential attendees? First, the mindset is influenced by experience and existing factors, and in the case of trade shows, it is whether I have attended or not, combined with the business situation and responsibility. Using the most frequently used segmentation of attendees, here are the logical mindsets we are dealing with:

- **Past Attendee**
 1. **I am attending** – a variety of reasons drives this mindset including always attending or being obligated to attend for business reasons.
 2. **Not sure** – based on past experience and/or other limiting factors such as expense, I have yet to decide on attending.
 3. **Not this year** – maybe next year or never again, but in both cases the decision has been made.

- **New Attendee**
 1. **I'm attending** – new job responsibilities or business priorities makes the decision to attend easy.
 2. **Not sure** – haven't been given and/or see enough reason to attend at this time.
 3. **Not this year** – or ever, as the show is not in my area of interest/responsibility and/or my business is not engaged in this market.

So who is really our target to increase registration? You guessed it – the **Not Sure past and potential attendees**. The others are pre-determined as to their decision and unless something changes in their situation or mindset, any marketing communications will not change this.



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Using Personas to Craft Convincing Communications to the *Not Sure Segments*

In the last several years, personas have become popular for one reason – we do not know the individual we are talking to and this is the next best thing. Usually, marketers create a persona of the individual targeted based on their job responsibilities and likely profile. Unfortunately, many trade show marketers cannot narrow it down to the individual function and profile and need to deal with a much wider group of individuals.

So how can we use personas to reach and effectively communicate and convince the “Not Sure” attendees to register? The **best approach is to use basic persona types**, and construct different messages for each persona. Then rotate the messages to cover all of them during the registration campaign. As you will see in the following outline, some personas are mostly rational and others are heavily emotional.

Think of personas as the driving force behind decision-making and structure communications from their viewpoint. In other words, **present the attendance decision on the buyer’s terms in both benefits and language**. That is how to use personas in marketing. Also be aware that while an individual has a dominate persona they also will have a secondary or even tertiary persona that exists alongside. Here’s a brief description of six typical personas.

- **Six Basic Persona Types**

- 1. Decisive**

This individual makes decisions quickly and drives results on their schedule. They are independent, believe in their own opinion and do not particularly like committee decisions unless they are leading the committee. They take risks and expect others to be decisive and risk takers as well. On the rational/emotional scale, they are in the 90/10 range.

- 2. Analytical**

As the name indicates, this individual looks at data or experience in decision-making. They follow procedures, rules and established methods and do not easily step outside of the box unless logic dictates. At times, they procrastinate while looking for more data and information. If you push too hard, they will become stubborn and shut down unless the data you present is overwhelming. On the rational/emotional scale they are also up there in the 80/20 range.



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3. Skeptical

They start the decision process questioning what is said and the more boastful the communication, the more they distrust it and you. Generally, they are quite, introspective and keep their feelings to themselves. They value input and look for others they trust and/or respect. Once their trust is given, it is hard to shake it. They do not like phone conversations and prefer email. On the rational/emotional scale, they are in the 70/30 range.

4. Innovator

They are somewhat the opposite of Analytical. This individual is a risk taker who is looking for new (out-of-the-box) solutions. They tend to ignore rules and procedures and do not like the chain of command. Brainstorming with them is good so long as the outcomes are the directions they endorse and will lead. Strong willed and communicative are two traits. On the rational/emotional scale, they are in the 40/60 range.

5. Collaborative

The opposite of Decisive, this individual seeks and values the input and opinions of others. They are flexible and diplomatic. They take time to make decisions. Consensus building is important and decisions will consider many elements and viewpoints. Strong verbal communications and tactful language are two traits. On the rational/emotional scale, they are in the 30/70 range.

6. Relationship

These individuals seek out others first and deal with facts later. Social engagement is very important and they will gravitate toward opportunities to meet other people. They tend to be creative and not very logical, and like others who are similar. They mix business and personal easily and do not see a problem in doing so. Their decisions go with the tide and not against it, as the opinions of others are a needed confirmation. On the rational/emotional scale, they are in the 10/90 range.

How to Use Personas in Marketing to the “Not Sure” Group

It would be great if we could identify who are in this group, but falling short of a survey we cannot. That does not mean we should not use their personas in creating marketing communications, and as mentioned previously here is one four-step approach that will work.



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- View the most compelling and unique aspects of your trade show from the perspective of these six personas and construct strong copy that appeals to each one. This includes headlines, body copy and images.
- Look to combine personas if the creative is similar, but if not, do not merge.
- Rotate these different creative executions throughout the registration campaign.
- Measure opening and response rates when possible and repeat the ones that work.

This process is familiar to marketers, but at times, we default to talking too much about us. We often fall into the routine of three to six marketing campaigns and one size fits all.

A Kick Starter List

To get your creative juices flowing, here is a kick-starter list of headlines/subject lines that should appeal to each of the personas. Obviously, they are not customized to your show, but hopefully they will get you started. The supporting copy must play off the headline.

- **Decisive:**
You know you are coming; it is time to register now!
- **Analytical:**
Here are the five reasons you need to register now!
- **Skeptical:**
Need more information to sign up for the show?
- **Innovator:**
You cannot learn what is new unless you come – register now.
- **Collaborative:**
Hear why others have already registered – do not miss out.
- **Relationship:**
People to meet, things to do and fun to have – join us.

I hope that these sample headlines will kick-start your creative juices.



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To Sum Up

Trade show marketing communications are too predictable and do not frequently speak to the attendee's decision process and motivation. By using the Rational/Emotional balance contained in Personas, you can create new and more engaging communications. For those organizers seeking ways to break through the clutter, our advice is to try, test and measure this approach. Which of these six personas are you? What messaging would speak to you? A great place to start.

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Direct Hit Marketing (DHM) has been providing data analytics to the trade show industry for 30 years. DHM offers other data services to organizers and for a full description of these go to: www.directhitmarketing.com/datasciencesolutions.

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