

Top Tips for success at conferences, exhibitions and events

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B2B MARKETING, PR & DIGITAL CONTENT

Plan & prepare

After much deliberation, haggling and planning, you've pinned down, the trade shows you are going to attend now

You've got a picture in your mind of what your stand is going to look like and you've planned out which products you want to show off during the events. Your staff are ready and raring to go with their business cards, and the iPads and brochures are all prepped, packed and polished. Well, you're on to a winner as that's all necessary preparation for any trade event. However, there are three fundamental questions you should ask yourself next:



WHY ARE THESE QUESTIONS IMPORTANT?

It's all well and good planning for your physical presence at a trade show. But it means little if delegates don't know that you're going to be there and where to find you. At any event large or small you'll be facing stiff competition from competitors – be it direct competitors or just companies with big flashy stands that might distract delegates away from yours.

So it's vital to think about pre-show publicity to get the maximum value out of the investment that you've made. Here are some top tips for ensuring your event is as successful as possible and generates maximum return on investment.

Have a profile

Once you're signed up to exhibit at a trade show you'll usually be sent a whole raft of information from the event organisers



This will include lots of forms and information to read relating to the operational and logistical side to the show. However, there will also be some guidance referring to marketing and publicity opportunities to take advantage of.

One of key first steps is to complete your company profile – this will be featured on the trade show's website and printed show guide will be the first port-of-call for those that are interested in attending the event. You'll typically need to enter a 100 or so word description about your company and expertise; choose your words carefully and always tailor your profile to appeal to potential customers – don't just make a list of your products!

You need a call-to-action



You need to give delegates a reason to visit your stand – simply being there isn't good enough. You'll be facing competition from other exhibitors, and at a trade show time is a precious commodity

If you haven't got a new product or service offering to launch then think about preparing something else – such as a one-off discount offer, a free consultation, or similar marketing offer.

Another option is to run an on-stand competition to encourage delegates to give you their business cards and to add an element of interactivity and fun to the event. Whatever you offer, be sure to make it relevant to the delegates and enticing – too many exhibitors these days think it's fine just to promote a prize draw for an iPad. However, these types of competitions have become so common they are now often ignored.

Spend time brainstorming and try to be more creative with both the competition/offer and the prize – it will be worth the investment of your time.

Prepare a press release

Having a press release written, signed off and on-hand well in advance of the show is critical

Press releases are key tools for letting potential delegates and your own contacts know that you're going to be at a show. Also, more importantly, tells them what you're going to be doing there and gives you the opportunity to build awareness in the lead up to the exhibition.

There is an art to writing a good press release. Think of it as a vehicle for delivering news – therefore there needs to be something 'new' or 'newsworthy' within it. You also need to consider the key messages about your company, products and services that you want to get across. A good press release will be around 250 – 400 words and will include concise information on WHAT the news is about, WHO it involves, WHEN it's happening and HOW it's taking place. Delivery of the press release is of equal importance. You need to research the magazines or web sites that might be interested in the story and the appropriate contact for receiving the story. Building and maintain a good working relationship with the right journalists helps with this process.



More top tips for writing a press release:

- ☑ Concoct a catchy headline - avoid "[company name] to attend [event name]
- ☑ Focus on your call-to-action
- ☑ Be sure to include your stand number
- ☑ Link to your website
- ☑ Link to your company profile on the trade show's website

Take advantage of media partners

A typical trade show will usually be sponsored by a number of trade publications, often called ‘media partners’

You’ll find a list of these partners on the trade show’s web site. It’s a good idea to note who these are well in advance of the show, as they will usually be running pre-planned ‘preview’ features.

The editors will be looking for press releases and good images from exhibitors to highlight what delegates will have on show. This is a good opportunity to promote the press release that you have ideally prepared. You need to be wary of deadlines – most magazines usually work well in advance of publication dates and will need information in advance.

You’ll also need to know who the best person is to send the press release, as a tip it’s best to try the editorial team, either a news, features or managing editor, rather than going through a sales or advertising representative. The editorial team might include the news for free, whereas the advertising team will try and sell you space in the magazine.



Use email marketing

Use a simple system such as Dot Mailer or MailChimp to send an email to your contacts to tell them you'll be at the show.



Make sure your email is clean and simple – people have extremely short attention spans so crowding your email with too much content can be detrimental.

On the other hand, make sure you have something to say. Including extra content, such as links to a white paper or a video preview of why you're going to the show, can also make people sit up and pay attention.

Another consideration is to sponsor the email newsletters that the event's media partners will be sending out prior to the show. Costs vary according to the media partner, however these are typically a few hundred pounds. The benefit of doing this type of email marketing is that you will potentially reach a whole new audience of contacts that you otherwise wouldn't.

A few things to remember: make sure that the people on the database are the right people, check job titles and sectors, check the people are in the right countries that you want to target, check that the database only includes those that have 'opted in'.

Be active on Social Media

Make sure you're following the show's official social media channels and engaging with them - they will often repost your comments and spread awareness to a larger audience

Most shows will also have a dedicated hashtag, make sure you know what this is and include it in every of your posts. Hashtags are the method by which people follow conversations on social media - your goal is to be part of that conversation and to get noticed - for the right reasons of course.

However, it's not all one-way communication: make sure you take notice of what others are talking about in relation to the show and repost where appropriate as the favour will usually be returned.

Social Media is also useful tool for directing people to your stand and/or presentation throughout the event.



CLICK TO PLAY THE VIDEO

Don't ignore calls for speakers

If you're going to a conference or exhibition, try to secure a presentation or seminar slot as early as possible

These are often very popular at events as people are always looking to learn something new from others.

DO'S AND DON'TS INCLUDE:

- Do book early - the most popular slots get taken up very quickly and mornings are usually reserved for keynote speeches.
- Do think carefully about the timing – to maximise the number of people you have attending your slot, avoid the lunchtime lull and late afternoon graveyard shift.
- Do tell people you're doing this – be sure to include the title, short synopsis, timings and location of your presentation on your pre-show press release, corporate profile, email marketing and signatures, and anywhere else that you are able to mention it.
- Don't sell – the temptation is always there to make your presentation all about you, your company, your products, your services. However, remember that people are there to learn – they want to feel like they are being educated rather than preached at or sold to. Its fine to include information about your company and products towards the end but don't start with it or you will lose people from the get-go.
- Don't read from a sheet – audience engagement is key to delivering a successful presentation and there's nothing more off-putting than someone that's reading from a piece of paper or a tablet. Be confident in your subject matter, learn it and practice it. Ask your colleagues to listen and be critical and most importantly be receptive to the criticism and improve.

Do you have your documentation?

It’s important to have literature on your stand that any visitors or passers-by can pick up and take away

Remember that it’s not a numbers game, the key is to have a few, well-thought-out and designed documents. Think about the content, design and printing of the following:

Corporate brochure

A simple four sided document that tells anyone and everyone who you are, what you do and why they should know about it. Consult with a design specialist to make sure that your brochure is well-written, easy to read and stands out from the crowd.

White papers

As mentioned previously, a big reason why people go to trade shows is so they can learn something new from experts in a particular field. Branded white papers are a great way to showcase your specialist knowledge of a particular subject. Remember that it isn’t a sales brochure, the purpose of a white paper is to discuss a topic, technology or opinion in a considered, balanced and general manner rather than promoting a specific product or service.

Datasheets

If there’s a particular product that you want to draw attention to at the show make sure you have a one page, double sided sheet that highlights the key benefits and specifications of that particular product. However, be picky with your datasheets, remember that less is more and too many will only crowd your stand and be ignored by visitors.

Business cards

Make sure you have prepared and printed enough business cards for everyone from your company that is planning to be at the event.

Summary

If you're planning to attend a trade show, conference or exhibition it's well worth spending the time and effort to think through every aspect well in advance

By doing so, you give your company the best possible chance of standing out for the crowd to gather new sales leads and generate new business.

If you're short of time or resources then we can help. If you'd like to learn more about our B2B marketing, PR and digital content services then please give our Managing Director, Nick Brooks, a call on 01908 533253 or email nick.brooks@4cm.co.uk.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deepa Vyas is a Senior Consultant at 4CM, with more than eight years of experience in PR and Marketing Communications.

She has worked with B2B and B2C companies and Non-Profit organisations that operate across a broad range of sectors with varying briefs – from increasing market share and maintaining presence to launching new products and entering new markets.

Get in touch with Deepa to discuss your marketing and PR needs - she'll provide the coffee, if you provide her favourite chocolate viennese biscuits.



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