

The 3 P's



for a Powerhouse Trade Show Presence

A practical guide to planning and running a successful trade show booth.
Includes the Powerhouse Trade Show Planner.

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Marketing
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Many people predicted the demise of industry trade shows due to the increasing use of technology.

But it hasn't happened.

For many business sectors trade shows are very important opportunities to:

- Discover vendors you don't usually see
- Find new products and services
- Meet industry contacts, both vendors and clients
- Find out what competitors are doing
- Learn something new, either from exhibitors, other attendees, or from seminars

"Without a clear goal for exhibiting it can be difficult to make the event work for you."

As an exhibitor it is easy to book a booth space and set up your display the day before. Then on the day of the show simply arrive a little bit before opening time, and grab a coffee from the handy café at the show. Then wander back to your allocated space, fill up a bowl with lollies or promotional merchandise, and wait for delegates to flood into your booth.

Dream on!

... that's not really how it works. Not for those exhibitors who want success.

To make for a powerful trade show presence you need the same degree of management, careful planning and professionalism that you apply to other aspects of your business.

The 3 P's of a Powerhouse Trade Show



Purpose

What is your goal?

Trade shows can be exciting; and that alone attracts some people to be an exhibitor. Other reasons may include the desire 'to be seen to be there' and not cede ground to competitors.

However, without a clear goal for exhibiting it can be difficult to make the event work for you.

Companies exhibit at trade shows to:

- Find new clients (get enquiries)
- Meet other contacts within existing client organisations who are attending the show
- Generate orders and close deals

- Find out what competitors are doing
- Establish a 'presence' through the exhibition booth, meeting people, and exhibitor listings in the trade show directory or guide book
- Establish 'thought leadership' by presenting a seminar at the event
- Find referral partners
- Demonstrate to clients and prospects they are committed to the industry
- Test the market for new products and services through discussions, presentations, sampling and research

If you are a smaller, newer, or lesser-known business in your industry it can be extremely helpful to have a booth positioned in a high traffic location such as near a major, well-known, or popular company, near the café or coffee stand (as long as the operation of the café doesn't adversely affect your booth), or in a position with a good 'line of sight' (not tucked away in a corner or back alley).

Conversely, being located near the exit, or adjacent to washrooms, is usually not productive. Delegates won't stop at your booth as they are on their way somewhere.

What message do you need to give?

Now that you understand what you want to achieve, you can determine the message you need to communicate. You can also assess which communication formats (or media) will be best suited to deliver that message.

Your message may be translated into:

- **Text** – for use in trade show directories; signage, handouts; website; email newsletters and more
- **Signage** – featuring appropriate images and key points reinforcing the overall message, creating a discussion piece on the booth (e.g. a 3-D visualisation)
- **Brochures** – designed especially to communicate this message, rather than using standard 'generic' company handouts
- **Conversation guides (a cheat-sheet for staff)** – to help team members who will be speaking with visitors to your booth, include key phrases, terminology and benefits to be 'dropped' into conversations. Training is usually required on how to use these elements.
- **Product samples and demonstrations** – if used, product samples and demonstrations need to be focused on the key message/s, and be sure to direct visitors to the factors you want to highlight
- **Speaking topics** – if you have the opportunity to present a seminar or short talk
- **Webinars or onscreen presentations** – pre or post-show you can create online presentations featuring your message

"Before handing anything over it's a great idea to talk to the delegate... find out what they are interested in."

What material will you need?

Generally speaking at a trade show you find exhibitors giving away:

- Company brochures

- Product/service brochures
- Data sheets or fact sheets
- Promotional merchandise (anything from pens, USB memory sticks, mouse mats, stickers, bags, notepads, squeeze stress toys, and more)
- Case studies
- CD or DVD or USB memory containing video and/or text documents
- Business cards
- Presentation folders to hold the items above

At many exhibitions – especially large international events with hundreds of exhibitors – the garbage bins outside the event are overflowing with discarded material. Once the delegate leaves the exhibition they rummage through their collection of material and throw out anything that doesn't seem relevant, or if they can't remember why they have it, so they have less to carry and less to think about later on.

As an exhibitor it can be tempting to try and pass over as much documentation as possible to the people who visit you. Most delegates will politely accept it. But you may be wasting your time and money if you don't use some discretion when handing out your material.

Before handing anything over it's a great idea to talk to the delegate. Engage them personally and find out what they are interested in. If you introduce material too soon you run the risk of distracting them with the variety of brochures and product release information.

Therefore when planning your exhibit think carefully about your message and the conversations you will be having with delegates. Create material that will support that conversation, rather than detracting from it.



Who do you need at the show?

When you focus on your exhibition goal it is easier to decide which team members you need to attend. For example you may decide that technical knowledge is required, thereby needing some engineers or product development staff in attendance. Or maybe the sales team are the correct choice as they have the skills to quickly establish rapport with visitors to your booth.

Maybe you need senior managers to attend to add 'importance' and a sense of priority to your presence – even if it is only for peak periods of visitor traffic through the exhibition space, or during the opening or closing cocktail event.

What training will they need?

Many companies mistakenly believe they don't need to provide any training for staff manning a trade show booth. The belief is "They do this sort of thing all the time", especially when referring to sales staff. Or the thought is they will simply be handing out brochures.

But trade shows are not everyday events. And the last thing you want to happen is for your team to "simply hand out brochures".

The types of training you may need for your team include:

- **Sales conversation skills** – starting and maintaining a conversation with a sales focus in the confines of the trade show floor is extremely challenging (and is often more time limited than everyday meetings)
- **Listening skills** – to remain focused on what the delegate is saying, watching for body language as well as indicators between multiple delegates from the same organisation
- **Product knowledge** – delegates expect company representatives on your booth to know what they are talking about and be up to speed on what your company is promoting at the show (as well as other existing products and substitutes)
- **Competitor knowledge** – this is an essential component so you can extract maximum value from conversations with delegates, knowing which questions to ask, which comparisons to avoid, and which competitive advantages to push
- **Procedural knowledge** – what do you expect your team to do with the information they discover? Where do they record it? What commitment should they be giving to delegates regarding follow up?
- **Using sales tools** – how to use the tools on hand at the show for maximum effect (see the next section)

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Tools

Trade shows involve a combination of marketing and selling. Marketing is when you tell people about what you offer. That is, you create leads by getting your message out to potential clients. Selling is when you work one to one (i.e. have a sales conversation) with prospects who may be interested in buying from you.

Therefore, trade show tools are the items needed by your team to promote your business and to conduct sales conversations. Many times the same tool can be used for both marketing and selling if it is designed for that purpose from the start.

- Data sheets
- Case studies
- Photographs
- Diagrams and charts showing how your service/product is used
- Presentations, either on paper (e.g. flip pages) or using slideware (e.g. PowerPoint)
- Brochures, both for your business and specific products/services
- Demonstrations
- Order forms
- Product samples, if suitable for your business
- Signage on your booth that shows information on your services/products (e.g. a large photo that can be referred to as part of conversations on the booth)

Tools are included here in the People section because the tools are only as good as the team member using them. Everyone on the booth should be trained in how and when to use the individual tools provided.



Process

The days you spend on the booth at the trade show are only part of your overall trade show program. To maximise your success you need to be thinking of what you will do before, during and after the event.

- **Pre-show**

- **Research competitors exhibiting** – visit their website and see what they will be doing. That way you can be better prepared to counter anything they may be doing or saying, such as releasing new products
- **Check out complementary exhibitors** – potentially they could be promotional partners or referrers who could send prospects your way during the show or afterwards
- **Advise current clients** – invite them to visit, offer something new
- **Invite prospects on your database**, or via your sales team or account management staff by sending personal invitations by phone, email or post
- **Promote your attendance** in your email newsletter and social media pages – include your booth number (or location if it is memorable), and tease with mention of new information you will have available
- **Prepare the material you will need** at the show such as handouts, samples, products, business cards, and signage/posters/banners,
- **Arrange furniture and lighting** for your booth to make it stand out
- **Train participating staff** – see points noted in section 2) People
- **Prepare your post-show plan** and determine who will do what and when

- **On your booth**

- **Keep it clean and breezy.** Visitors don't want to step around signage, or over electrical cords, or be surrounded by boxes of junk. Make it an inviting space. Plan your booth so you have storage room that is out of site, such as in a cabinet or within display fixtures.
- **Look presentable.** Working a trade show can sometimes be a drag. Make sure your team always looks bright and well-presented. If possible rotate staff on and off the booth to keep them fresh.
- **Don't scare visitors away by rushing at them.** Give people space to approach your stand. Look interested, but not over-eager. Design your stand so passers-by can get an idea of what you do from a short distance. They can approach to view more detailed information.
- **Choose the correct lighting.** The standard lights that come with most booths are not strong enough. Often you will need twice as much as the standard exhibitor package provides. Take into account the size of your booth and the position of your signage. Use lighting to highlight signage and any displays – make it pop! But position the lights so they don't shine into the eyes of visitors when they are looking at the booth.
- **Choose wall and floor finish** to give your booth a 'lift' and distinguish it from all the others. Standard booth walls are often a dull silver/grey colour, or an off blue, or white. Floors are usually dull carpet. However for most shows you

can pay extra to have a different colour walls and special flooring. Think about using black on walls, as your signage will really stand out from the background colour, especially if you have designed it with a white border or vibrant colours. Contrast works!

- **Record all significant interactions** with visitors, even when it gets busy. Have a system for recording not only the name of people you speak to, but what you spoke to them about, what they are looking for, and any commitments made to them to provide further information or contact. A simple exercise book will do (protect it with your life!). Or use an online document such as via Google docs that everyone can access. This information is priceless when following up after the show.
- **Eat properly and stay hydrated.** Yes I know this sounds like your mother talking. But it really is important for you to stay the distance and remain fresh as a daisy! Especially if you participate in show-related events at night that include alcohol and staying up late. But don't EVER eat or relax over a coffee at the booth. Only keep water on the stand, and have a place for the water bottle or glasses that is out of site of visitors.
- **If you have chairs on your booth don't sit on them** waiting for visitors. It looks lazy. I know it is very tempting to sit down. But it is a bad habit to get into. Stay upright and alert. Better, arrange for bar stools to be on your booth instead of chairs. They are more suitable for visitors to rest for a few moments, and you can sit on them occasionally without looking like you are relaxing on a break.

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- **After the show**

- **Protect your list of contacts.** Make sure it gets back to the office or entered into your CRM or database. The sooner the better.
- **Allocate follow up** to a specific staff member, preferably someone in sales.
- **Create a conversation plan** (scripted key points) for what needs to be said during the follow up call. This can be a tricky moment as the contact may have sounded interested at the booth, but now they are back at work and feeling time-poor or under pressure and may not want to talk about what was discussed at the show. That is why it is critical to have good notes about what was discussed – have a 'trigger' to mention to reignite the contacts interest.
- **Plan additional follow up and/or personal visits.** The job of follow up is not complete with just one phone call, an email, or leaving a voicemail. Contact must continue until either: the contact withdraws and is no longer interested; you get an order or commitment to proceed; or you qualify them out based on certain criteria such as ability to buy, time frame, or suitability as a client.
- **Calculate Cost Per Lead.** To make it realistic include all costs related to the show including travel and accommodation, booth set up, signage, and handouts. Include all costs you would not have incurred if you did not do the show. Then, to calculate the Cost Per Lead divide the total cost by the number of leads. You can define a lead your own way, but generally a 'lead' must have potential to turn into a client. So if you have a list of contacts made at the show that are clearly not potential client material (such as an industry contact), then they should be discounted from this calculation. The result will be your Cost Per Lead. There is no standard answer for what the cost per

lead should be. To determine if the cost per lead is satisfactory for your business, you must assess the conversion rate from lead to client, and the future profit value of that client (e.g. transaction or Life Time Value).

Summary

Exhibiting at trade shows can be fun, exciting, risky, frustrating, time-consuming, and very profitable. Through effective planning and careful execution you can maximise your opportunity for trade show success.

Work on all 3 P's to create a powerhouse trade show presence

1. Purpose
2. People
3. Process

Involve your team in planning for the show so everyone is committed, knows what to do, and understands why it is important for your business.

Allow sufficient time for planning and preparation as last-minute decisions can cause unnecessary frustration and will usually result in a sub-optimal outcome. Start your planning as soon as you know about the event.

Treat your trade show booth as the marketing investment it is. Don't get sidetracked by the glitz, glamour and social scene of the show. Stay focused on achieving your goals.

About the Author



Stuart Ayling is Managing Director of Marketing Nous, an Australian sales performance improvement agency founded in 1999.

His clients include expertise-based businesses across industries such as software, technical products, consulting, education, finance and science.

Stuart Ayling holds a Bachelors degree in marketing and a post graduate qualification in International Business, has lectured at the University of Queensland Business School, and has authored over 100 business development articles and sales improvement guides.

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Powerhouse Trade Show Planner



Purpose		
What is your goal?		
What message do you need to give?		
What material will you need?		
People		
Who do you need?		
What training do they need?		
Tools		
Process		
Pre-show		
On your booth		
After the show		

