Using Trade Shows for Product Promotion

Trade shows may be one of the best means available to get word out about your new venture. You will find them taking place in your region, at the state level and nationally. Finding the right trade shows to benefit your business and spending the resources to make yourself noticed when at the show will help you gain the best return on your investment.

You should check out the possibilities of exhibiting through grocery, agricultural, food processing and specific commodity/product associations. Instead of going just to observe and learn, you now must gear up to attend as one of the businesses “hosting” the show.

These basic questions will tell you which shows are worth your effort. Talk to the group putting on the trade show and if possible previous and current attendees.

• What is the breakdown of the show’s attendance: General interest, purchasers of products, middle traders or vendors, academics, restaurateurs?
• What amount and type of pre-publicity is sent out and to whom?
• What goes into the informational packets that are available to other vendors, sponsors or attendees?
• What are other displays of similar products like?

There are many questions to ask about setup, timing, expectations of you and your staff, logistics, etc. Answers will help determine if the project is “do-able.” Right now, however, you are interested in getting the most bang for your buck. Remember, too, that going to only one trade show each year or season is not the best use of your resources. It is expensive to buy exhibit space, pay staff and prepare a display that is effective. If you are going to get into this arena, look for at least two outlets over a year’s time.

Your goals in making this effort can be quite simple and highly successful:
• Gain exposure
• Build interest
• Gain a list of potential customers
• Make valuable contacts in your product business arena

In order to have these things happen, however, you – and your exhibit – have to be noticed and competitive. That means planning ahead and preparing a booth that attracts visitors. Most businesses need some graphic design and construction assistance with this. The associations sponsoring the shows will detail the amount of space that is available for what cost. You will need to construct a display that will fit within the allotted space at each show (or be adaptable to fit).

Several companies produce ready-made, easily folded up and transportable display units. Most are for tabletops which can help you save costs on the display itself as well as give you additional table area for demonstration, product literature, samples, etc.

You will need either large, blown up photos or some type of graphically attractive word use to bring in interested passers-by. Of course, part of your package will be identification of your company. That could be a super-large logo on one of the display panels.

What would attract potential customers to your display? Your research should help you out here. Just as that research brought you to certain conclusions about how to discuss your product and company, it
also will lead you to those words that will entice look-
ers. Consider what benefits the customer wants and
can find in your product, then splash it big on your
signage. How is your product different from other
products or companies?

Then spend some time finding out what the other
booths (especially those with similar product lines)
will be like at the show. While you want to be differ-
ent and stand out, you need to be on a par with them
—or stretch beyond them in terms of presentation,
attractive characteristics, size and use of technological
bells and whistles. Yes, it is costly but it is better to
spend a little more than to get no return on investment
for what you are spending.

A few other items to put on your list of things to do:

• Have printed materials available for passers-
by to take with them. These should not just
repeat what is in your display signage.

• If your budget can stand it, this is the place
where trinkets and gadgets can do you some
good. Let those that stop by your booth leave
with a reminder.

• If you do not like the trinkets way of think-
ing, consider making available a more
substantial gift item (or several) and put
a big bowl or box on your display table.
Ask for individual’s business cards or let
them fill out a card-size slip of paper. Then
do a drawing for the item(s) at the event’s
end. You will have to make it a prize that
has some worth to those attending. But
you will have gained a ready-made list of
contacts.

• This is a good time to consider milking
the media. As well as finding out what
media coverage is being handled by the
sponsoring agency, determine if you have
any “news” from your own company. If so,
send out a relevant press release a week
ahead of the trade show adding that you
will be among those present at the trade
show event. Perhaps a follow-up call to the
media will create the impetus for a one-
on-one meeting with a reporter, ag expert,
columnist, etc.

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