

Steps for Using Trade Shows

File C5-141

Although trade shows are relatively expensive they are widely used in the food industry. They offer the potential for you to establish valuable contacts and increase your sales. However, if not properly planned, the time, effort and money invested in your trade show experience will be of little value. Several months to a year may be required to obtain a well located booth and prepare the appropriate materials and displays.

Including trade shows in the overall marketing plan is a highly focused way to:

- establish a presence in the marketplace,
- gain an overview of the industry at present,
- obtain a list of serious buyers more quickly than would be possible with a traditional sales approach.

Choosing the Trade Show

Choosing the proper trade show for your product is critical for success. Below are points to help you choose the right trade show.

1. List several trade shows that would be suitable for your business and its products. Various directories are available that contain a complete index of trade shows listed chronologically, geographically and by subject. Each listing has a phone number of the trade show contact. A source of Trade Show listings is: [Ag Marketing Resource Center - Directory of trade shows](http://www.agmrc.org/food/trade-shows), www.agmrc.org/food/trade-shows.
2. From the list of potential trade shows, choose to participate in the one(s) that:
 - Attracts the most appropriate customers, not necessarily the largest volume of customers.
 - Draws an audience from the geographic area the company is prepared to serve and is attended by competitors in the industry (i.e., if the competition never misses it, there could be a reason).

- Is well organized and promoted.
3. Obtain all information needed to begin preparing for the trade show(s). The contact person for the trade show will provide information. Additional materials and information that should be requested (if not offered) include:
 - A floor plan of the trade show (preferably with other exhibitors indicated) so a high traffic area can be chosen. Do not hesitate to pay extra for a good location; the whole point is exposure.
 - Booth specifications, including dimensions, lighting, tables, chairs, skirting and any display or sample restrictions.
 - Information on all services being offered, such as accommodations, equipment rental, assistance with set up, tear down or packing storage. It is a good idea to exploit the services being offered on site, as there are many details to be concerned with at a trade show event.

Preparing for the Trade Show

Careful preparation for the trade show is important. Factors to consider include:

1. Set clearly defined goals for what you want to achieve at the trade show. This will help in the development of the presentation strategy and display.
2. Set a budget allowing for enough personnel, accommodations, product and travel. If the trade show is out of the country, allow for insurance costs and plan to spend a day in the host country before and after the trade show.
3. It is usually advisable to choose professional design and marketing consultants to help prepare the materials for the booth. Effective material can also be prepared by the company- just remember the target audience and the image you wish to project.

Reviewed December 2022

Materials will include:

- a high-impact display to attract the audience,
 - professionally prepared information handouts (Remember, the people attending are coming to gather knowledge),
 - samples of the product.
4. Prepare the sales presentation. Exhibit selling must be polished, brief and convey information. If the presentation lacks impact, the audience will quickly move on.
 5. Prepare a system for recording leads. Several options include:
 - lead sheets for sales staff,
 - a business card exchange system,
 - sign-up sheet for more information,
 - a guest book.
 6. Ensure that everyone at your booth is well informed about your company, its product, prices and terms of sale.

Activities at the Trade Show

You and your staff will be presenting the product and working with customers the entire time you are in the booth. Ensure that adequate breaks are given so the quality of presentations remains consistent.

It is important that the customer relate the product to their situation. You should encourage customers to handle the product and talk about their situation so the most relevant points about the product can be presented. Encourage customers to take information and samples. Just because the materials are there does not mean they will be examined.

Follow-up After the Trade Show

Prepare a plan for following-up with interested parties you will meet at the trade show. Create this plan before the trade show starts. Establish deadlines for making these contacts. Follow-up should be as soon as possible after the trade show. It is best to let customers know when you meet them at the trade show when and how they will be contacted.

*Based on information from the Food Processing Center,
Kansas State University*