After the Show:

Tips for Successful Tradeshow Follow Up

You've just finished the biggest show of the year, and all you want to do is go home, crawl into bed and sleep for about a week. But to ensure you get the best ROI from your show, the hard work has just begun. While you likely chose to participate in a given show for many reasons – to boost awareness, enhance your brand, and bolster key partnerships – ultimately you are responsible for driving revenue and maximizing ROI from the show. And your lead follow up process is key to maximizing show ROI.

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A tradeshow has some unique characteristic as compared to other demand generation programs. First, you will receive a large volume of leads all at once. With most other types of campaigns, such as email or ad-words, you receive leads over several days or even weeks. Second, because you will likely collect your leads via a lead scanner (and you should use this because it will save you tons of time and effort post show), you will have no opportunity to gather qualifying information on a form. In addition, your booth staffers can only speak personally to a small percentage of your booth visitors. Third, the motivation of each tradeshow lead is often a mystery. With a specific content offer, such as a whitepaper, you know the person is registering to receive the content so he is most likely searching for a solution to a pressing business pain. In contrast, a booth visitor could have been primarily interested in your cool give-away or he could actually have a business need that your product or service will address. Unfortunately, you have no way of knowing who is in each category based on your raw lead list from show. You may also have a set of leads from a reception sponsorship or leads you have swapped with partners. The status of these leads is completely unknown.

So you can't simply rely on your normal lead follow up process and assume it will work for your tradeshow leads. Rather, you must analyze your current lead follow up procedures, and adjust as needed. Your follow up process post show must ensure that you can vet each lead, categorize them for follow up, and make proper contact with each and every worthwhile lead. In short, your follow up process must address the unique characteristics of a tradeshow lead.

Characteristics of Tradeshow Leads

1. High Volume in Short Time Frame
2. Lack of Qualifying Information Needed for Lead Scoring
3. No Knowledge of Prospects' Motivation

High Volume

With any successful tradeshow program, you will walk away with a large volume of leads. Depending on the size of the show, it is not unheard of to collect 500 to 2000 leads from a single show. While this is a great problem to have, the first part of any lead follow up strategy is to ensure that you have enough internal resources to handle the inbound volume. If your internal telemarketing team can't handle the volume, you need to have a plan to nurture these leads via email and you also need to consider outsourcing some of the post show telephone qualification. You must keep in mind that competitive exhibitors are already contacting your leads as well, and the sale often goes to the first vendor who makes contact.

Prioritizing

You likely already have a process in place that you use to categorize or score your inbound leads. This may or may not involve using a marketing automation system to auto-score your leads and put them into an email nurturing process. But whether or not your prioritization process is automated, certain information is needed to prioritize any inbound lead. If you don't have the right information, the tradeshow leads will be miscoded as low priority and they won't be followed up in a timely manner. Some typical pieces of information you might need are industry, company size, IT environment and the contact's job role. While your web lead forms probably collect this information, your typical lead retrieval system will not be able to provide you with any of this information. So how do you get the information you need?

If you are using a marketing automation system, you could design a "drip" campaign to offer the leads a series of premium content offers, such as whitepapers, webinars or product demos, and require each person to provide a bit more information with each download or registration. So, for example, on the first offer you ask for industry, with the second offer you ask for what ERP application they use, and so forth. This process will get folks who are interested in your content to supply you with the information you need to score them. And given your recent interaction with the leads, you will probably get a higher than average response rate. But that still means that 90% of the leads will not have the information required for scoring, and so will not get the correct follow up. The result will be "good fit" leads that do not get the attention they deserve. Add to this, your marketing resources are probably maxed out with the show itself, and it takes significant time and effort to develop such a complex campaign.

You could also use a data services company to append in the needed information, such as industry or company size, for some of the leads. This will usually have a fairly low cost, and typical match rates can be as high as 40-60%. But this still means that a significant portion of your leads will not find a match and, once more, the result is that good leads will get ignored. So if you want to ensure you have detailed information on every lead, you will need to spend a little time researching each unmatched record and manually appending in the needed information.

A good solution is to append some of the data automatically, and then manually research to identify the information needed on the unmatched leads. Most of this type of "firmagraphic" data can be found via online data sources. While this may not be the best use of valuable internal resources, you can also outsource this type of research. This method guarantees that you evaluate each lead, and none of them will fall through the cracks. This may also give you an opportunity to go one step further and find out additional information about each lead. For example, if the company is a good fit but the contact is not in the right role to make a purchase decision for your product, manual research could help you identify a better decision maker at that account.

Lead Motivation

While you will walk away from any show with a handful of truly qualified "hot" leads that someone spoke to personally at the show, the majority of your leads will not be qualified at all. You must be able to distinguish the folks who stopped by just for your cool swag from those who are actually good prospects. In addition, because some people are hesitant to be upfront in a face to face conversation, even personal notes are no guarantee of the quality of a lead. One person might say she is extremely interested in your new product or service even when she is not because she doesn't want to offend the booth staffer. Another might brush off a staffer even if he has a real interest in your product because he is in a hurry or wants to avoid a long sales pitch.

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The only way to gain an accurate assessment of your prospects' true motivation is to re-qualify each lead over the phone. But you may strain your internal resources asking them to phone qualify 500, 1000 or more leads all at once. You also can't afford to waste any time in following up because competing exhibitors are contacting the same set of prospects. You need to work fast and stand out. One solution is to outsource the qualifying project, and use a demand generation services company to handle the telemarketing process.

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Maximize ROI

Tradeshows are still one of the most effective ways for companies to market their business and build brand. But they take work – both before, during, and after the show. A great deal of the effort that goes into a tradeshow comes at the front end – planning all of the logistics for the show, deciding on the right message, designing the booth graphics, and actually working the booth. By the time the show is over, most people are just glad they made it through the whole show in one piece. Unfortunately the work is only half over, and it's this last half that leads to revenue. By analyzing your follow up process before the show, you can make sure you have the right resources in place to handle your tradeshow leads. And having the right follow up process in place will help convert that list of leads into sales – resulting in maximum ROI for your show.

About Salesify

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