



TRADE SHOW SURVIVAL GUIDE

Why Should You Attend Trade Shows?

It's easy to think of attending in-person trade shows or conferences as time consuming and expensive. That may be true at face value, but not if you do your research and put a plan together as to what you want to accomplish. You may also consider reframing how you look at them.

They're not expensive, they're investments. They're not unnecessarily taking you away from your facility, they're giving you time with peers, speakers, and relevant businesses that allow you to go back to your day-to-day feeling refreshed and inspired. You never know who you'll meet at an in-person event, nor do you know what kind of ideas you'll go home with.

Maybe you've been wanting to get a grip on your social media or general marketing, maybe you want to hear a talk about taxes or liability insurance, maybe you just want to talk to other gym/yoga/massage/barre/health club etc. business owners in person to hear what they're doing that's working (or not working).

If you do decide to attend a conference or trade show, do your own research and plan what talks or panels you want to attend, what businesses you want to meet with, how you'll collect and manage all the contact information you're sure to receive, and how you'll spend your downtime.

Even in our always-connected world, there's still nothing like meeting with people face-to-face. Make friends, partnerships, and learn new stuff that's based entirely around improving your business - what could be better than that?

PREP: What to know before you go.

During any conference, you are going to have a lot of opportunities to see different speakers on a variety of topics. This is usually separate from the actual trade show portion of the conference, allowing everyone the time to see what they want. At large conferences such as IHRSA, there are so many speakers and people to see that it can be overwhelming. That is why you must prep, even if it's just for a day, before attending. This allows you to make the most out of your experience and really walk away with the most beneficial information for your business.

To begin prepping, we have put together a couple of questions that you can ask yourself and others at your business to ensure you're looking for the right information.

Question 1: What are you personally wanting to learn?

Think about personal improvement. Do you think that you could be more tech-savvy? Or possibly that you could be more open to new equipment? This will help you guide which speaking sessions you attend, which companies you focus on visiting, and give you an overall sense of organization during your visit.

Question 2: What part of your business could improve?

This is a hard question, because for many people it can be difficult to see their businesses strengths and weaknesses. Take a look at what you're doing day-to-day. Are you spending a lot of time doing things that could be automated? Are your members complaining about specific equipment or requesting new classes? What kind of retention rates do you have, and are your members engaged? Once you take a closer look at these aspects of your business, you can see specific opportunities for improvement, and look for solutions during the trade show.

Question 3: What technology, consulting, equipment, or services are you interested in?

Start thinking a little more granular. Once you have overall ideas of what you're interested in, break it down by different markets. Are you looking for software that can help you manage your sales or maybe some new TRX equipment that is more flexible? By narrowing down your exact wants or needs by market, you can walk into the conference knowing exactly what to look for.

Question 4: Are there any specific companies that you are interested in learning more about?

If you are keeping up with industry news, you probably see the names of companies over and over again, but never really pay much attention. Go back through your emails and industry newsletters to find companies that spark your interest. Most likely, everyone will be at the tradeshow, so you can stop by and meet their team face-to-face. This is a great time to ask questions, understand the full capabilities, and (you didn't hear it here) but work out some killer deals. Every company going to a tradeshow is hoping to show you why they are the best, so this is a great time to take advantage of more competitive pricing.

Question 5: Talk to your employees and co-workers. What are some pain points they see?

Oftentimes, we notice that the front desk employee or the personal trainers at a gym or studio have a lot of input on where things could improve. The more someone is in front of members, the more feedback they get. So pick their brains! Have a meeting with your employees before you go and see if they have noticed anything specifically that could be beneficial.

DURING: Making the most of the trade show while you're there.

If you have attended a large trade show, you know the deal. It's non-stop walking, talking, (sometimes drinking), and networking. The entire process can become exhausting. So, we have put some tips together to help you pace yourself, immerse yourself, and come out of it with a clear sense of improvement.



Follow Your Plan: Remember your prep! It can be really exciting and fun when you get on the tradeshow floor, but remember what you came for. Take advantage of all of the learning opportunities, but base your experience around your wants and needs. Stop by your most-wanted companies first, then you can explore outside of your zone. This ensures that you come back with all of the information you went there to find.

Wear Comfortable Shoes/Clothes: This may seem silly, but trust us, you're going to want to be comfortable. Especially when it comes to shoes, you will most likely be on your feet all day (and night), so wear shoes that gives you some endurance. The great part about the fitness industry is that "business casual" usually includes leggings and a pullover. It's also always a good idea to represent your business by wearing your colors, logos, and swag. Let people know who you are representing and why they should be interested in your gym or studio!



Talk to People: Depending on your personality, this can be the hard part or the easy part. For all you introverts out there, it's time to step out of your comfort zone. A trade show is the perfect place to learn about services and technology in your industry, but it's hard to learn if you don't talk to the vendors. Don't just slip by with a brochure, actually talk to the vendors you're interested in and ask questions. This is also a great time to talk with vendors you already use and meet them face-to-face.

For the extroverts out there, this part will be easy. But sometimes, it can be too easy. Everyone is going to be trying to sell you on their product, so it's vitally important that you stick to your plan and don't spend too much time on vendors that you don't particularly need. Make sure that you leave enough time to make the rounds to different vendors and to listen in on the speaking sessions that are being hosted throughout the day.

Broaden Your Horizon: Now I know we have been harping on the importance of a plan, but that doesn't mean you can't see new things. Maybe there are a couple of equipment vendors that are new in the space and you want to check it out. This is the perfect time to see everything in person and decide if your business could benefit from it. Once you have narrowed down the type of vendor you need, check out all of the vendors in that space, even if you haven't heard of them before. Who knows, you could stumble upon a product that is a perfect fit for your company.



Collect Everything: So. Much. Swag. You are going to be overwhelmed with giveaways, swag items, free samples, and more. Take advantage of it! Most companies are happy to hand out their pens, koozies, chargers, bags, and more. This is not only a good way to keep your drink cold, it's also a reminder of the companies that you visited. The most important item to collect would be the handouts or brochures. Keep them all so that when you get back from your conference, you can organize them and contact companies that you are interested in.

POST: How to use the information you learned to better your business.

So you've made it back from your trade show and slept for 18 hours straight, right? Besides the (possible) hangover and sore feet, you were actually extremely productive and learned a lot of new things. Now it's time to unpack all the free stuff you got and organize the information. Where do you start?



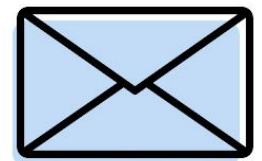
Organize Your Handouts: You were probably handed more pieces of paper than you even remember, so when you get home or back to the office, get all of those handouts in one place and start weeding through them. Block off 20-30 minutes to read about the features of the products and to look up the ones that you are particularly interested in. These should have contact information, any particular promotions that they are running, and a quick overview of what they do. Keep 4-5 handouts so that you can remember your top picks and do more in-depth research later.

Review Your Notes: After attending the different sessions and listening to different industry professionals, you should have a lot of notes. If you don't have notes, hopefully you have a great memory. Take some time to run through your notes and highlight anything that stuck out to you. Take that retention method that the speaker talked about and think about ways that you could put it into action at your gym or studio. It can be extremely exciting to hear about new strategies at a conference, so use this time to harness that excitement and put it into an actionable plan.



Research, Research, Research: After you have organized and found your center balance, get to the fun stuff, research. Take a look at each company or individual that you are interested in. Read reviews, visit their website, ask questions, talk to others in the industry who may already use the product, and most importantly, talk to the company. If the product requires a demo, take one! Get to know each product so that you can make an extremely informed decision.

Keep an Eye on Your Email: Like we mentioned before, now is the perfect time to take advantage of promotions that most companies will be running. Whether it be a free month, a free trial, a gift card, or anything else, it's worth your time. If you have found a couple of companies that you think would be a great fit at your gym or studio, then keep a lookout for their promotions. If you don't see anything within a couple of days (you should), then reach out through the website and ask. You will most likely be getting emails from every vendor you saw after the show, so be sure to flag your favorites.





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