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# 10 Steps to Prepare for a Successful Trade Show

How to Make the Most of Your Company's Investment

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# Introduction

You've made the decision to attend a trade show and you've allocated a lot of your marketing budget to the event. So, what steps can you take to make this a successful investment? There are many variables and complexities involved in exhibiting, so preparation is a crucial component of the overall process.

To ensure your investment is well spent and your goals are met, there are many plans and considerations to work through. Here are key steps you should take in order to have a well-managed, successful trade show.



## Step One: Plan Early, Plan Often



Fail to plan and you can plan to fail, right? Planning isn't just writing up a list of what you need to bring to a show or even how to staff your booth. We recommend you begin the planning process at least six months before a trade show and major events; the planning can start over a year in advance. This means bringing in all the parties involved in the process to establish goals and objectives for the show. Once you are clear on objectives, you can turn your attention to overarching messaging and theming.

Then, you should walk step by step through products you plan to debut or display at the show, details and logistics, guidelines for those working the booth, and even details like how staffers will dress and how they will speak to visitors. This is all about getting marketing, sales, and management on the same page well in advance of a show. We recommend a creative brief to align your team during the planning process.

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## Step Two: Establish Buyer Personas



Do you know what your target audience looks like? Creating a series of buyer personas will not only help you understand the pain points of your buyers, but to find innovative solutions to their problems. By understanding your audience, you gain insights into how they can be accurately targeted and pulled from the aisles and into your booth. When you are clear about the profile of your target attendee, you can then move on to attracting, meeting, and wowing these prospects during a show and well into the future.

## Step Three: Select the Ideal Booth Size

Is bigger always better? Not necessarily. When it comes to selecting booth size, you'll need to consider your target number of prospects and the bearing that will have on the size your team needs to attain your goals and objectives. Think about what's happening in your booth: are your salespeople giving presentations? How much space does that require? How long is each presentation? How many salespeople and support staff will be in the booth simultaneously? Likewise, you should be thinking about storage space, AV equipment needs and conference rooms. Adding all these answers together will help you determine the proper size and consulting your trusty exhibit house is a great way to find a booth size that meets your unique needs.



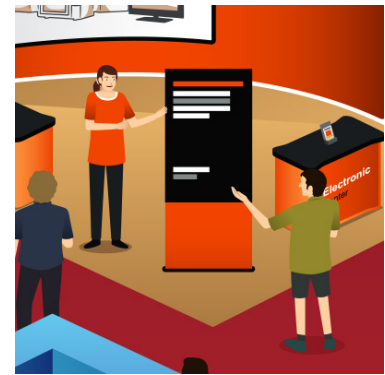
## Step Four: Choose Your Location Wisely

It's a question we are asked often: where is the best location for my booth? Taking a peek at the show floor can give you the best insight; you won't be able to see the show floor ahead of time. When looking at the layout, think not only about your customer but also about the booths located near and around your potential space that could have loud, distracting noise. Carefully consider the location of large, obtrusive columns, low ceilings, and even the location of the bathrooms in the hall. This is about your business, so choose wisely! Just like in real estate, location is everything. You may have to change the dimensions of your booth in order to get prime real estate.

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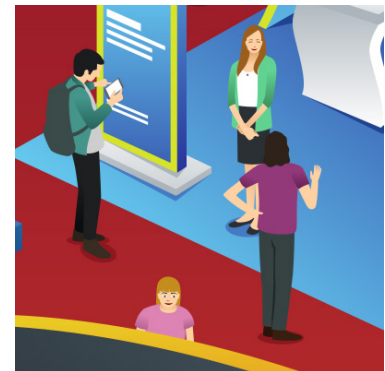
## Step Five: Engagement is King

An attractive trade show booth is just one element of a successful show. The next step is to think about innovative ways to pull your clients from the aisles of a busy show floor and into your booth for a meaningful conversation. Engagement should spark curiosity, bring smiles, and fit your overall theme and messaging for the show and also for your brand. It should feel fresh and smart, not hokey or contrived. Make this step a key part of your planning process to capture the eyes (and eventually hearts and minds) of your top targets.



## Step Six: Staffing

The employees working your booth during the trade show are a key element to your success. When going through the planning process, think about the number of staff you'll need from each of the key departments in your organization. Salespeople are a key element, but what about other support staff? Consider members of the marketing team who can offer support and meet with clients along with company leadership.



## Step Seven: Sales, Sales, Sales

Personal, face-to-face selling is dynamic and very effective when utilized properly. The members of your sales team rely solely on the success of their efforts, making the orders received and targets hit during a show incredibly important. Even those working the booth who do not have a sales role should always be thinking sales. This means looking at booth visitors as potential clients, knowing what to say and when, and gathering the proper information to ensure leads are vetted and notes are made. It's all about adding value, solving problems, and of course, selling your product.

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## Step Eight: Leads, Glorious Leads

It's safe to say that not everyone who visits your booth will be an ideal lead. In fact, you might get traffic that isn't even close to being a lead. For this reason, it is important to create a scoring system for every potential lead you interact with at a show. Whether you choose to rate them by letter (A, B, C) or temperature (Hot, Warm, Cold) develop a consistent, fool-proof system and teach your salespeople what it means. Make the criteria for scoring leads as objective as possible. It is okay to start the rating system initially based on a "gut check" on how realistic the project seems. But over time, as you gather more information and are able to validate the subjective assumptions, you can be more data driven in your lead scoring system.



## Step Nine: Talk to Your Leads

There is a saying: leads are like fish; after a few days they start to stink. When a potential customer raises their hand and expresses interest in doing business with you, it's up to your staff to respond quickly. In striking while the iron is hot, you could not only step in front of a competitor, you're also showing the client that you are responsive, organized and interested in doing business.

It is a good idea to send a "Thank-you" communication as soon as possible after making contact, ideally that same evening. And then,

recognizing that trade show attendees are very busy and may miss your first communication, you should send a second more detailed communication for the day after they get back to their office.

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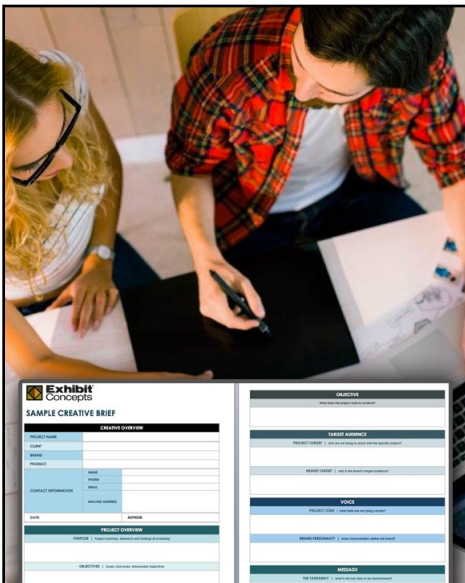
## Step Ten: Conduct a Start, Stop, Continue Exercise



Once the show has concluded, we recommend you conduct this formal exercise within a week or two post-show. You want the session to be held close enough to the event that memories are still fresh but with enough time passed that your post-show activities have been initiated.

The Start, Stop, Continue exercise, as the name suggests, is a guided way to think about what activities worked really well- these are the ones we want to Continue. Now that we've had a chance to reflect, are there things we should have done but didn't – these are the ones we want to Start. And of course, there are things that just didn't work out as planned – these are the ones we want to Stop.

Want to learn more about the importance of going through this exercise with your team? We walk you through the process and give you a free downloadable template on our blog.



## LET'S GET CREATIVE!

Is creativity a key component of your face-to-face marketing program? It should be. Our Creative Brief Template will get you and your team started down the path to creative thinking.

This template will help you to:

- Gain complete understanding of the project scope
- Identify potential problems & challenges
- Create a guide for your entire team

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