

 STEELHEAD
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The Exhibitor's Guide To Trade Show Success In 2020

Identifying Trends, Incorporating Technology, And
Overcoming Biases For Long-Term ROI



A new decade creates a natural reflection point on the current state of the trade show industry and where it's going in the years to come.

On one hand, trade shows still offer companies an opportunity for one-on-one interaction with potential clients, which makes that good first impression absolutely critical. Yet, increasingly, technology is becoming a cornerstone of that first impression.

As with every part of our lives, technology has affected the industry in a big way. Augmented Reality (AR), touchscreens, large-scale LED displays, social media — not only are many average trade show booths embracing innovation, they're often pieces in a game of one-upmanship.

But while the most dazzling displays are not always the most effective ones, there are a number of trends that we've identified for the new year. That's why we've put together this guide on what you can expect in the coming years.

WITHIN THESE PAGES YOU WILL FIND:

- Top booth design trends for 2020
- Tips for incorporating technology into your booth
- How to manage your biases in a period of change

Let's get to it.

Top Booth Design Trends for 2020

AUGMENTED REALITY

As we've already mentioned, AR technology is already being used in the industry, and there's no sign it will be slowing down anytime soon.

In this past year alone, we've worked with a client in the automotive industry to utilize AR and a curved LED screen to create a virtual cockpit for people to immerse themselves in on the trade show floor.

From an attention-capturing standpoint, such innovative experiences are hard to beat. But you don't always have to go all-in on new tech to make your booth stand out on the crowded trade show floor.



SENSORY-ACTIVATING TEXTURES

Another recent client of ours, Smash Fly, chose to take a more textural approach to their show presence by incorporating elements such as plants, nice wood and brick textures, and a more organic design.

While none of these elements are particularly technological, they go a long way toward making Smash Fly's presence unique among the crowd of presenters. The design also offers attendees a bit of respite from the cacophony of the trade show floor.

In many ways, their calmer approach is becoming a trend in and of itself, as more and more companies are moving toward a more sensory-interactive experience. This is in line with one of our very own design theories, which is to provide trade show attendees with an experience that hits all five of their senses.

EYE-CATCHING HANGING SIGNS

Imagine this: You're walking through the crowded trade show floor, exhausted and mentally overwhelmed by all of the bright colors and loud messaging being thrown at you from every angle. Suddenly, you look up and you're transported away from the trade show floor — not because you've suddenly been abducted — but because all you can see is a vibrant sky.

This is an experience we recently put together for a client of ours.

We provided a unique experience for attendees by giving them an opportunity to gaze into clouds, rather than the standard convention hall rafters.

Not only did this design element draw people to the booth visually, but they also felt more relaxed once they were inside, which made them more open to a conversation with the team inside the booth. And it did this for a relatively low cost compared to more technologically elaborate bells and whistles.

This isn't to say that textures and technology can't work together. In fact, the combination of the two is where the trade show industry seems to be headed. Put another way, one of the major trends we see for 2020 and beyond is a mixture of quiet and minimal combined with flashy and bold.



The question is, what's the right mix?

Tips for Incorporating Technology into Your Booth

The goal for every trade show experience is to tell a story. Your booth design should tell a story about your company and the journey your prospects are about to embark on. And your team should have a story to tell attendees.

Technology can be an effective way to help tell those stories. However, it can also easily become a distraction.

Think of a fireworks display. It captures the attention, but after the final sparks have faded the experience is quickly forgotten. A trade show booth that is primarily focused on dazzling people with technology risks creating the same effect in attendees. Cutting edge displays and the latest tech may draw people in, but once they've taken in all the gadgetry, they may not remember — or even bother to find out — the story the booth is trying to tell.

So when incorporating technology into a booth design, we recommend keeping a few things in mind.

There's a fine line between flashy and overwhelming

Massive LED screens, virtual reality experiences, touchscreen displays — each of these has their strengths in drawing people in, but they should never be the sole focus of your design.

Remember, trade show booths are first and foremost about making a connection with attendees. Technology is a great way to get attention, but you don't want it to create distance between you and those you want to reach.



Design your booth *with* technology, not around it

Technology should feel organic within your trade show presence. It's meant to be a tool used to tell a story rather than be the hero of it.

Even companies presenting at major technology conferences like CES should consider their displays more as a living space than, say, a wall of TVs at a big box store. You want people to spend time with your brand, not simply stop to gape at your booth before moving on.

Good lighting is important

Things like LED displays can deliver eye candy in droves, but they can also dull the senses and eventually become a visual blur.

The lighting of your booth should be designed in such a way that it is inviting, rather than dazzling. Make it bright enough for people to see what you have to offer without blinding them. Most of all, it should feel warm and inviting so people are comfortable enough to spend time inside your booth so conversations can happen.



How to **Manage Your Biases** in a Period of Change

We're all naturally drawn to bright and shiny things. Think back to when you first saw something like the iPhone, how it almost seemed like a device from years in the future. We're also drawn to things that are familiar — after all, who doesn't hate their voice when it comes from anywhere outside of our head?

While the start of a new decade feels like an obvious time for change, you should resist the temptation of the shiny and new when designing your next trade show presence. That doesn't mean avoiding technology, but rather, considering how best to utilize it in your design.

Meanwhile, you should want to break free from the status quo in order to stand out. But you should also keep in mind that your brand has a story to tell.

It's that mix of sticking to what you know works for your brand and being open to innovations that forms the magic that is a high-performing trade show exhibit. To that end, here are some things to remember as you plan for 2020 and beyond.

CONSIDER THE LEARNING PYRAMID

1

The [Learning Pyramid](#) was developed by the National Training Laboratory. It was created in the wake of studies that showed students were only able to remember roughly 10% of what they read in textbooks as opposed to the 90% they could retain by teaching others.

In other words, we learn more by doing rather than watching. That's why your booth should be designed in such a way as to encourage participation from attendees.

REFRAME YOUR MINDSET

2

Old habits, as they say, die hard. That's especially true with the way we run our businesses.

Finding new methods to effectively communicate with trade show attendees takes time and effort, and those resources can make it scary to try new things. But innovation never happens by being inert, so make sure to step outside your comfort zone and approach challenges and problems in new ways.

Doing this will ensure that you won't just be following trade show trends, you're more likely to be starting them.

CONTROL YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

3

Your sphere of influence is not only affected by the people around you, but by the places and ideas you encounter as well.

One way to control and shape your sphere of influence is to remain curious and push the envelope in directions you find inspirational.

When it comes to your trade show presence in 2020 and beyond, don't immediately dismiss ideas that sound crazy. Instead, live by the motto that there are no bad ideas, just ideas that don't fit right now.



Conclusion

2020 is going to mark a time of change in the trade show industry. New ways of standing out, new ways of reaching people.

Technology will drive much of this change, but the foundation of what makes a successful trade show presence will remain the same. Having a good design, having a good story to tell, making real connections — these will continue to be the trends moving forward.

By smartly incorporating emerging technologies with enticing design and a focus on attendees, you can stand out in the coming year.

Remember, you always have a good story to tell. You just need to make sure people are willing to listen in an increasingly noisy world.

Start planning for your 2020 trade show booth today. [Reach out to us](#) at Steelhead and schedule a free discovery call.

For more information on creating an awesome trade show booth, check out [The Ultimate Guide to Designing a Trade Show Booth](#).



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