

# HOW TO ORGANIZE A TRADE SHOW CHECKLIST

A nine-step guide to putting on a  
successful and profitable trade show.

Planning a trade show is an exciting prospect, but it takes a lot of work to get off the ground. What do you need to do first? How will you ensure your trade show is properly advertised? How will you get enough people to attend? Dealing with these questions can be overwhelming to someone who has never done something like this before. Proper planning and management, however, can help you keep your stress to a minimum and increase your chances for a successful and profitable trade show.

# PLAN YOUR SHOW

One of the first things you want to do is plan the key pieces of the trade show and put together an outline that defines the main items for your event. You need to determine:

## PURPOSE OF THE SHOW:

- Why are you having this event? What pain points make the conference necessary?
- Are you trying to bring companies together with vendors who can give them products and services to support their businesses?
- What is your goal? Do you want to promote tourism in your city? Is there a need for a wedding exposition in your community?

Determine the reason you want to have the show and choose a theme for your event. Once these decisions have been made, it will be much easier to plan the rest of your trade show.

## TARGET AUDIENCE AND EXHIBITORS:

- Who is your target audience for this trade show?
- Do you have specific exhibitors or attendees in mind?
- Do you need to have businesses to sell products at the show, or just companies that can promote their services?

Make a list of the ideal audience for your trade show and the businesses or groups you want as exhibitors. Once you have an idea of who you hope will attend, you will be better able to market and advertise your event to these people.

## LOCATION FOR THE SHOW:

- Where would you like to hold your trade show?
- Is there a specific city or state that would work best?
- Is there a location within your chosen city that makes the best sense for your show?

Choose a city you think will attract the most attendees to your trade show. Try to select a location that is central to your target audience so they will be easier to reach and it will be easier to promote your event. Think about the area's weather, transportation, local attractions and the availability of possible show venues. These decisions will help you market and sell your show.

## FACILITY FOR THE SHOW:

- Is there a specific venue you want for your trade show?
- Is the facility easily accessible for exhibitors and attendees?
- Will the venue have enough space for the number of people you are expecting?
- Is the site set up for your audio/visual needs?

Make sure you select a convenient location for your event. A site that is easily accessible (near airports and major highways, close to lodging for out-of-towners, etc.) will help boost attendance at your show, and make it simple for attendees to get to the event.

Check with the location to ensure it will be large enough to hold the number of exhibits and attendees you expect. Some hotels have conference facilities that are suitable for larger events while a banquet hall or convention center might be better for smaller trade shows.

When you have a place in mind, contact them as soon as possible – a lot of spaces fill up a year or more in advance. Don't lose the spot you want by waiting to plan the rest of the trade show first.

## **FIND SPONSORS:**

- Is there an industry expert that will sponsor the trade show?
- Can I get radio or television stations as sponsors?
- What can I offer potential sponsors?

Finding a sponsor or partner for your trade show can help in many ways. Sponsors can help share the costs for a lot of the show expenses. If you partner with a newspaper, radio or television station, they can give you free advertising every time they mention their sponsorship of your event. One common way to attract sponsors is by offering them larger booth space and inclusion on all of your show's marketing materials.

## **SELECT A CATERER:**

- Does my venue allow food and drinks?
- Does the location allow for outside catering?
- What type of food would my attendees prefer?

Attendees to your trade show will probably be walking through the booths and exhibits for several hours at a time. It's a good idea to offer some sort of food and beverages with the price of a ticket to the event. Make sure your location allows you to have food and drinks, and check to see if you can bring in an outside caterer, or if the venue has their own catering services.

Try to determine the best type of food for your audience by doing a little research. If you are hosting a bevy of potential brides, finger sandwiches and sparkling cider would work well. If your show is going to be attended by Fortune 500 businesspeople, a buffet of a variety of foods might be a better bet.

## CREATE A MARKETING PLAN:

- What is the best way to reach your target audience?
- Will email and social media be enough to market your show, or do you need to have radio or television spots too?
- How will you get vendors on board that will draw more attendees?

Marketing the trade show is crucial to its success. Your target audience needs to know about the event and all the details before they can decide if they want to attend. Do some research to determine what media is preferred by the potential exhibitors and attendees to best reach your audience.

Create a promotional plan that markets to vendors and exhibitors first. Offer discounts to vendors who register early, or who choose larger exhibitor booths. Give them a reason to want to work at your event. Once you have a number of vendors, you can market to attendees. You want to make sure you have enough exhibits before you try to sell tickets!

## CREATE ON-SITE MARKETING MATERIALS:

- How many different types of marketing material do I need?
- Can I include the sponsors on the items?
- What will be useful to attendees?

On-site marketing materials will help you promote your business, your event and your sponsors. You might want to offer a swag bag with branded goodies such as pens, notepads keychains, and more. Branded marketing materials can help your attendees remember a great event while piquing the interest of those who weren't there.

## WRAP-UP AND REVIEW OF THE SHOW:

- Did the attendees enjoy the show?
- Were the vendors happy with participating?
- What could we have done differently?

Obtaining feedback from the people who worked at and who attended your trade show is the best way to know if your event was a success. Include comment cards or show evaluation forms in exhibitor and attendee welcome packets. Collect them after the show is over to determine what parts of your event were a hit and which things were a miss. This will help you to make sure your next trade show meets and exceeds the expectations of your show participants.

While this is not an all-inclusive list, it gives you some of the major areas that need to be considered before undertaking the planning of a trade show event. The biggest tasks to remember are you need to plan ahead of time and pay attention to your target audience. Do these two things and you should be on the road to a successful trade show!



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