



Pre-Show Tactics That Support Trade Show Goals

Trade Show 101 **White Paper Series**

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Introduction

In the first installment of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series, "Hitting the Mark: Setting Effective Goals and Objectives™," we explored five of the most common goals established for effectively monitoring and evaluating the success of trade shows:

- Increasing sales (new customer acquisition or up selling current customers)
- Increasing customer share
- Launching new products or services
- Branding, positioning and/or image branding
- Growing your marketing database

As we uncovered in the most recent chapter of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series, "Designing Exhibits to Support Trade Show Goals™," the best way to accomplish these goals, in addition to building a solid pre-, at- and post-show strategy, is by designing an exhibit that effectively communicates your brand and effortlessly relays your message to your target audience. If your message is communicated clearly, staff members will ideally spend less time qualifying traffic and more time solving prospects' business pains.

Now that we have established goals and objectives and identified our priorities for the show, let's review different pre-show tactics that will help us accomplish our goals.

We all know of the different promotional items that exhibitors promise and give away as promotional items, but is giving away free items the most effective way to get people to visit your exhibit? What about giving away a Harley Davidson? Is that the best way to spend your trade show budget? We'll explore these and many other options in this installment of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series, all the while remembering that we want to be able to measure everything and prove demonstrable results.

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You Have Goals—Now Support Them

You and your team have worked hard preparing for your upcoming shows. First, you sat down and mapped out your key initiatives for your next show. You know exactly what your goals are for the show and you have shared them with all of the members that will be staffing the booth as well as the executives of your company. You wrote them down and were very specific in what you wanted to accomplish.

Then you went out and met with an exhibit house to help you design your exhibit. Thanks to the last installment of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series, you were able to identify different ways to design an exhibit to support your trade show goals.

Now it's time to build a pre-show marketing strategy that will allow you to not only identify and segment your target market effectively but drive the right people to your exhibit. After all, we want to try to minimize the amount of money spent on people that will most likely never spend money with us. So let's build a plan that will be very targeted and measurable.

Step 1: Define Your Target Market

Today it's fairly common to hear someone say, "Do you really know anyone anymore?" While there may be something to that statement, in this instance, the answer is yes. You can know your target market* better than you know your own neighbors. In fact, we should know our target market so intimately that we know what drives them both personally and professionally. But if you're reading this and acknowledging that at this point you don't know your target market as well as maybe you'd like, don't worry, that's why we're writing this white paper.

* For the purposes of this white paper, we will use the terms attendees and target market interchangeably because at the end of the day, they are the same thing.

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Thoroughly understanding our target market and trade show attendees will allow us to be much more successful and precise in our pre-show marketing activities. We'll be able to create relevant, timely and compelling content that resonates with attendees on an individual level, which we'll discuss in more detail later, but it will also allow us to define what an ideal attendee looks like. Before we begin doing any pre-show marketing, we need to define different categories or segments of leads. For instance, what buying propensities does an ideal lead (A Lead) exhibit? What would a B Lead look like and what is it worth to you compared to a C Lead? We need to create this classification before we begin marketing. If you're already practicing this principle at your trade shows, congratulations, you're way ahead of the curve. If you're not, then here's how.

1. Analyze historical purchasing data – Take a look at your previous and current customer base and ask yourself if you see any common characteristics shared amongst them. Do your most profitable, most desirable customers share any characteristics? How about your least profitable customers? When your customers were initially purchasing from you, what were their buying characteristics (specific pains, needs, interests)? Did one group exhibit one characteristic more commonly or was there a specific title that you noticed your company is successful selling to? These are only a few examples of trends to look for when analyzing historical purchasing data. The reason for doing this will make sense as you continue through the steps.

2. Identify business critical questions – A well trained, successful sales person knows which questions to ask prospects early in the sales process in order to identify whether or not the prospect will be a good candidate for your products or services. What are those questions?

If you're not sure, go ask one of your top performers. They'll be more than glad to help. Identify what those questions are and what common answers are. Of those answers, which answer tells you this prospect is a **solid** prospect? Which answer tells you they might be a **good** candidate? And so forth. There should be three or four questions that can easily identify the prospect's buying propensities.

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3. Weight the answers to those questions – Once you've determined the top three or four questions that help categorically identify the worth of a lead, weight the answers to those questions. You'll want to use this ranking to help you categorize leads, so whichever answers lead to closed deals should receive the highest scores. After the prospect answers the series of questions, we'll be adding them up and designating a final score for the prospect. Depending on the number of questions and the scores associated with each answer, category scores will obviously vary from one company to the next.

4. Create your lead categories – Now that you have identified the important questions and answers and appropriately scored each answer to the questions, you need to create your lead categories. Some companies like to break their categories down by letters (A, B, C) or numbers (1,2,3) or even words (Hot, Warm, Cold). There is no set number of categories a company should have, but you should have a solid idea of how you want to break your categories down based on the historical data you just analyzed. One way to look at it is to consider how an ideal candidate might answer those questions. What would that score range look like?

5. Design your lead capture form – We are going to be marketing to attendees soon, and we need ways to capture their information in order to categorize leads. So now we need to create a lead capture form. Some refer to this as a survey, web form and Customer Fit Review™, among other things. In essence, it's an online form used to capture data from your target market and allow you to score and segment your list. Keep in mind, there are only so many questions you can ask before prospects grow tired or irritated and abandon the form. You also need to be careful as to the types of questions you ask. You don't want to build question bias into your form, and you don't want to ask questions prospects might find too invasive or encroaching. Nonetheless, you'll need some basic demographic information and then a few qualifying questions. Considering that attendees expect to be asked questions before and during a show, you can usually get away with asking a few more questions than usual in your online data capture form or survey.

Taking the time to establish a way to better understand your target market may require a fair amount of time up front, but once it is established, subsequent efforts should require much less time. Plus, it is a critical step in helping to better understand your target market's needs and buying propensities, which ultimately allows you to more precisely target individuals with a relevant, timely message.

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Step 2: Let's Talk Numbers

Establishing lead categories is critical to building a quantifiable and measurable pre-show plan that helps you identify the number of leads (from each category) that you need to visit your exhibit in order to reach your revenue goal. Once you've established these categories, it's time to ask yourself a few questions regarding the outcome you expect from the show. If you know how much revenue you're striving to generate from the show, let's identify how many A, B or C leads your marketing efforts need to drive to the exhibit. We covered this pre-show planning process in the first white paper, but let's quickly revisit the thought process.

In order to determine this magical number, let's work backward from our revenue goal to derive the number of leads we need to meet. Let's take a look at an example.

If one of your objectives for an event is to close 10 deals as a direct result of attending the show, you can determine how many A leads you need to meet with some simple regression analysis. If you know that you have a close ratio of 35 percent on A prospects once you present a proposal and that 50 percent of those A prospects you meet for the first time make it to the proposal stage, then you will need to meet with 57 A leads to achieve your objective of closing 10 deals. Then, spread that number over the three-day show and make sure you are averaging about 19 A prospects each day.

Formula for A leads based on above scenario:
 $35\% \text{ close rate} / 10 \text{ deals} = 29 \text{ proposals} = \text{meet with } 57 \text{ A leads to close deals}$

This is a simplified objective, and it assumes that there are 57 A prospects at the show who will attend your exhibit. This isn't always likely, so you'll need to create a mixture of A, B and C leads (or whatever your category mix) that you need to meet with in order to meet your objective. Use the formula above for all of your category leads. We'll soon discuss options for driving these leads to your exhibit.

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One thing to keep in mind, this can become very cumbersome if you try to do it manually, especially if you have a large number of respondents. It will also become more difficult to keep track of data over time if you do not have the appropriate technology in place. Proving ROI is certainly attainable without the assistance of some type of technology, but it is much more difficult if you have to do it manually. One firm that is leading the way in event lead management and tracking is FISH™ Software. Their technology is making lead tracking and lead management for events much more effective and timely. Check them out at <http://www.fishsoftware.com>.

Focus on Quality, Not Quantity

By now you have successfully completed two critical components of building a successful pre-show marketing plan – 1. Identifying the buying propensities of an ideal prospect within your target market and 2. Categorizing leads based on the weight of each potential answer. Now let's turn our attention to driving traffic to our booth. Keep in mind, we're not striving for quantity, we want quality. We don't want to drive attendees to our exhibit that aren't ready to spend money with us. So we need to be precise in our marketing efforts. That begins with your message.

But this point can't be stressed too much. So let's spend a little time focusing on the importance of quality over quantity before we move on to your message. Often times, an exhibitor can declare a show successful by driving only one A Lead. In other words, if only one person showed up at their exhibit, and it was this particular A Lead, it could be considered a huge success in some instances. It may sound extreme or unlikely, but some companies actually target a subset of their target market, those prospects who are highly valuable to the company. For a real example of a company targeting only a few attendees at one show, [check out this case study](#). These exhibitors only wanted three A Leads, but by using a high-level marketing campaign (which is explained in the case study), they were able to drive 19 A Leads, greatly exceeding their goal of 3 A Leads. [Click here to read this great story](#).

Tell Your Story

You have a story to tell, but if attendees are spending time in your competitors' exhibit instead of yours, their never going to hear it. Having a great story is never enough. Others need to know about it. If you have a message that resonates with your target market and

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a brand that portrays your industry-leading status coupled with a superior product or service, but no one to listen, your event might suffer.

In order to tell your story and enthrall the prospect with a great experience at the show, you have to persuade them to visit your booth before the show. Chose an approach that effectively communicates your brand and will allow you to customize your message based on the needs of the customer and your value proposition and your exhibit will be full of attendees ready to hear your story.

Step 3: Determine the Best Approach

First, let's examine what you are going to be doing in your exhibit during the show. This white paper isn't designed to focus on at-show tactics (to be covered in a later white paper), but it's important to integrate what you will be doing in the booth before you begin executing your pre-show tactics. So go back to the goals and objectives you established when you first began planning and then look ahead to the experience you want to provide attendees. Here are a few questions to help you envision what you want and integrate it with the experience.

1. Are you going to be utilizing technology in your exhibit to enhance your customer experience – RFID, multimedia, audio for a presentation? Should your pre-show marketing activities carry over an image or message that will be presented in multimedia format inside your exhibit or during a presentation / demo. If so, let's make sure to incorporate it into the pre-show marketing activities.
2. Are you planning to give away a contextually relevant offer when you're A leads visit the exhibit? What is that offer – an incomplete offer, white paper, research report, iPod, etc?
3. Are you going to have a drawing to give away a premier package of your product or service?
4. Will you have a distinguished industry thought leader at your booth to meet with attendees or deliver a presentation?

These are only a few questions to help the thought process along? What you plan to do on the showroom floor will dictate to some degree what you do as pre-show tactics because they need to be integrated and part of your overall marketing message.

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Step 4: Pick Your Point of Attack

There are multiple ways to communicate with your target market. Remember, target market is not a general statement in this sense—in this case, the target market is the appropriate mix of A, B and C leads needed to hit your revenue goal.

Some methods of communication are much more effective, appropriate and cost efficient than others. As always, your budget will dictate how many touch points you can have with your target market. Also keep in mind that we should be trying to find ways to drive the right people to our exhibit at the lowest cost per qualified lead.

Methods of Communication

Let's review some of the different ways to directly communicate with your target market prior to a show. Keep in mind that you need to let your prospects know where your booth is located on the showroom floor. Don't make them hunt you down. Here are a few options for communicating with the prospects that will be at the show, in no particular order:

Direct Mail

Letter

This can be a conventional letter with details of the show, including your booth number, offer, why you are exhibiting and your company's value proposition. Make sure to include an insert that contains a large call-to-action. This should be included in the mailer, but should be separate from the letter in order to stand out as an obvious call-to-action.

Power Play

Often referred to as dimensional mailers or incomplete offers, power plays are frequently more expensive and should be used for late-stage opportunities. The idea is to deliver a bulky package that will not be opened by anyone other than the target and will immediately catch the target's attention. An example of a power play is an empty wine bottle with a letter inside inviting the prospect to visit

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the booth in order to sign up for a wine of the month club from your company. An other example might be an expensive chess board with the kings removed prior to mailing to the prospect. Whatever the offer may be, you need to know in advance if it is an offer that resonates with your target market. If it's not, why would they be compelled to come pick up the missing element from you?

Postcard

Postcards are pretty common and well known as a pre-show marketing activity. The call-to-action needs to be obvious and must include a great offer. Try making it a component of an integrated campaign. With postage rising constantly, postcards are becomingly much more costly and can get lost among all the other pieces of mail the prospect receives, especially when it's sitting next to your competitor's in complete offer. But in the right situation they can still be an effective method of communication.

Email

Email is still one of the most cost effective and successful means of pre-show marketing. Though it is becoming more and more difficult to get an email in someone's inbox, if done correctly, you can get in front of the right people and easily capture valuable information about those prospects while delivering a targeted message. Despite all of the spam email that floats around, research indicates that people still prefer to be marketed to via email.

Telemarketing

Telemarketing is quickly becoming known as an expensive, time-consuming and arduous method of communication. Rarely does telemarketing lead to a live connection. Today's telemarketers are leaving a voicemail at an alarming rate of 95% of the time. There are more cost-effective and efficient ways to leave voicemails than paying for a live body to dial for dollars all day, especially as a pre-show tactic.

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Guided Voicemail

Guided voicemails are one of the best kept secrets in marketing, especially for pre-show activity. Guided voicemails allow you to record a single message and deliver it to a list of prospects. If you know you're going to be leaving messages all day anyhow, why not record a professional message with a strong call to action and a clear, succinct value proposition in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost? It is best utilized when announcing the items the prospect will receive from you and as a reminder the night before the show that you will be exhibiting at booth #1234.

Marketing Press Releases (MPRs)

MPRs, also one of the best kept secrets in marketing and search engine optimization, are the best thing since sliced bread for increasing your company's Internet footprint and building your database of new prospects. MPRs are different from traditional press releases in that they are distributed over the Internet and can have hyperlinks embedded in the content. By distributing an MPR with embedded hyperlinks, you are placing articles all over the Internet that link back to your website. This becomes very relevant in pre-show tactics because trade shows rarely optimize their sites, so you can easily release several MPRs a few weeks prior to the show to drive people to your site. MPRs range from free to a couple hundred dollars per release. But you get what you pay for. Here are a few recommendations regarding to MPRs:

- Optimize around the name of the show and link the name of the show to your site.
- Dedicate a page on your site or build a microsite that includes all of the details of the show.
- Distribute a few MPRs leading up to the show.

Frequency Is King

As you might imagine, frequency is king here. The more personalized touch points you can have with your prospect in different communication vehicles, the better. However, your marketing communications need to be designed to capture valuable information about your prospects. For instance, your marketing communications will be more effective and you'll see a higher response rate if you can integrate multiple touch points such as email,

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direct mail and a guided voicemail. Just remember that you want to pick a marketing mix that will drive leads at the lowest cost per qualified lead. Key word being qualified. Keep in mind that some forms of communication, such as telemarketing, can be very expensive and often times ineffective.

Step 5: Evaluate Your Message

Does your message resonate? If so, with who? Before you begin marketing to your prospects, can you explain precisely what your target market wants? To whom are you selling? Is one person the final decision maker? If so, who is that and what is his/her title? What does that person care about? Are you selling to a committee comprised of decision makers and influencers?

The point is, most of the time, different titles (roles) within an organization care about different value propositions based on their needs as an individual within that particular company. How can your product or service help them do their job better? A C-Level executive will care about different features and benefits than a mid-level manager will. A canned message won't be nearly effective as if you were to segment your list based on company titles and roles and target your message. And segmenting by titles is only one example, there are various ways to segment your list and message.

That means you could be sending two or three different emails at a time. It's more work but well worth the end result. Take a typical family of four as an example. If they are planning a trip to Disney World, will the parents care about the same things the kids will care about? To take it even further, will one parent care about the exact same thing as the other parent? Probably not, so why would we put one canned message in front of all four? A savvy pre-show marketing campaign would target them as individuals.

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Step 6: Plan Your Timeline

If you are building an integrated pre-show campaign, how early should you begin marketing to your prospects? The answer depends on how many touch points you want. Let's take a scenario where we have a moderate budget and are integrating email, direct mail (a dimensional mailer), guided voicemails and MPRs.

You should begin building out and designing every component of this integrated campaign well in advance of the show. You should have every component completely designed and ready to be executed a month before the show in order to test each piece and set them up for timely distribution.

Three Weeks Out

Three weeks prior to the event, distribute your guided voicemail to your list announcing that your company will be exhibiting at the show and to keep an eye out for an email and a package that should be arriving shortly. Give them a URL to visit in the meantime or a number they can call to schedule some time with one of your members that will be staffing the booth.

You should also release your first MPR at this time. The MPR should include the name of the show (linked back to the page on your site that you built for the show). The MPR should be an announcement of your attendance, your booth number, the date of the show and why you are exhibiting at that show. Because trade shows rarely optimize their web sites, there will be a great chance that prospects will come across your MPR as they are searching for information about the show online. You want to start releasing MPRs now in order to have time to release a few more before the show, ultimately increasing your footprint on the Internet. Make sure the page that your MPR links to has an offer and a form for prospects to complete. It should be the same form used in all other marketing communications in order to categorize this new prospect. MPRs are a great way to capture new prospects that are not in your current database.

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Two Weeks Out

Two weeks prior to the show you should send out your email with your offer included. When you are inviting people to visit your booth, it is important that you provide a contextually relevant offer as an incentive for them to visit. Don't just give away some trinket or gadget—make the offer relevant to your target market. Have them come to the exhibit to receive the offer. For our scenario, we are sending an incomplete offer as a direct mail piece. In this case, mention in the email that the prospects will receive a package shortly and that it will have something great in it, but in order to receive the complete offer, they will need to visit the booth to pick it up. Incomplete offers can range from a wine of the month club to a remote control airplane minus the remote control and so on. Know your target market and what their interests are outside of work as well—market research is a great way to uncover psychographics to help you select the best offer.

So, back to our scenario. Again, let's distribute another MPR two weeks prior to this show. This should be the second release. It can actually be the exact same release you pushed before, or you can rewrite it. The important element, however, is that you put the name of the show in the MPR and link it back to your site. This will widen your footprint on the Internet even more.

One Week Out

One week out, the prospect should receive the direct mail piece (in this case, the incomplete offer). There should be a letter included that references the voicemail and the email and that reminds the prospect that you will be exhibiting in a week at the show they'll be attending. The offer should be bulky in order to increase the odds of the package making it to your prospect unopened by an assistant or someone other than your intended target. Make sure to remind them of your booth number in the letter. Then, distribute yet another MPR. For those who haven't responded to any of your campaigns, send them one last email with a different subject line.

Night Before

The night before the event, send another guided voicemail. Mention that you hope they received the package and that you are excited to meet them at the show. Reference the booth number again.

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You should be continuously monitoring lead volume throughout all marketing communications as it relates to your goals. Are you on target to hit the required number of A and B leads, or do you need to increase lead volume? Adjust your plan accordingly so you can provide your team with the necessary tools to hit your marketing goals.

The scenario we just walked through should provide you with an example of an integrated campaign, but you should also be able to pull some ideas from it in case your budget doesn't allow for so many touch points. While planning pre-show marketing tactics, keep a few things in mind.

1. Always build a portfolio of activity that will drive the lowest cost per qualified lead.
2. Design the program to capture the prospect's information for categorization purposes.
3. Try to incorporate multiple touch points (frequency). If you decide to choose only email, do more than one broadcast.
4. Map out your timeline so that you give reasonable notice to your prospects.
5. Segment your list for better results.
6. Have a contextually relevant and compelling offer.

If you had to choose one vehicle for communicating with prospects, go with email, but only if you have a solid email list. The list is most critical element of any email campaign.

Step 7: Keep Tabs

One last thing—keep tabs on what pre-show marketing tactics are costing you. You will want to come back to it at a later point when it is time to prove your ROI. Again, there are some great tools made available to exhibitors that allow you to automate, track and measure every component of your pre-show, at-show and post show marketing activities. Check out <http://www.fishsoftware.com>. We will cover this topic more in a later installment of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series.

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Conclusion

There are multiple ways to build a pre-show marketing strategy depending on which tactics you choose to employ. However, keep in mind that you want to build a plan that is going to support your goals for the show. You want to maximize ROI, so it is important to choose marketing tactics that are not only cost effective, but also efficient. Try to drive leads at the lowest cost per qualified lead.

To do this, understand the overall goals of the show. Know how much revenue you need to generate and how many deals you need to close to generate that revenue. Be aware of how many A, B and C leads you need to drive to your exhibit in order to successfully execute all of your trade show goals.

Then, design an exhibit that is going to support your goals for the show and plan and execute pre-show tactics that support your goals and objectives. To plan and successfully implement pre-show tactics, first identify your target market and categorize / score your leads. Determine the message you are trying to convey to your target market and ensure that it resonates with both influencers and decision makers. Then select the tactics available to you as pre-show marketing techniques. After you have completed these steps, you will be ready to design an effective plan to reach your target market and capture valuable data about the prospect.

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The Trade Group® Trade Show 101 White Paper Series

This white paper, "Pre-Show Tactics That Support Trade Show Goals™," is the third in a series of white papers that The Trade Group® will be publishing over the course of the year. The purpose of the Trade Show 101 White Paper Series is to provide our marketing community with valuable knowledge and expertise that will ultimately help exhibitors maximize their potential at their next event. The series explores exhibitors' challenges and provides valuable advice on how to overcome them. Each white paper will focus on a different and unique challenge ranging from setting effective goals and objectives, to pre-show marketing, to measurement and ROI.

About The Trade Group®

The Trade Group® is among the Southwest's largest providers of exhibit products and services for trade shows, conventions and other business events. Founded in 1986, The Trade Group has delivered more than 40,000 exhibits to more than 15,000 customers. The Trade Group occupies 100,000 square feet in Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Oklahoma City and Las Vegas. The company's reputation is built on obsessive customer service and creativity.