

Nine Neglects That Kill at Trade Shows

By Brian Azar

Trade shows, whether national or regional, are one of the foremost ways for manufacturers to market and sell their products. All too often though, salespeople or management find themselves unprepared to handle the real job. Here's why:

1. Neglecting to commit to SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Companies spend days, weeks, even months planning the display. However, they neglect to invest appropriate amounts of time and money to properly prepare those manning the exhibit booth with the methodology and techniques relevant for doing business at trade shows. Defining specific objectives in advance will start the process of determining your trade show strategy. Are your trade show objectives to sell?... gather leads?... qualify leads?... expose or introduce your product to the marketplace?... or some other goal that you are looking to achieve? Prioritizing your objectives will help you define what has to be done.

2. Neglecting to DRAW PEOPLE INTO THE EXHIBIT BOOTH

Gimmicks may be great - - an eye-catching display will get people to stop in. But people do business with people. Are your people prepared to deal with the trade show attendees that come into the booth? Or are they chasing them away by lingering in the back of the booth like vultures awaiting their prey? Perhaps they are grabbing them in front of the booth with some version of the old "retail" store opening, "Can I help you?" Training your people to be as strong and different as the eye-catching display is worth as much, if not more, toward getting people to stop by your booth.

3. Neglecting to separate SUSPECTS FROM PROSPECTS

Part of prioritizing your leads is qualifying the people that come into your exhibit booth. Far too many people who work at trade shows believe that they have to tell everybody their story. Not every person has an interest in your product, nor do they necessarily qualify, or even deserve to hear your presentation. Being able to differentiate the SUSPECTS from PROSPECTS will certainly increase sales.

4. Neglecting to ASK QUESTIONS

Too many salespeople make presumptions and then provide solutions prematurely. Developing a format for questioning the suspects, to see if they become prospects, will help in determining which people warrant your time and efforts.

5. Neglecting to get a DECISION, even if it means getting a "No"

The people at the trade show should not be serving as educators. They need to get a commitment and learn the priority that the prospect places on your type of product. Not getting a decision, or avoiding the "NO" that so many people fear, results in not knowing which prospects require follow-up. Too many leads, especially unqualified or unqualified ones, can be worse than too few leads, and produce unproductive sales time after the show.

6. Neglecting to adjust outside selling to TRADE SHOW SELLING

The pace of a good trade show is generally fast-moving. The people in attendance are in a mode to see a lot in a short period of time. Ad-libbing and working your way through the detail of a typical sale doesn't work in the trade show environment. While one person is being sold, 10 are getting away. The truth is that you need to apply a strategy that gets the prospects to show or tell you what they need, and identify when they see themselves doing something about that need. The difference between the outside selling strategy, and the trade show style, is similar to the difference between an airplane taking off from an aircraft carrier, instead of the standard airport runway.

7. Neglecting to do more than just 'PUT IN THEIR TIME'

Many people are not motivated to "work" at the show. There is no attempt on the part of management to arouse interest and generate excitement for the show. If you couple that with a lack of specific show objectives, you wind up with people who are not in a goal-oriented mode. The people working the exhibit booth need to be included in the planning and decision-making stage of how to accomplish certain objectives. With any of these ingredients missing, how can you expect your people to do more than just "put in their time?"

8. Neglecting to understand the 'ROLE' at the trade show

The trade show should be viewed as a Broadway play, in which you are the Star! Do you take control? Or do you fail to use the talent and ability necessary to investigate, examine and understand the prospect's situation?

9. Neglecting to plan for the FOLLOW-UP

The trade show ends, and there is a sigh of relief from everyone involved. The problem is that now the work should begin -- the work of bringing the return on investment. Even those companies that have planned on sending out thank you letters, literature, or some other sort of advertisement, often find themselves failing to make that person-to-person contact so necessary to close the sale. Whether it is lack of staff, technique, goals, qualified prospects or planning, without the sales call for follow-up, you had better not sit around waiting for the orders to flow in.

Copyright © 2011. Women's Enterprise Centre is the go-to place for BC women business owners for business loans, skills training, business advisory services, resources, publications and referrals. For more resources to start or grow your business, visit our website at www.womensenterprise.ca or call 1.800.643.7014.