

The Most Overlooked Key to Exhibiting Success

By Jefferson Davis, *Competitive Edge*

Guess what percentage of marketing professionals with college degrees received exhibit marketing as part of their university curriculum? 2% 7% 13% 24%

If you guessed 2% you are right. As a nationally recognized tradeshow expert, I am often asked “What is the single most important key to making tradeshows deliver real results for our company?” People expect me to tell them things like “get a better booth location”, “build a bigger, flashier exhibit”, “do a better job promoting your exhibit”, “demonstrate your products better”, “capture better leads” and things like that.

All of these things can help. But, when I tell them the single most important key to making tradeshows deliver meaningful and measurable results is to update and expand their company’s exhibiting knowledge base, they look surprised. They tell me “we know how to exhibit, we’ve been doing it for years.” I then ask them to tell me about the results their exhibit program is delivering, and far too few exhibitors can speak of any specific results. They all seem to know what they are spending, but too few know what they are really getting.

The question of how to make tradeshows deliver results is a very poignant question because many companies exhibit programs fail to deliver measurable and meaningful results. I believe strongly that the lack of formal exhibiting knowledge is one of the main reasons. Consider these shocking exhibiting industry statistics:

- Only 24% of exhibitors set objectives for tradeshows
- Less than 20% of exhibitors do any form of targeted pre-show marketing.
- 84% of booth staffers have never received training on how to work a tradeshow
- 76% of sales people views tradeshow leads as “cold” calls.
- 87% of tradeshow leads captured are never effectively followed up on.
- Only 35% of exhibitors have any organized form of post-show measurement.

These statistics point to a major problem. Marketing departments spend almost 1/3 of their annual marketing budget on tradeshows. Sales department are asked to staff the exhibit, often against their will or desire. Both departments spend significant financial and human capital, and both with very little formal education or training on how to best do so. And it shows in their results.

Tradeshows have changed in complexity over the last several years. The body of knowledge on how to make tradeshows productive and profitable has exploded. And far too few exhibitors are keeping up with the changes and seeking out the latest thinking and best exhibiting practices. Many companies are operating on an exhibiting model that is 10 years outdated.

So where do you look for the changes and latest and best exhibiting practices? While there are many good resources, ad-tech is a great place to start. All exhibitors will receive a monthly newsletter with timely, “how-to” exhibiting articles. Please make sure you and the key people in your marketing and sales departments read the articles. And most importantly, please use what makes sense for your situation. By doing so, we can assure that exhibiting knowledge will no longer be a gap in your company.

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