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TECHNOLOGY SALES  
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## **WHITE PAPER:**

*Top Ten Ways to Maximize Your Trade Show ROI*

# Top Ten Ways to Maximize Your Trade Show Marketing Investment

*Why do U.S. businesses continue to throw away almost 80% of their \$16 billion annual investment in trade show marketing?*

The numbers are staggering. In its “Communications Industry Forecast 2004-2014,” Veronis Suhler Stevenson projects that trade show spending will reach \$15.63 billion in 2014, which will make it larger than the predicted combined total of e-media spending (\$8.03 billion) and print ad spending (\$6.36 billion). Yet, year after year, the reported percentage of leads that do not receive follow-up hovers between 70% - 80%. This is despite the fact that 86% of marketers say that they attend trade shows for the primary purpose of generating leads.

There continues to be very strong justification for trade show or in-person event marketing, such as conferences, seminars, etc. At a time when the vast majority of business communication is electronic, there is no replacing the value of human interaction when it comes to forming relationships and developing trust, two of the most important factors in sales. And industry research supports that notion.

According to a recent report from Marketing Profs.com and the Content Marketing Institute, in-person events are sited as being their most effective marketing tactic (70% of B2B marketers surveyed) for the fourth year in a row.\*

*Then why is the lead follow-up percentage so low?*

## Lack of Planning, Communication and Follow-through

Not surprisingly, the three stalwarts of business success – planning, communication and follow-through – play the largest role in trade show marketing success...or failure.

More than half of trade show exhibitors (56%) enter an event without a formal plan to collect, record and follow up on the leads that they generate. This lack of planning is often coupled with a lack of “forethought” about the event, which means there is an absence of advanced promotion or communication with the expected attendees.

Other common issues:

- No clear delegation of responsibility regarding lead collection/organization
- Incomplete or inaccurate lead forms
- Inadequately trained booth staff (*just because they know your company's product offering doesn't mean that they are effective at “boothmanship”*)

But the biggest “ROI” buster is the lack of timely follow-up on the leads that were generated at the show. This most important “post-show” responsibility often takes a backseat to other pressing concerns that have piled up while your key staff members were away from the office attending the event. Those “hot leads” cool off pretty quickly and are all too often forgotten.



\* MarketingProfs.com and the Content Marketing Institute's 2014 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends for B2B

## Planning for Trade Show Pay-off

How can you more easily turn the hard work associated with trade show and conference participation into viable leads and ultimately, closed business? Consider the following:

- 1. Establish a clear plan for pre-show, at-show and post show activity.** This should include a breakdown of responsibilities for all involved, including the individuals who will be charged with lead follow up after the show. Having their input early in the process will help ensure that leads come to them with the information they need to follow up with confidence.
- 2. Promote your attendance in advance.** Add information to your website (don't forget your booth number) and send out invitations to prospects. Don't assume customers or prospects that are attending will simply "stop by." Proactive pre-show communication should also include personalized e-mails or letters (the "human touch" goes a long way). Invite customers and prospects to your booth, trying to set up appointments in advance if possible. A special incentive like a ticket they can drop off for a grand prize raffle might prove an effective draw. Incentives might add to your overall show expense, but can provide marketing touch points that yield huge results.
- 3. Razzle and dazzle.** According to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), the average trade show attendee spends only 5-15 minutes visiting a booth. That's not a lot of time to create a lasting impression with a prospective client who may be in your competitor's booth a few moments later. Ask yourselves: what could make us unique enough to increase our booth traffic and make us more memorable than our competitors?

Having a visually exciting exhibit space is a good start. Enlist professional assistance for your booth design and exhibit presentation. This is not an area where you should try to save money with a DIY approach. Interactive touch screens and kiosks make great lead-generating tools, as do drawings/raffles, contests, and scheduled demonstrations that require registration or sign-in.

- 4. Select the right staff and be sure they are well-trained.** "Available bodies" shouldn't be the main criteria for the people you choose to man your exhibition. Think about your booth as a transportable representation of your company. The person you select to fill your space IS your company. With that in mind, who should be standing there? According to research by the Trade Show Exhibitors Association (TSEA), people are the most influential factor in a customer's perception followed by the company and finally the products and services.

So choose the people who will stand (not sit), smile, shake hands and be great conversation starters. It's a given that these individuals should thoroughly understand your products/services and be able to address pain points. But they also need to know how to "work" the booth: engaging visitors, capturing needed information, etc. Investing in trade show or "boothmanship" training can make an enormous difference in how well your staff performs at an event.

### Trade Show Marketing By the Numbers†

- **88%** of attendees have not been seen by a member of your company's sales staff in the preceding 12 months
- **Seven out of ten** attendees plan to buy one or more products
- **76%** asked for quotes and **26%** signed purchase orders (average all shows)
- **72%** of show visitors say the show influenced their buying decision
- **87%** of attendees will share some of the information obtained at an exhibition
- **64%** of attendees tell at least 6 other people about the event
- **58%** attend only the show in which you are exhibiting
- **40%** are first-time attendees
- It costs **22%** less to contact a potential buyer at a show than it does through traditional field sales calls
- **54%** of exhibitors do not set objectives, and a much larger percentage have no formal process to either measure objectives or report about what happened at their events

† MarketResearch.com

**5. Make yourself visible.** Speaking at the conference itself, if applicable, can grant you instant credibility as an industry leader in your field. Most trade shows are desperate for good public speakers. Why shouldn't you be one of them?

Taking the lead role as a speaker helps you and your company stand apart from the rest. Hosting meetings, participating on a panel or even conducting a class as part of a seminar are all ways of raising your company's profile and increasing your visibility. Lead follow-ups sent after the event should of course include a reminder of who you are and what principal speaking role you took in the event.

**6. Hold back on marketing collateral.** Sometimes less is indeed more, especially at a trade show where clients are bombarded with paper. Don't inundate prospective clients with mounds of brochures that will be stuffed into a bag, never to see daylight for weeks, or perhaps months.

Consider offering one to two strategic pieces of information while taking down contact information for a future, personalized packet that can be sent after the show to re-establish contact. An eco-friendly carry bag customized with your logo can turn you into a short-term hero for trade show walkers already overwhelmed with armfuls of material.

## A Study in Trade Show Lead Follow-up

In the Spring of 2010, TSRI conducted a study to measure and compare follow-up sales tactics by leading IT firms from industry trade shows. Using a real company name and address (with their permission), TSRI created a unique identity, email address, mail address and phone number for the survey's "test prospect."

The individual attended a well-known IT industry trade show with 135 exhibitors and stopped by each booth to express interest in services, either dropping off a business card and/or completed the contact form used by the company at their booth.

Although the exhibitors fared better in the TSRI study than the industry averages in the Forrester research mentioned earlier in this document, the results were still not stellar by any standard:

- 60% of the exhibiting IT companies made no documented follow-up attempts

- Less than 4% made direct voice contact with the test prospect after two attempts (*first call was deliberately sent to voicemail; second call was picked up by the test prospect*).

By contrast, TSRI was hired to do trade show lead follow-up for one of 135 exhibitors at the same show. The results make a strong case for utilizing an experienced outside firm to develop and execute a strategic trade show follow plan.

So in contrast to the lead follow-up with our "test prospect" where less than 4% of exhibitors made direct voice contact, TSRI's lead follow up efforts resulted in an 86% contact rate, resulting in a 15.5% ratio of leads to qualified prospects and a 13.5% ratio of leads to appointments (*face-to-face or webinar*).

### TSRI Trade Show Lead Follow-up Results (791 total leads from show)

Show Leads	# of Calls/emails	# of Contacts	# of Qualified Prospects*	# of Appts and Webinars
791	3,799 (4.8 per lead)	680 86%	123 15.5%	107 13.5%

\* A qualified prospect is defined as a prospect who has expressed interest in the client's product offering; the number of appointments and webinar participants is a subset of the pool of qualified prospects.



**7. Create quiet one-on-one space.** Make sure you have enough room for a semi-private nook where you can meet and greet people with whom you've set up appointments in advance. A private room or suite is ideal. At the very least, you need a space that's slightly out of earshot from others.

**8. Offer meaningful advertising specialties/giveaways.**

Consider giving away something really useful – not just pens or keychains, but perhaps personalized technology giveaways (i.e., USB ports, universal plugs, etc.) that can be purchased in bulk as giveaways to prospects who take the time to fill in questionnaires. Can't resist the less expensive giveaways? Advertising specialties like flashlights, stress balls and water bottles won't zap your marketing budget but will still get your name across.

**9. Walk the show.** Take the time to investigate the competition by strolling around and viewing what's out there. Pick up ideas by visiting other exhibits that seem to be capturing a lot of attention. Learn what you can – there's nothing wrong with asking questions and picking up promotional material from other exhibitors.

**10. Consider hiring an outside firm to handle your post-show lead follow-up.** The real work of a tradeshow begins after the booth is deconstructed and the exhibit floor is swept. But then again, the reality of your day-to-day business is also snapping at your heels at the same time. And more often than not, it's lead follow-up that loses that match-up.

Industry averages show that getting in touch with a key lead or prospect after an event can take between 5 to 7 'touches,' such as phone calls or emails. It is easy for inside sales reps to grow frustrated and discouraged by the process.

The alternative? Outsource it. By hiring a team of professionals to handle your trade show follow-up, you are ensuring that your valuable leads get immediate action rather than being put on the back burner for weeks, months or, worse, forever. The expense will be more than covered with the increased lead conversion and resulting ROI.

## Trade Shows Work: Make the Most of Them

Each year, the Center for Exhibition Industry Research conducts research on trade show exhibition participation. For the first time in over two years, all four indexes tracked by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research in its CEIR index report (*attendance, square footage, exhibitors and revenues*) were all up in 2013.\*

So there is no question that industry trade shows will continue to be a primary tool for new business development and lead generation. Formulate a potent new strategy now to ensure your investment in trade show and event marketing reaps all the rewards it has to offer.

*\*Source: Center for Exhibition Research, July, 2013.*

Since 2001, Technology Sales Resource Interactive (TSRI) has been a trusted partner with major IT manufacturers and channel partners throughout the United States – including Hewlett-Packard, AT&T, Logicalis, AdvizeX and Ingram Micro, to name a few – providing innovative sales and marketing solutions that produce strong, tangible results.

For more information on TSRI's proven strategies for maximizing tradeshow/event ROI, visit [www.tsrweb.com](http://www.tsrweb.com) or call 888-639-7252.

