

Trade Shows

Guidelines for National Trade Shows 262
National Distributor Trade Show Financial Policy 263
Trade Show Planning for Representatives 265
Statement on Financial Support of Distributor Trade Shows..... 277
Liability Exposure Involved With Financial Support of Distributor Trade Shows 278
Regional/Dealer Trade Show Participation Request 279
Trade Show Evaluation Form 280
Trade Shows Are More Than Exhibit and Meetings 282

GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL TRADE SHOWS

Representatives Attendance

National trade show audience forecasts in terms of quantity and geographic location should be made prior to making a decision as to which representatives should be required to attend. Manufacturers and representatives must respect the costs each incur, and weigh the relative merits of attending each show. Indiscriminate attendance requirements for representatives should be avoided.

Booth Personnel

Manufacturers should have an adequate number of factory personnel to staff their booth, and be flexible in their scheduling of representatives to work in the booth. Representatives should promptly notify manufacturers of booth schedule conflicts, and offer alternative times when they can be present in the booth. Representatives should make themselves available on an equitable time basis to all their factories. Time must be allowed for representatives to seek out sales prospects and customers to guide them to each of their manufacturers booths for individual sales presentations.

Boothmanship

The conduct of booth personnel is vital to the success of national trade shows. The following points should be followed by both manufacturers and representatives.

1. Be on time for your booth assignment, and stay for the full time period.
2. Be aware of the manufacturer's special goals for the show, i.e., new products, new programs, special offers.
3. Make a full sales presentation regardless of the geographic location of the booth visitor.
4. Do not become engrossed in conversation with colleagues to the detriment of booth visitor,
5. Provide full information on show lead cards. This should include not only name, address, and phone number, but most important specific product and level of interest. Manufacturers must distribute show leads as promptly as possible after the conclusion of the show,
6. Representatives should provide manufacturers their entire show schedule and hotel location in the event customers wish to contact them.

Sales Meetings

Sales meetings held in conjunction with a national trade show should be scheduled well in advance, and representatives provided adequate advance notice. Representatives should respond to the meeting announcement as quickly as possible if a schedule conflict occurs so that manufacturers might plan accordingly. Meetings should not be conducted during show hours, and should be kept as brief as possible.

NATIONAL DISTRIBUTOR TRADE SHOW POLICY

_____ MANUFACTURING COMPANY

This should be used as a guideline to participate in dealer/distributor shows. Dealers and distributors are both in the inventory business and as a result they must have an adequate inventory. This form gives the manufacturer the opportunity to qualify a request and decide in the best interest of all.

Abbreviated Version

_____ Manufacturer is interested in supporting its products through trade show put on by distributors that merchandise its products thoroughly and properly. Since we are interested in supporting selling shows we have put together the following policy which we believe will make it easier for major distributors to put together a profitable selling show.

I. Manufacturer and representative will pay for all representatives' expenses, including travel, food and lodging.

II. _____ Manufacturer will pay for their share of the booth with either free goods or credit to be used to pay for goods.

III. Distributors should have enough inventory to set up a proper display at the show.

IV. Our company name is to be in the show brochure.

V. Our Company name is to be on the side of the booth.

VI. Our guideline is that our participation in the show would not exceed 1% of the previous 12 months sales.

VII. _____ Manufacturer will only support trade shows put on by distributors that pay their bill promptly and within normal credit terms.

Letter Version

_____ Manufacturer is interested in supporting Trade Shows put on by the distributors that support and merchandise its products thoroughly and properly. Since we are interested in supporting selling shows we have put together the following policy which we believe will make it easier for major distributors to put together a profitable selling show.

While it is a major expense for the show, we and the representative will pay for all the representative's expenses including travel and food and lodging so that he can be at the show to support it properly

Booth cost is a problem and while we understand the distributor has incurred a certain booth cost, we do not expect him to use the cost of booths as a profit center. This will enable the distributor to make absolutely certain that he has inventory in stock for his selling show.

We also expect the distributor to have a good selection of products from our product line in the show and if more products are required than our representative could easily carry in his car, it would be expected that the distributor would bring in additional inventory in order to have a proper display at the show.

As part of our emphasis on a selling show, we would expect our company name and product to be mentioned in the show program or brochure that is handed out. We would also expect that the name of our company would be displayed on the side of the booth at the show.

While we are interested in promoting these shows as we have stated above, our stated guide line is that our participation in this show would not exceed 1% of the previous twelve months sales to the distributor. In today's market of decreasing margins it is difficult to budget any more than this toward trade shows.

Of course it should go without saying that we at manufacturing would only support trade shows put on by distributors that pay their bills promptly and within our normal credit terms.

We at _____ Manufacturing have been in a great number of trade shows and participated in a lot of them. We do not believe that any of our requirements as outlined about are excessive but are rather only the proper approach in order to make sure that we are part of a substantial selling show that is profitable for everyone concerned.

TRADE SHOW PLANNING FOR REPRESENTATIVES

By Laurence Kaufman, Frank Tylinski and Martha B. Wolf

While trade shows trace their roots to the marketplaces of ancient Egypt and Persia, it was the industrial revolution that reinforced trade shows as an important sales opportunity. At that time, new manufacturing methods and growing technologies brought about increased competition and the need for expanded markets. Selling became increasingly important for economic growth. Responding to this ever increasing need for new markets, trade shows blossomed around the globe.

Today, trade shows are among the most important marketing events both nationally and internationally. Each year, thousands of shows are held throughout the world, with over 8,000 of those in the U.S. alone.

Trade Shows = Cost Effective Sales

It almost goes without saying that trade shows are big business. In 1985, U.S. companies spent more than 21 billion direct dollars on trade shows, and the total impact of trade shows on the American economy was even greater -- \$35 billion. Even more importantly, though, trade shows are extremely cost effective for those companies that know how to properly use them.

In a trade show, the customer comes to the seller, reversing the traditional sales approach. Because these potential customers are self-selected, trade shows boast a lower cost-per-lead than direct sales. In research figures released by the McGraw-Hill Laboratory of Advertising Performance (1985), the average cost of an industrial sales call was more than double the average cost of a trade show lead. Only meaningful contacts were considered in these figures, i.e., people who had authority to purchase or who had direct influence on a purchase.

What is even more important is the cost to convert the lead into a sale. According to the McGraw-Hill study, it takes an average of 5.1 direct sales calls to complete a sale but only an average 0.8 calls to close a sale to a qualified trade show lead. The ratio of almost 5:1 is staggering. Considering the fact that you make more sales contacts in one hour at a trade show than in two days in the field, trade shows are a standout marketing opportunity.

About the Attendees

Trade show attendees come to the show in a buying mood. On an average, 54 percent of all qualified trade show leads are converted to sales. With the change in the IRS rules that now allow companies to close the sale right on the show floor, that percentage is expected to climb even higher.

There are other interesting facts about trade show attendees:

- More than half come to see "what's new;"
- More than one-third are first time attendees;
- Between 11 and 23 percent come to see a specific company;
- Between 94 and 92 percent have not been called on by your company in the past 12 months.

Marketing Value

Why are trade shows such an effective marketing tool? In addition to the previously cited reasons (reversal of traditional seller-customer approach, self-selected audience, decision-makers as attendees), studies show that a contact made at a trade show can influence a purchase for up to two years after the event. Thus, trade show return-on-investment continues to build over time.

Why aren't more companies taking advantage of the sales opportunities trade shows offer? The answer may lie in the past, when trade shows generally were tabletop exhibits that were almost an afterthought of many professional/technical conferences. Exhibits were basically looked upon as public relations rather than marketing events, and few companies tried to tie participation to any genuine business purpose, such as sales. Consequently, exhibitor return-on-investment was measured in "good will," and if a few sales were made, all the better.

Not too many years ago, American businesses could afford that approach. The cost of participating in trade shows and conventions was considered part of supporting an industry, and return was not a prime consideration. Those days are gone forever. In today's marketplace, survival has become the theme. A slowed rate of economic growth, coupled with rapidly increasing foreign competition, has meant that U.S. companies must market not only more strongly, but more intelligently. Each marketing dollar spent must produce results.

That "more intelligent" marketing is evident in most U.S. industries today, many of which can partially attribute their growth to trade shows. Many start-up companies use trade shows as their chosen "playing field," moving their products into the limelight without spending millions to do battle with the "big boys."

Trade shows bring together all elements of an industry -- manufacturers, distributors, representatives and customers -- in a "real-time" environment that allows hands-on experience with the newest, latest and the best that the industry has to offer. Interaction -- between customers and manufacturers, between representatives and their principals, between sales and engineering -- offers an intensified experience that fosters creativity and growth.

Maximizing Your Principal's (and Your) Investment

Your principals make sizable investments in their trade show participation. In some cases, trade show expenditures can amount to 50 percent of a manufacturer's advertising budget.

Why do they do it? First and foremost, they want to achieve the broadest possible exposure for their products to the widest possible audience. Of equal importance is a principal's desire to support his representatives. Trade shows are an important sales tool because they generate and provide more sales opportunities for you as a representative than any other means.

Do carefully select the right trade shows. Qualify them by looking at the mix of attendance/visitors, your market segments, costs involved, sponsors of the exhibition, reputation of previous exhibitions, planned programs and agenda. Pick the shows that best meet your marketing goals at the lowest possible costs, define your objectives and workload to determine how much you will need to spend, and establish a trade show budget. If you are assisting a particular principal at a specific show, be sure to know what type of promotional support will be available to help defray some of your costs.

To maximize the investment in time and money by both your firm and your principal, you should carry out certain activities before, during and after a trade show. The following suggestions can apply to local, regional and national suggestions can apply to local, regional and national events.

Before the show, you should promote and help create an awareness of the event by publicizing it, both in person and via mail, phone, FAX, Telex or e-mail, as well as distributing tickets and inviting your customers to attend. Emphasize the value of being able see your principal's new products firsthand, being able to discuss technical matters with factory personnel, and being able to resolve product problems directly with manufacturing personnel without a costly trip to the factory. Strive for communication that calls for action. Include a response vehicle -- a coupon, reply card, complimentary badge application, etc. -- that asks the customer to do something and to do it at your principal's trade show booth.

Set up firm appointments to bring your customers and factory personnel together with you in attendance. Once you have a commitment for an appointment, send an immediate confirmation and then another confirmation just prior to the show. Many agents print show appointment schedules (much like a dance card) to insure that sufficient time is arranged for meetings between customers and principals. The schedules also serve to confirm appointments. Plan agendas for these meetings so everyone's time is used wisely. You may want to provide a planning sheet for attendees. It's a good way to keep notes, and the sheet (printed with your company name and logo) promotes your firm. During the show, be on time for the customer-principal meetings you have scheduled, and conduct them as business sessions, not as social gatherings. On the exhibit floor, you should be highly visible in your principal's booth, not only to assist in manning the exhibit, but to personally welcome customers. Assuming that more than one of your principals is exhibiting at the same event, you may have to keep moving from one area to another, but your efforts will be worthwhile and appreciated. For local or regional events, you may be able to work with the show management to group your principals, e.g., all in one aisle or section, to help save "travel time."

The key to establishing new customers and to closing sales with current accounts is quick qualification of prospects who visit the exhibit booth. Time is limited at every trade show, and competition for your prospects' time from other exhibitors is fierce. Assume each prospect will not spend more than five minutes in your booth, so act quickly to find out: the nature of the prospect's business; the prospect's authority or influence to buy; competitive or related products carried; probable date of purchase.

You must be more aggressive than you would be during a sales situation in the field. Make the first move, but do not ask closed-ended questions, such as "May I help you?" Instead, start off with "What kind of products/services are you looking for?" Keep in mind that 65 percent of what a prospect remembers about your booth and products will result from interactive communication. You must involve the prospect in conversation. Little will be remembered by the prospect if you don't talk or if you simply hand him/her a catalog.

After the show, it is incumbent upon the principal to send you leads and inquiries for follow up as promptly as possible. Make these contacts a priority. Immediate follow up takes best advantage of the enthusiasm and interest generated among potential customers by the show.

The major ingredients of a successful trade show are the interaction and cooperation between representatives and their principals. By following these general guidelines, many representatives can document countless sales and other tangible benefits that have resulted from their trade show participation. You will find trade shows to be the most effective way to reach the largest number of people in the shortest amount of time.

On the following pages are a variety of forms designed as aids to maximize your trade show participation.

Goals And Objectives

Success at trade shows is a result of how well you plan ... your goals, your strategy, your schedule. And this includes planning what you must do before the show, at the show and after the show. Your goals and your strategy are largely up to you, but keep in mind that you must work around: the calendar of events; the schedules of the people you want to see; your limitations of time and manpower.

Within that framework, this worksheet and those that follow will help you to organize your time at trade shows most effectively ... and point you toward capitalizing afterwards on what you've accomplished at each event.

Name of Show _____ **Dates** _____
Location _____

1. The most important thing we want to accomplish this year at this show is: _____

2. Other important goals are: _____

3. These are the things and people who can help us accomplish our goals: _____

4. These are the problems and obstacles we will have to overcome en route: _____

"Make It Happen" Checklist

Completed	Responsibility	Due Date
<hr/>		
I. Goal Setting		
A. Marketing Plan		
1. Existing principals at show	_____	_____
2. Program to get "missing" principals to participate	_____	_____
B. New lines		
C. Customers		
1. Arrange customer / factory interfaces	_____	_____
2. Agendas - appointments - gather data	_____	_____
3. Program to maximize customer attendance from territory	_____	_____
II. Logistics		
A. Who's attending		
B. Travel arrangements		
C. Responsibilities		
1. Sales meetings	_____	_____
2. Booth duty	_____	_____
3. Appointment making & confirmation	_____	_____
4. New lines	_____	_____

D. Miscellaneous

1. Seminars

2. Association activities

3. Social

III. Follow-up and evaluation

Principals Who Will Be At The Show

(Make copies of this form and complete one for each principal.)

**Company
Dates**

Personnel

Trade Show &

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Our Agenda / Responsibilities

Sales meeting? _____

When? _____

Who will attend? _____

Booth duty? _____

When? _____

Who will cover: _____

Customer Appointments

Current Customers _____

Prospective Customers _____

Appointments

Appointment Schedule and Time Organizer

Date	Day / Date	Day / Date	Day / Date	Day /
7 AM	_____	_____	_____	_____
8 AM	_____	_____	_____	_____
9 AM	_____	_____	_____	_____
10 AM	_____	_____	_____	_____
11 AM	_____	_____	_____	_____
12 Noon	_____	_____	_____	_____
1 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
2 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
3 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
4 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
5 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
6 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____
7 PM	_____	_____	_____	_____

New Lines

One of the major opportunities a trade show gives you is the chance to pick up new lines. MAKE IT HAPPEN!

I. Identify new lines you know you'd be interested in that will be at the show. _____

II. How will they relate to your marketing plan? _____

III. Strategy

A. Direct contact? _____

B. Introduction by another principal,
a distributor or another rep? _____

C. Preparation? What is your market-
ing plan to secure them? _____

IV. Serendipity -- Trade shows also give you a chance to "fall in" to desirable situations.

A. Have you left enough flexibility in your schedule to respond? _____

B. Do you have with you "hard copy" company data to take advantage of every opportunity? _____

Travel Schedules

Name of Show _____ Dates _____
_____ Location _____

	Individual (or Group) I	Individual (or Group) II
Depart Home	Date _____	_____
	Time _____	_____
	Flight # _____	_____
Return Home	Date _____	_____
	Time _____	_____
	Flight # _____	_____

Flight Arrangements Responsibility _____
Complete (date) _____

Hotel Reservations Responsibility _____
Complete (date) _____
Confirmation Received _____
Arrival (date) _____ Departure (date) _____

Plan on who will attend:

	Attendee	Time
Industry seminar	_____	_____
Trade Association Functions	_____	_____
Principals' Social Events	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Other evening plans arranged in advance	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Post-Show Evaluation / Overview

1. Action follow-ups

2. Seminar notes

3. Ideas gleaned from other attendees

4. Industry trend notes

5. Ideas to put into action

STATEMENT ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF DISTRIBUTOR TRADE SHOWS

Reports from all parts of the country which indicate that distributor-sponsored open houses and trade shows to which manufacturers representatives are assigned "shared" financial responsibility are causing confusion and concern among its members. They is an increasing burden that manufacturers representatives are called upon to bear in the financial support of distributor open houses and trade shows.

The proliferation of such distributor sponsored and produced shows in which local manufacturers representatives are invited to participate and are charged a pro-rata share of the cost of such distributor programs, has been of growing concern to manufacturers' agents.

While it was emphasized by the manufacturers' agents that such distributor-promoted trade shows are valuable opportunities for all segments of the industry to develop important and timely contacts with the end-user customer, the total cost of such shows, manufacturers' agents, should be borne by the distributors producing them, in as much as they are considered to be promotional and marketing objectives enjoyed by, and rebounding to, the distributor sponsoring them.

To openly request such direct financial aid from manufacturer's representatives, in the form of table or booth space accommodations, or other expressions of monetary support, places the representative in a compromising position in his trading area and, in fact, raises the question of a breach of business ethics if the same considerations are not offered, equally or in kind, to all other competing distributors in the local trading area.

However, manufacturers representatives should continue to make the services of their manufacturers -and themselves and their people -available for such distributor open houses and trade shows, according to their own individual policies with respect to displays, literature, samples, manpower, etc., which by themselves constitute very valuable and substantial contributions to such distributor programs.

In no manner should the expression of this sincere concern be construed as an effort to interfere with, or be in opposition to, policies of manufacturers and their representatives as they may relate to sales meetings, contests and other promotional and in-house marketing activities which they carry on as a cooperative effort with their distributors.

All manufacturers representatives are urged to actively support and lend their assistance to industry trade shows which benefit the total cross-section of all segments of the food service industry in a given trading area. Such support of these industry wide product exposure programs is in the best interests of all distributors and their manufacturers.

LIABILITY EXPOSURE INVOLVED WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF DISTRIBUTOR TRADE SHOWS

The Manufacturers Agents for the Food Service Industry (MAFSI) has long taken the position that the cost of distributor open houses and trade shows should be totally borne by the distributors producing them since they are the direct recipients of the marketing benefits.

While the Association recognizes that the ultimate decision to financially participate in such events rests with the individual representative, the growing number of members engaging in these activities warrants concern. MAFSI has sought the advice of its legal counsel in order to define the potential risks and extent of liability posed by such involvement's to MAFSI members.

It is unlikely that manufacturers' representatives would neglect insuring their businesses against fire or theft. Likewise, the MAFSI Board of Directors want to be certain that its members take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their businesses **BEFORE they agree to financially sponsor** trade shows or other events.

When members are participating in events, shows or outings as sponsors, rather than exhibitors and are not being indemnified against potential liability by the event organizers, they run the risk of being named in a lawsuit. Due to the litigious nature of our society, and to the guard against such an occurrence, MAFSI suggests that its members request a certificate of insurance from the show organizer specifying the representative firm's name as an insured. If such a document is not provided, the MAFSI representative should insist upon a written disclaimer that would hold him/her harmless from and defend litigation, should any personal injury or property damage result from the sponsored event.

The following legal language will assure that the member is protected against any claimant trying to extend liability. Whether donating money or a gift, the member can then participate in the event with complete confidence.

The statement recommended by MAFSI is as follows. It should be dated, signed by the sponsor and witnessed:

INDEMNIFICATION AGREEMENT

Date _____

(Show Sponsor) will indemnify and hold (Representative Agency) harmless from any loss, liability, damage or expense, including reasonable attorney's fees, incurred by (Representative Agency) as a result of participation in the event entitled, (Show Name). Should any claim for personal injury or property damage arising from the holding of the event be asserted against me, such claim need only be referred to (Show Sponsor) for handling and defense.*

Signed _____
(Officer of Company Sponsoring or Promoting the Event)

Witness Signature _____

***Note: Any negligence caused by the individual representative is excluded from this indemnification covenant.**

This guideline is intended only to pertain to the question of liability in the event of personal injury or property damage.

YOUR LOGO HERE
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

REGIONAL/DEALER TRADE SHOW PARTICIPATION REQUEST

Please complete and submit to Vice President of Sales. Please submit copy of material to Marketing Services Department.

Show Name: _____

Date and Location: _____

Dealer Show: Yes No If yes, specify dealer: _____

Financial Contribution by Manufacturer: _____

Benefit of Show to Manufacturer: _____

Equipment to be Displayed: _____

PLEASE ATTACH PURCHASE ORDER WITH THIS REQUEST FOR EXPEDITIOUS PROCESSING

Arrival Date of Equipment: _____

Will Equipment be Pre-Sold? _____

If Dealer Show, Will Stock Be Utilized: _____

Planned Personnel in Attendance: _____

Competitors Attending Show: _____

Target Market: _____

Expected Show Attendance: _____

Literature Requirements: _____

Submitted By: _____ Date: _____

Regional Manager Approval: _____ Date: _____

Corporate Approval: _____ Date: _____

TRADE SHOW EVALUATION

This form is applicable for all major Regional and Dealer Trade Shows and should be completed by factory or Sales Representative and set to Marketing Services Department within five (5) days of the completion of the show. A copy should be forwarded to the appropriate Regional Sales Manager.

I. General Information

Trade Show Name: _____

Date and Location: _____

Booth Size: _____ Eqpt. To Be Displayed: _____

Date Eqpt. Ordered: _____

Eqpt. Arrival Date: _____

Dealer Participation? Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, Specify Dealer: _____

Expected Show Attendance: _____

Target Market: _____

Financial Contribution: \$ _____

Dealer Contribution: \$ _____

Date and Location of Previous Show(s) - If Company Participated: _____

II. Trade Show Evaluation:

Show Attendance Satisfactory? Yes _____ No _____

If No, Explain: _____

Did Key Buying Influences (i.e. Consultants, Architects, Etc.) Attend the Show: Yes _____ No _____

Please Explain: _____

Equipment/Booth Delivered on Time and in Good Condition: Yes _____ No _____

If No, Explain: _____

Competitors Attending Show: _____

Reactions to Equipment By Show Attendees: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Please Explain: _____

Did the Show Generate the Expected Number of Sales Leads? Yes _____

Any Equipment Not Sold at Show and Returned? _____

If Sold, To Whom? _____

Benefits of Show: _____

Evaluate Show in Comparison to Previously Held Shows: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____

Please Explain: _____

If This Show is Held Next Year, Should We Participate? Yes _____ No _____

Any Problems Relating to Installation or Dismantling of Eqpt.? Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, Please Explain _____

Comment and Suggestions: _____

Sales Representative

Regional Sales Manager

Date

Date

CC: Marketing Department

TRADE SHOWS ARE MORE THAN EXHIBITS AND MEETINGS

Setting Obtainable And Measurable Objectives

A manufacturer paraphrased a business cliché the other day. He told us, "Half of my trade show budget is wasted. My problem is that I don't know which half."

Not to put too fine a point on it, he was half kidding and half serious. He is a regular user of and a strong believer in trade shows. He has participated in local and national shows for years, and always invites his agents to participate when it will be helpful for them. But, like any business person, he wants to get his money's worth. This led us to thinking, and we made a few calls to MANA member agents and manufacturers about their use of trade shows. What we discovered was that those who use them consistently are those who have specific objectives in mind for every show, and who set and make use of measurable results.

Far too many people, it seems to us, are in trade shows for the wrong reasons. One of the really wrongheaded reasons given by some of the people we talked with is that they fear not being there will send a sign to their competitors and customers that they are not doing too well and can't afford to do it. It's the what-will-people-think mentality, and it's the wrong reason to be in a trade show. We probed a bit when talking with these people and discovered that very few of them planned much beyond creating a good exhibit. They seemed to feel that a great booth was all that was needed. In fact, many told us that when they kept track of booth traffic, they scored among the highest in the shows in which they participated. Yet, despite good traffic, they felt that trade shows were not all that effective for them. For the dollars spent, they couldn't justify the expense, other than to have a presence which would signal that they were alive and well to customers and competitors.

Don't Start Your Planning with the Booth

The booth should be the last item on your trade show planning schedule. The booth should only be considered when you have set specific goals for your show participation. The booth is a tool, not the be-all and end-all of your show program. The first question to ask is: What do you want to accomplish in a particular show?

Some trade shows allow and encourage selling from the floor. Others forbid it. If you are going to be in a show in which you're going to actively sell and take orders, your show plans begin with outlining all the steps you will take to do this. And your planning will include an estimate of how much you can and should make from on-the-floor sales to make the show practical. To do this, you need a lot of information. The show management people should be able to provide you with registration lists and counts from previous shows. They should be able to tell you when, where and how they will promote show attendance. They should be able to tell you, in rough terms, how much others have booked from floor selling during previous shows. With this information, you should be in a good position to estimate your take from the show you plan to attend. Compare these numbers with your anticipated costs. If you can make money, do the show. If you can't, think about not doing it. We say think about it, rather than drop it, because if you are close to a break-even point, you may want to participate for other reasons. If it's a dead loss, you may be better off spending your promotional money in other ways.

Using an economic model can often give you a pretty realistic view of the P and L side of the go-no-go equation. However, when direct selling is not an issue, your equations can get a little soft. And it seems that most of the manufacturers we talked with went to trade shows not to sell directly from the floor, but to do a number of other things. This included introducing new products, distribution of sales literature, scoping out competitors, holding sales meetings with representatives, and just making an appearance. When your objectives are less focused, you will have a hard time setting specific goals, and an even more difficult time trying to determine

whether or not your efforts have been successful. It's at this point that most exhibitors who have given any thought at all to measuring results turn to a head count of visitors. And it's here that many exhibitors fall into a real trap. When their goal is just getting people into the booth, they turn to booths that are designed to do just that—build traffic. They can easily get the high numbers a flashy booth will develop. But, the question of quality is seldom answered. Are the people who visit the exhibit prospects, or just passersby who were attracted by the bells and whistles? Are the visitors literature collectors, or serious prospects?

There's nothing wrong with designing a booth that will draw crowds. However, you must carefully train those who work the exhibit to quickly sort the prospects from the just-curious. This isn't an easy job. However, those who sell through agents tell us that they are better able to do this than those who don't. As one manufacturer explained it: "I used to work for a company that sold with a direct sales force. When we participated in a trade show, the field man from the territory was in the booth along with a number of people from headquarters. The field salesperson was usually pretty good at discovering who were good prospects and who were not. However, the office people were often sent to the show poorly trained. The engineers would get in long and tedious conversations with other technical types, whether they were prospects or not. The office support staff was most often intimidated by the task and seldom took the initiative. As a result, they often huddled together in the corner of the booth hoping that no one would talk with them. However, my present company sells through independent sales representatives. And the representatives know how to work a booth. First of all, they are sales professionals. They want to talk with people. Second, because they live by commissions only, they recognize that trade shows give them an opportunity to meet more people in a few days than they could in months of making calls. They get to meet and talk with people they would never be able to see on a cold call. And, because they sell other related products that are often being exhibited at the same show, they provide a real-time synergy that direct people can't. In short, representatives are, for my money, the folks who can really make a show worthwhile."

Some told us that they looked at trade shows mainly as a place where they could schedule meetings with representatives, customers, prospects and others most conveniently. The larger shows usually bring together people in the same field from all over the country. And those who took this view and who planned and scheduled meetings way in advance felt that shows were worth it for them. Those who planned on the fly obviously felt that shows were often a waste of money. Again, those who used representatives found that they were able to schedule customer meetings better through their representatives than they might otherwise be able to do.

Planning With Your Representatives

Most representatives welcome the opportunity to participate in their principals' trade shows—when the shows are in or near their territories. Those whose territories are not near the show often prefer not to participate. Their feeling is that they would be working the show for the representative in whose territory the show is being held. Even if they're billed as national shows, most shows tend to be heavily regional for the territory in which they're held.

Many manufacturers use major trade shows as a focus for holding a national representative sales meeting. In many ways this is a good idea. Just the enthusiasm that a show develops can have a positive effect on the meeting- The show is often a good place for representatives from all over the country to get together. It gives them the opportunity to swap information, and to check out competitive principals. The immediate discussions that result from this can be very productive. However, as willing as most representatives are to attend principal sales meetings, they resent it if the meeting is just a disguised ploy to get them to work the booth. A manufacturer who does hold annual representative sales meetings at a national trade show said: "We recognize the problem (for representatives) and handle it this way. The show we attend always opens on a Sunday and runs through the following Wednesday. We schedule our sales meeting for the Saturday before the show opens. We book hotel rooms for the representatives through Monday. This means that they are free on Sunday to see the show at their own pace, and leave on Monday. However, if any want to stay longer - with the proviso that they put in a minimum of one full day working the booth, we pick up the extra hotel expense. Of course, we pick up travel to and from the show, whatever they decide to do. The decision is- theirs, except for the representative in the territory of the show. We do expect that he will spend two of the four days working the show. And he usually opts for working the entire show. Where else could he meet the people he can't by making cold calls?"

The Success of a Show Is Measured in More Than Numbers

A manufacturer told us that over the years he has learned that there's more to evaluating a trade show than counting booth traffic, or by using any other quantitative measure. He said: "Sure, we look for maximum exposure, but we also try to get a feel for the enthusiasm or lack of it we see in customers. When customers and prospects are enthusiastic about business, we know it. When they aren't, we know it, too. You can sense the trends of your field from show to show. You know when things are looking good and when they are not. There's more to a show than just the numbers. There's the gut feeling you leave with that it's going to be a good 12 months until the next show or it isn't. Don't discount these feelings; they are important."

And don't discount the feedback you get from your agents. They are usually able to give you a good sense of the market today and as it's probably going to be for a while in the future. Ask them about their feelings if they don't offer them. After all, you and they are partners. You're in it together, and there's no better place to share views than at a trade show.

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