

Boothmanship 101

You have a significant investment in your display. You are scrambling to schedule your employees to staff your booth. You hope the exhibit will actually be there when you arrive at show site. But you are not alone. Hundreds of your equivalents at the competition are going through the same motions right now. So if everyone is doing the same thing, how can you get ahead of the race?

It's a given that everyone will have incredible graphics, a stop-you-in-your tracks exhibit, and useful giveaways/literature. But very few exhibitors invest in the final step: booth staffer training, or Boothmanship.

Boothmanship is more than simply placing sharp salespersons in the booth. It is the art of understanding why attendees go to trade shows, and mixing that knowledge with your goals as an exhibitor. Improper techniques and poor body language turn off attendees. And any individual who has invested the time and expense to attend a show is a potential lead... perhaps a hot lead. (NOTE: how will your trade show budgets increase in the future? Lead generation. Increasing your leads from shows will certainly put trade shows on a new level in your administration's eyes.)

We have gathered a number of guidelines, hints, suggestions, and observations over the years and would like to share them with you. Hold training sessions before the show and another session at show site before the show opens.

- establish & announce realistic yet motivating boothmanship goals involving leads per person per day
- match your boothmanship goals with your exhibit marketing goals
- select individuals who are most capable of meeting and excelling your goals
- booth staffers should represent a blend of salespeople, technical staffers, and executives
- each staffer must possess strong communication skills:
 - be able to engage and disengage with attendees (don't let them slip away, and don't let them take too much of your time)
 - identify the needs of each potential lead
 - qualify the lead (go beyond the common name, address, title, etc. that you could otherwise receive by purchasing the show's mailing list; note their specific needs, concerns, time frame)
 - encourage two-way communication after the show
 - remember: proper qualification = probability
- each staffer must possess a strong knowledge base:
 - don't use the show as a training ground for a new recruit
 - be sure they know and can recall on demand:
 - your company's history
 - product features, specifications
 - related services offered by your organization (800#'s, etc.)
 - the competition and what makes you better than them (as well as what they are better at so no false claims are made)
 - market demographics, information
 - show/attendee information, demographics
- staffers should be able to “walk-the-walk” in addition to “talking-the-talk” (be sure they can demonstrate your products/services and their features)
- features & benefits of each product/service should be correlated with attendee's needs
- meet regularly during the show to reestablish goals and discuss what changes must take place

- let them know in advance that you expect a brief written report about what went well and what unexpected occurrences happened for your post-show evaluation records
- consider a contest for your staffers; reward those who attain a pre-established level of leads; have a multi-leveled prize structure so no one “loses”
- establish who your booth visitors are (decision maker, influencer, competitor, supplier, foreigner, other)
- establish location early - you do not want to waste each other’s time if he/she is out of your region
- create an original one-sentence invitation to attendees passing the booth other than “May I help you/How are you/What can I do for you/etc” (they have responded to that greeting dozens of times in the 20 minutes it took them to get to your booth)
- ask questions that reveal attendee’s level of interest
- discover what caused their interest and quickly establish how your product can solve their problem
- define time, budget parameters
- use probing questions & statements such as “That’s interesting. Tell me more about that...” to get more detailed information
- remember to conduct a conversation, not an inquisition
- anticipate questions and lead the conversation by asking questions
- record all pertinent information on a lead card
- 80/20 Rule:
 - 80 % of time = listen to visitors
 - 20 % of time = talk about your products/services
 - and never talk for more than two straight minutes
- use giveaways as a thank-you gift for stopping by the booth and providing information to you
- do not hand out a gift until after the lead has been fully qualified
- change body position, minimize eye contact, and shake hands to close the conversation
- let the attendee know what to expect from you or from your organization and when it will happen

And now for the “don’t” list. You’ve heard these before, and you know how difficult it is to avoid some of these actions after being stuck in a foreign town on your feet on concrete for twelve hour days for three consecutive days. But you still shouldn’t do them.

- do not sit down in your booth unless you are meeting with a prospect
- do not read the newspaper, magazines, etc. or appear tired or bored
- do not eat or drink in visible areas of the booth
- do not close out attendees by chatting with a group of colleagues
- do not leave the booth unattended during any time while the show is open for any reason
- do not leave without informing your fellow staffers
- do not be late
- do not close off the conversation by crossing your arms
- do not stand with your back to the aisle
- do not lean on booth furniture
- do not drink alcohol or eat spicy food during the day
- do not use inappropriate language
- do not complain about the show or about being at the show
- do not wear new shoes or high heels
- do not badmouth your competitors
- do not let the booth get dirty or messy
- do not be unprofessional

These demands may seem extreme at times (especially on the final day of the show), but they mean the difference between healthy sales and closing your doors. Accepting these standards for yourself and encouraging them in your staffers will lead you to trade show success. Be sure to also see other topics in our free “How-To Be A Successful Exhibitor” series, available exclusively at <http://www.northlandcustom.com/library/>

- *Maximize ROI On Your Exhibit*
- *Budget & Cost Control*
- *Show Selection Guidelines*
- *Space Selection Guidelines*
- *Post Show Evaluation*

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