



Tactics for the modern exhibitor

Pre-Show Marketing



Abstract

Events are a proven marketing channel when it comes to the business of attracting high-quality leads.

That's because leading events attract large numbers of buyers from the markets they serve. These are buyers that can, and often do, transform the fortunes of individual exhibiting businesses.

Given those high stakes, it's vital, as an exhibitor, you make the most of your participation. Marketing your presence in advance of an event can help you achieve excellent results.

This whitepaper provides in-depth advice on how to use pre-show marketing to generate quality leads and media coverage.



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Introduction

Events put you in direct contact with real people in the market that you serve - you get to meet these people, and the businesses that they represent, face-to-face.

In the age of digital marketing, this is an important and rare distinction.

Events can also help you to build a database quickly. You can use shows for research, product launches, market testing, building an agency network and many other things besides.

First and foremost though, you can use events to build sales.

The starting point to that process is the collection of quality leads. Those leads will come from the people that you meet on your stand. So, the more conversations you have, the greater your participation success is likely to be. That's why pre-show marketing is so important to exhibiting and why we have produced this whitepaper.

Pre-show marketing gets your business on the radar of potential buyers:

(CEIR)



85%

of decision makers say attending events saves their company time and money by bringing vendors together under one roof.

In these pages, we are going to show you how to build interest and attendance in advance of an event.

We will also show you how to extract greater sales and marketing value from the investment your company has made in exhibiting.

Part 1

Why promoting your attendance pre-show makes sound commercial sense

Spending time, effort and, in some cases, money on your pre-show marketing campaign makes perfect sense. But, especially where fighting for budget is concerned, you may need to get some buy-in from the powers that be to justify your spend. Here are some evidence-based cases to start you on your way:

1 When you exhibit at an event, you are competing for attention

The role of an exhibition organiser is to get the attendance to the venue. Once those visitors come through the doors, their job is largely done.

The mantle then falls upon each exhibitor to attract visitors onto their stands. Each exhibitor is competing for attention and, in a busy show, there is a lot for attendees to see and take in.

When you exhibit, you are competing for buyer attention:

(CMO Council & E2MA)

64%

of event marketers say events are most often used as a source of new prospects and business opportunities.



2 Not everyone attending a show is right for your business

This is why conducting a pre-show marketing campaign is so important; you will have primed some or many of those visitors to seek out your stand and see what you have to say. You will have moved from being an unknown entity to a priority on their list of things and suppliers to see during their visit.

This will help you acquire more, or better, sales team resources when it eventually comes time to exhibit. If you can prove who you're expecting to see - especially if those visitors are of a high-caliber, or on the client wish list - your sales teams will find the time to rally behind you and support your activity. It will also serve as a proof of concept: if I spend X, I can get you in front of more potential clients like Y.

Here's another important aspect of pre-show marketing: it helps you attract more of the people who are right for your business.

That's because not everyone attending a trade show is a prospective client for what you offer.

Marketing before an event is about raising interest with the people most likely to want or need your product or service. Setting out your metaphorical stall before you get there means you'll spend less time talking to people with misaligned needs or giving away expensive merchandise/literature to people who can't furnish you with a lead.



3 Pre-show marketing helps you to make the most of limited sales time

Events attract a significant number of buyers from the markets they serve. As an exhibitor, it's therefore of the utmost importance to make the most of the face time available during that very narrow window.

Pre-show marketing helps you extract the greatest sales value from your time at a show by priming buyers and increasing the likelihood of visits to your stand before the event. While most of your competitors will be gearing up to deliver their best pitches on the day(s) of the event, there's nothing stopping you banging the drum in the two to four weeks before the show opens to generate interest.

4 Events are supported by huge promotional campaigns: plug your business into the interest created to support the show

For an exhibition organiser, the attendance to the show is their product. If the quality of the type of visitor drops and exhibitors generate less business from a show, chances are the exhibitors aren't going to come back next year. That's why organisers go to great lengths to attract the right visitors to their events.

They run advertisements; both online and in the press, they produce thousands of words in editorials and they really go to town on social media too. You can be certain that there will be an event website and emails to thousands of buyers – probably all orchestrated by a very expensive PR agency working on the show.

Timing promotional activity for your business so it coincides with event-generated interest is a smart marketing move.

Ride the promotional wave created by events:

(Bizzabo)

84%

of event organisers said that audience engagement solutions* is the biggest trend in maximising the event experience.

*(live messaging through event apps, networking capabilities through LinkedIn integrations, and other features provided by event technologies)

Part 2

Create engagement with the people you would most like to meet and do business with

Event participation can create a focal point for marketing activity, both with existing clients and with prospects. In order to make the most of that opportunity, you need to provide valid points of interest for both groups. This is where the “what’s in it for me” proposition needs to be framed convincingly.

Simply telling people you are exhibiting at a show is not compelling enough in an era when everyone is so hard pressed for time.

Creating propositions for clients, and for prospective clients, is much more likely to produce content that;

1. Will be of interest

2. Be much more likely to be acted upon

Therefore, pre-show marketing should be seen as an active process, not a passive one. Help your clients through the decision-making process with really helpful pieces of content, and they’ll be more likely to trust and buy from you.

Use content marketing to build engagement and visitors to your stand:

(Contently)

74%

of readers trust educational content from brands - as long as it doesn’t push a sale.

Brand ambassadorship

For someone who has never heard of your company or products before, your stand and the people working on it will represent their first impression of your business.

You'll want to ensure the impression received is the best it could possibly be.

Make pre-show marketing part of that impression strategy.

Events become brand ambassadors for your business:

(Contently)

88%

of show visitors will not have spoken to your sales staff in the past 12 months

When used in this way, you are telling visitors what they can expect from your business if they make the time to meet with you at the show.



What should be in your messaging?

If you are struggling to find a theme or a core message for your preshow communications, examine how your business makes life better for your clients.

Do you:

- Save them money?
- Make them money?
- Save them time?
- Slash production costs?
- Free them up in some way to do higher and better work?

Some of this thinking will have already been done when it was decided to exhibit at the show. You could relate your pre-show messaging to the themes of your stand. Tying everything together in this way will make your messaging consistent and more likely to resonate with visitors when they attend.

Use incentives to support your core message

Remember, this is marketing.

So, where possible, include offers and incentives in your pre-show communications, but use the incentives in ways that support your core benefit messaging. Your core message should be about the important difference your business can make, but incentives have their place in creating compelling offers.

Discounts, free trial periods and samples to take away are all effective visitor hooks. On-stand demonstrations, goody bags, the seminar or conference programme, show features...these are all valid features to use or mention.

However, incentives should never be the reason why you want someone to visit you at a show.

When building your message, remember why buyers go to events

People coming to your stand merely to collect a goody-bag or some other form of incentive are not likely to be people who place orders.

The single biggest reason cited by visitors for attending exhibitions is to see what's new. By this, they mean what's new to them and this is an important distinction to note.

What they really mean is discovering products and suppliers they have not come seen before. It doesn't mean brand new launch products. Rather, it's things that are new to their businesses.

True, some visitors will attend because they have a specific problem that needs a solution, but it's "new" that helps visitors to keep innovating within their businesses and to stay ahead of their competition.

Don't worry if your company doesn't have "a brand new" product to promote. Instead, highlight any improvements, tweaks or additions which have been made. Including an offer your company has never made before also qualifies as "new."

Building the word "new" into your pre-show marketing is a proven and powerful hook for gaining visitor interest. Don't forget to use it.

92%

of trade show attendees come to see and learn about what's new in products and services

Part 3

Communication tools can help you create a pre-show marketing campaign

When it comes to alerting buyers to your presence, you have lots of tools to choose from.

But for your efforts to be most effective, we recommend you think about creating a campaign instead of a series of one-off messages.

Consistency in your event messages is going to work better for your business. Sporadic and disjointed communications will make little or no impact with the people you most want to meet.

(EMI & Mosaic)

80%

of attendees said live demonstrations and free samples significantly help define their purchasing decision.

On your website

- List the events that your company is taking part in with dates and venues displayed.
- Provide links to a landing page that describes what will be on show and what's on offer to visitors who come to your stand.
- If you add a sign-up form to your landing page, you can collect leads in advance of the show.
- Send targeted messages to those leads in the run-up to the event. Keep would-be attendees posted on product and show news.
- If you are releasing any subject-related content, provide details. If the content is already available, provide links to it.
- Build interest and make your prospective clients keen to meet you at the show!

Use event email signatures to promote your presence

Use these as widely as possible across your business (you can usually download them from your show's website). With this simple device, you can alert hundreds, perhaps thousands of people before a show.

Linking the signature to your show landing page may attract leads pre-show as described in the previous tip.

The media in your market

The journals that serve your market, both printed and online, will be carrying previews of the show. They will be on the lookout for content to run.

Follow their guidelines and submit stories and content that will be interesting and useful to their readers. Remember; useful content, not puff, will get you coverage.

Email marketing

- Alert clients to your presence and invite them to see you at the show.
- Do the same with your dormant client list - events offer a great reason to reconnect.
- For prospects, send targeted and relevant messages in a series of emails.
- Spread the timing of those messages and start sending them 3-4 weeks out from the show.
- Never batch and blast from Outlook. If you have client contact details, send each one an email individually, or use a mass mailing service. Whatever you do, do not share your customer's contact details with the entire database.

(Bizzabo)

85%

of event marketers choose email marketing campaigns to promote their event.

Include strong calls to action (CTAs) in your emails

These CTAs might include setting appointments to meet at the show, signing-up for a newsletter, requesting a sales call, entering a competition or attending an on-stand seminar. There are tons of possibilities.

(Enterprise Event Marketing)

63%

of millennials say that they use social media to keep up with brands.

Social media

Social media is an excellent engagement tool, especially when it comes to exhibiting. The visual dimension of events, the fact that you can show bright stands, busy aisles and real people, all add up to a terrific means of conveying excitement and the buzz that comes from live events.

Piggyback on the themes covered in your email marketing. Use images, the show logo, pictures of the venue and crowd shots from the last event to build excitement and interest. Promote competitions and giveaways. Encourage people in your market to share what they will be looking for when they attend and the topics that are burning issues for them and their businesses.

Combining social media and event marketing year-round boosts click-through by **236%**

(Marketing Sherpa)

Keep these promotions going during the show. Not only will you be promoting your business, you might also convince a buyer to come to the show and meet you.

A word about webinars

Want to get conversations started before a show? Webinars are the way to go.

You can broadcast a well-crafted message to a targeted audience and build interest pre-event. Better still, they can be listened to again and again and they can be shared by your audience.

Webinars can be uploaded to websites, which is great for follow-up emails both to the people who registered but couldn't attend and to your prospect list in general.



Part 4 - Conclusion

Take these 12 steps for pre-show marketing success

1. Use pre-show marketing as a means to take control of the success you achieve from exhibiting. Use it because you are competing for the attention of buyers.
2. Build time into your event preparation calendar to organise your pre-show marketing and to think about the messages and offers that will appeal most strongly to your audience.
3. Piggyback on the promotional spend and attention that an event generates. Doing so will greatly enhance the value that you extract from participation.
4. Talk to the show organiser's marketing team. They may be able to see ways to use elements of your content in their promotion of the event.
5. Create propositions for your visitors highlighting "what's in it for them."
6. Use personalised copy: current clients should have different messages to dormant ones. People who have never purchased need their own copy.
7. Generate leads pre-show by offering content or a subscription to your newsletter in exchange for email addresses.
8. Use incentives to make your show story even more compelling.
9. Utilise the power of the word "new" when talking to prospective visitors.
10. See trade show participation as a way to re-purpose existing content. Doing so generates extra value from marketing investments already made.
11. Use all of your existing marketing channels to promote your presence. Use events as landmarks that you build marketing activity around.
12. Don't forget to include your stand number plus the dates and location of the show in all of your pre-show communications.

84%

of event attendees say that they have a more positive opinion about the company, brand, product or service being promoted after the event.

(EMI & Mosaic)

Part 5

Further resources

Guide to abbreviations used in this whitepaper

CEIR:

Centre for Exhibition Industry Research

CMO Council:

Chief Marketing Officer Council

E2MA:

Exhibit & Event Marketers Association

EMI:

Event Marketing Institute



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