



# **THE ULTIMATE TRADE SHOW EXPERIENCE IN 10 STEPS**

A WHITE PAPER  
DECEMBER 2015

# How to succeed at Trade Shows

It's 10am on Tuesday, an hour into the second day of a 3-day trade show. The excitement and energy of day-one has come and gone, and you've already seen the same group of students walk by three times this morning looking for jobs and the coolest freebies to grab. You're on your third cup of coffee, not because you need the caffeine, rather, just to have something in your hands and to give yourself an excuse to walk down the show floor to stretch your legs.

As you walk back to your booth in the far corner of the hall, you stop and observe your three colleagues also stuck with the morning shift. You see two of them deep into emails (or Facebook, you're not sure) on their phones, and the other with his laptop on the front reception counter.

You scan the rest of your booth and notice the unfortunate shadow casted by the 20' x 40' behemoth of a neighboring exhibitor, you see an empty coffee cup, a few of your own brochures out of place, and to top it off, your looping video is frozen on your mounted flat screen TV. You shake your head, sigh, take a sip of coffee, rejoin your team and begin to check your own emails ...

**Anyone who has ever worked at or attended large trade shows has seen this booth, and sadly some form of this exists far too often. It makes most people in the Customer Service/Experience Management and Marketing world cringe. How can we fix this? What are you doing to maximize the dollars spent for your company to be there?**

**What you are trying to achieve?**

**How do you ensure the investment in exhibiting is optimized?**

**Follow these 10 steps  
to revitalize your trade  
show experience.**



1

## Location Location Location

### It's all about the location

Identify trade shows you want to exhibit at as early as possible – often up to a year in advance. This will give you the opportunity to choose the best available space and location that suits your needs.

Look for the main entrance and walk ways. You typically want to stay along those paths and away from the alcoves, far corners, or random support beams that limit visibility. Alternatively, if your options are limited – look for foot traffic destinations, such as the food courts, cyber-cafes, or even restrooms.



## 2

### Determine your Message

...and ultimately what kind of customer experience you're trying to create. Are you launching a new product, service, or making a major announcement? Or are you trying to network and have as many meetings as possible with new or existing customers? Both?

Often times, we don't have the budget and exhibit real estate to capitalize on both. If neither, you might not recapture the ROI of that show and should not bother exhibiting to begin with. Pick one and commit to that direction.



# 3

## Design, Look and Feel

The design, flow, messaging and feel of the exhibit must resonate with your goals of *launching/announcement* or *networking/in-booth meetings*. If you're launching or telling the world about something new – it needs to be the center of attention and obvious to anyone approaching your booth. If you're goal is to meet with as many customers as possible and develop new business than your booth needs to be welcoming, and you'll need some type of meeting area (lounge furniture or table and chairs, private area, etc.)

# Anecdote

Don't assume people know who your company is or what you do. Many exhibitors believe a logo is enough. Your logo does need to be prominent, but is it enough? Beyond your logo, the shiny new tool on display, or a fancy sitting area, **ensure that people within a few seconds are able to determine what it is you do.**

Whether you're promoting something or meeting with people, you cannot overlook the power of messaging and visuals. This is where you communicate what you do and begin to separate your booth and trade show experience from the others.

## LET'S REVIEW

- ✓ We have the best available booth location
- ✓ We have a design focused on your purpose of exhibiting, and
- ✓ We've addressed messaging and graphics in and around your booth

### Ready to go? Not quite.

Now it's time to understand how we take advantage of our planning, strategy and ensure the customer experience is executed beyond expectations.

Clearly separating yourself from the crowd comes down to the details and if executed, lead to a polished trade show appearance and customer experience.



# 4

## Create a Schedule

Identify the right number of staff to have working the booth at one time and develop a rotation. This keeps people fresh, reduces over-crowded booths, and should keep people off their phones and computers because they know they have time away from the booth to plug in. This also gives them time to walk the show, attend a technical presentation or plan a meeting with a customer around their shifts.



5

## Create a Dress Code

Nothing looks cleaner than your team representing the company in matching business professional dress shirts. Enforce it, and ensure you have a few back-ups in common sizes for the one guy who brings the wrong color or forgets to pack it. There is always one. It's also nice to see your professional looking staff walking the show floor representing the company well.



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## Have a social event at your booth

Nothing draws foot traffic like beer, wine or food. But don't expect to capitalize on this without generating some excitement beforehand. Send an email invitation out to your contacts that you also expect to attend the trade show. Design a simple post-card-like invite and have your staff distribute them to anyone walking by. Get to the show hall early on the morning of the social and drop off an invite to every booth before anyone gets there.

Generating a buzz before the social will give you something to talk about regardless of who walks by. Nothing beats a crowd around your booth with drinks in hand!



# 7

## Leverage Media

Limited on exhibition space to tell your story? Develop a video or animation that provides a company overview or highlights the reason you're exhibiting. This often serves as another staff member if you get busy – a visitor can watch the video and learn something. Plus, people absorb more information with audio/visual elements at a trade show than just reading text.

Use this to explain how your tool works, or to illustrate the culture at your company. It might be an investment to budget for – but this type of media can also be used on your website, YouTube, in an email marketing campaign and on display in your office lobby.

Should there be media representatives on site, invite them to your booth and make sure they catch your logo if they take videos - this often leads to free press! Also ensure you take as many photos of your exhibit and people as possible to capture the event and post these on social media platforms to further promote your event.



8

## Don't over-invest in print

How many times do you print and ship heavy boxes of literature, only to hand out a dozen pieces because your customer doesn't want to walk the hall carrying something? Bring only the most critical literature for display, pre-load at least a hundred USBs with as much literature as you want. This saves time, and money and reduces the amount of storage you'll need in the booth. Plus, the pre-loaded USB gives you one more promotional type item to hand out.





# 9

## Engage

Organize a raffle or contest to excite your visitors to participate. This will generate more foot traffic, increase leads, and depending on what you plan, provide a call to action during the trade show. A simple fish bowl with a sign that says, drop your card for a chance to win “X” is not the engagement I’m referring to, however, it’s not a bad way to collect cards.

True engagement requires a bit more planning and buy-in from your staff. Consider incorporating Social Media into your raffle or contest. First identify if the conference itself has a Twitter handle or hashtag, if not, use the conference organizers Twitter handle. Then develop a hook, for example – come up with a question that the audience can answer that ties into your company, exhibiting theme or service provided. Have them answer the question on Twitter (which increases your Social footprint, builds a following, and acts as a call to action). The catch is, the person with the right answer and is first to come visit your booth to show you the answer they Tweeted wins, “X”. This engagement creates a buzz, gets people talking... and if marketed effectively will generate foot traffic. The staff buy-in comes to play when each have to be completely briefed on the contest, and be able to acknowledge this correct answer, Twitter proof, and present the prize accordingly. A final touch is to take a photo with the winner and Tweet about it yourself!



# 10

## Promotional Items

Now it's time to purchase the giveaways! But before you spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on pens with your logo, mints, custom-shaped stress balls, or the trendiest widget at the time, spend some time looking at being unique. If you found a cool new portable phone charger, chances are so did 25 other exhibitors. Is there a way to tie a promotional product into the theme of your booth? If so, and it's reasonably priced, look at doing that instead of wasting money on all the common items that every other exhibitor hands out.

The harsh reality is – the stress ball might make it home but usually becomes a kid's new toy, and the other cheap items often find the hotel trash can before suitcase is zipped up. Be unique and you just might find your promotional item on your customers' desk the following year. Spend wisely – or don't spend at all.

Alternatively, you can accept the fact that your promotional item will become a toy and invest in an inexpensive item to have out on display for anyone to grab. But also invest in a higher quality item in a significantly smaller quantity and reserve these for visitors that truly engage with you at your booth – or for those prospects or VIP customers.

Organizing the ultimate trade show experience requires systematic planning and complete buy-in.

These ten steps highlight the core components to a successful trade show. If executed effectively, you'll ensure a customer experience that not only stands out from the rest, but most importantly is **memorable**.

Geo Energy Marketing Services can help you navigate this process and provide a detailed strategy for your exhibiting success. Give us a call to learn more.

**CONTACT US**



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