



ready, set, exhibit!

Eight Steps to Be Exhibit-Ready Year Round



Most marketers are pulled in a million different directions, from maintaining budgets to generating leads and everything in between.

When it comes to the trade show booth — oftentimes one of the largest and most lucrative investments a marketer makes — it's important to lay the groundwork early to be exhibit-ready all year long. When done right, bringing your brand to life with a three-dimensional exhibit can be the centerpiece of your marketing strategy — generating more leads, bigger buzz, and better results.

So how can you put your best brand forward, year round? Here are eight best practices to maintain exhibit readiness for the next 365 days and beyond.



Strategy

We know that maximizing your company's investment into its exhibit program while also proving ROI and delivering results is heavy on your mind. It's a tall order, but achievable if you start with a sound strategy. Instead of exhibiting at events simply because that's what you've always done, select programs that align to your organization's business and marketing goals, as well as your audience and budget.

As you examine each opportunity, consider what your goals are for that event and why you should be there. For example, will you be launching a product? Want to generate buzz? Nurture partnerships or opportunities? Or seek brand recognition?

From there, make sure you know which metrics your company wants to track, and have the process in place to track them at each show. This enables you to analyze your portfolio show-to-show and year-to-year. You can always add additional metrics on a case-by-case basis based on your goals and objectives for a particular event, but stay consistent with a core base.



Manage Your Booth Portfolio

With a clear strategy in sight and a portfolio plan in hand, you can begin to manage all booth assets. Create an inventory of the exhibits or exhibit elements you have available, noting the sizes and conditions of each. Refurbish your booth regularly and after each show to make sure it's ready for the next one. Whether you're attending three trade shows or 300, it's always a good idea to partner with an exhibit house to manage the execution of your booth. Leaving this to the experts allows you to focus on messaging and attendee engagement.



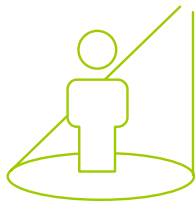
Booth Experience Design

Want to stand out in a sea of exhibits? Consider an exercise in booth design to create an on-brand, on-message booth experience. A clean booth design can communicate key messages without overpowering attendees. Everything from your booth design to your literature and graphics should be consistent with the branding and messaging on your website, in your email marketing, and social media. Make sure all attendee touchpoints tell a seamless story because interested prospects will research you post-event.



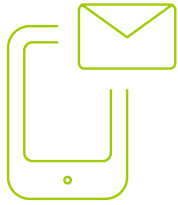
Integrate with Technology

Work with your audio-visual partner to create seamless technology integrations. Consider your hardware selection in advance and test all your files ahead of an exhibit execution to avoid hiccups on-site. Incorporate interactive or awe-inspiring elements like touch screens, LED displays, and up lighting to create more sizzle in your space. Upgrade your tech with integrations like 3D modeling or virtual reality to really up the ante. Also use technology to share content and important information with your audience.



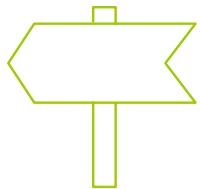
Speakers' Bureau

Since most trade shows have an education component, it's a good idea to have a short list of your best speakers and most engaging (but relevant) topics ready to submit for any conferences that align with your strategy. Sharing thought leadership from the stage can set you apart from the crowd, helping to drive traffic to your booth as well as lead generation for your product, solution, or service.



Pre-Show Communications

This is one of the most critical best practices for exhibitors. Before each event, send out an email communication to your clients, letting them know you will be there, encouraging them to stop by the booth or requesting an on-site meeting. Be sure to establish your objectives for the program in the email (introduce new product, build relationships, etc.), and offer a clear call to action.



Lead Management

With all these elements in place, your exhibit strategy will be ready to rock and leads should start flowing in! Make sure you have a lead management solution and a marketing representative in the booth to manage the collection of this data. This is a critical step to demonstrate booth ROI. Oftentimes, a sales person will get deeply involved in conversation and will not scan a badge for follow-up, so don't rely on them to capture this information.



Post-show Follow-up

Congratulations! When you get to this step, you are most likely exhausted from an amazing event experience. Take a breath — but don't rest too long. This is a critical time for the success of your exhibit strategy. Be sure to close the loop and follow up with both your prospects and sales teams on the day you get back. Plan ahead and have a post-show email written and ready to send to your list of prospects, welcoming them home from a great event and recapping your key in-booth or on-stage messages.

Schedule a debrief with your sales teams, colleagues who attended the event, and your exhibit house and audio visual partners to secure their feedback. Take the lessons learned and incorporate them into your ongoing booth strategy. Continually evaluating and refining your process will make each execution stronger and more beneficial to your organization!



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