set your exhibit measurement strategy

Using Data to Enhance the Experience
To create engaging, personalized experiences, exhibitors must constantly mine ideas that connect with customers.

But to ensure those ideas reap successful returns, you also need solid exhibit strategies backed by empirical data. Numbers tell a clear story, which makes them ideal for providing solid insight. By analyzing metrics and setting benchmarks within your exhibit program, you gain valuable wisdom on participation, event selection, spending, future strategies, and performance improvement. And most critical of all, you'll learn more about your audience and how to engage them in meaningful ways, on and off the show floor.
The Exhibit Measurement Plan
To get started analyzing and incorporating data to create unforgettable events, follow these four steps and create measurable outcomes.

1. Start with a Discovery Session
Bring your key stakeholders together for a strategy session. During this exploration, be sure to:

Consider Your Audience. Who is your customer? Are there different personas within that group? What is the scope? Defining the target audience and its potential reach shapes the entire exhibit program including experience design, content development, activations, and investment. Taking the right steps to analyze your target, and the subgroups within that target, defines objectives and strategies and helps quantify the experience value.

Define Objectives. What are your intentions for the booth, the event overall, and its intended outcomes? What actions would you like your audience to take away from this experience? Don’t proceed until you know the answers.

Consider all teams’ points of view. Strategy, creative, production, sales — when you include a variety of perspectives from inside your company, you’ll gain a complete understanding of expectations.

Think outside the box. Don’t get comfortable. Start with a clean slate each year, and be imaginative. Consider new programs, drop ones that underperformed. Never fall into the “We did it last year” trap. Keep it fresh!

Gather and review comprehensive data. Drawing on the entire event ecosystem (including past programs and technology) for empirical data helps you make educated decisions and recommendations.
2. Dig Deeper into Audience Engagement

Your approach to exhibiting needs to accommodate the people you're trying to reach. So, ask even more questions:

Is your booth and the experience personalized to your target? Focus on your desired audience and be clear about how your exhibit objectives relate to them. Badge scanners and other forms of event technology easily capture all the information you need — use these tools!

How does your target audience communicate? To understand their preferences, you need to conduct surveys about expectations, needs, and interests. Evaluating that data helps you deliver on expectations by creating personalized experiences.

What else do you know about your audience that could affect planning? When you fully understand your audience segments’ potential — and leverage that understanding — connections become quicker, deeper, and more authentic.

Ideally, these first two steps occur BEFORE your event as part of your portfolio planning process. With these clear goals and objectives in mind, you are ready to exhibit!

3. Assess the Experience

Here's where you connect the measurement dots between marketing results, overall business impact, and the exhibit experience objectives defined in your discovery session. After each activation, consider these key metrics.

Zero in on performance tracking. Did the event improve key brand metrics, such as awareness and affinity? How did performance compare to the competition?

Review sales numbers. Understanding the program’s impact on sales acceleration and purchase intent will help justify future participation and prove the value of exhibiting within the entire marketing mix. This data will also establish realistic and measurable objectives for future shows.
4. Develop Actionable Insights
When reviewing your exhibit measurement metrics, include:

**Actionable steps.** Go beyond measuring just attendance and square footage. Dive deeper by including more far-reaching metrics, such as the number of impressions, level of engagement, quality of leads, and more.

**Measurable results.** You must be able to see connections between intended and actual outcomes – that's what powerful numbers reveal. Without data measurements, it's almost like your event didn't happen.
**Exhibit Measurement Tools to Consider**

Not sure where to get those measurable results? Here are some tools you can easily tap into.

**On-Site Interviews**
Gather immediate feedback on the tactical elements of your event across all aspects of the visitor’s journey in real-time, which enables you to take immediate action to improve results and enhance planning after-the-fact.

**Attendee Surveys**
Post-show surveys identify strengths and weaknesses of the event experience, evaluate communication and content effectiveness, and determine where brand experiences stand in the overall marketing mix.

**Post-Show Lead Surveys**
Justify the level of investment by quantifying the value of your leads per product interest, buying role, purchase plans, and interest in competitors. Assess the booth staff’s overall performance and engagement with leads on-site.

**Sales Conversion Research**
Identify the percentage of leads purchasing one or more products exhibited at the event. Quantify the dollar volume of purchases from your brand versus competitors. Measure the influence of the exhibit versus other factors on these purchases. Determine the percentage of your leads who received follow-up from your sales personnel since the event.

**Exhibit Design & Effectiveness Research**
Measure the effectiveness of your exhibit design and in-booth experiences. Gain the insights and direction to improve the customer experience.
Benchmarks: Beacons of Performance

Now that you're moving forward with an exhibit measurement plan, it's time to incorporate key benchmarks along the path to take the data even farther. To effectively evaluate exhibit performance, you need individual metrics coupled with benchmarks.

Unlike metrics, which are comparative numbers, these beacons are reference points and best practice standards gained by comparing your trade show performance to others — or to your own organization, over time. They serve as guideposts that evaluate events from various angles, measure performance, and identify strengths and weaknesses to achieve competitive advantage.

By comparing individual events externally against industry norms, the competition, and internally against your own programs, you create a 360-degree approach to uncover performance gaps and insight into what drives performance versus just reviewing tactics.

Put into practice, this powerful knowledge leads to enhanced trade show experiences and stronger connections to your audiences.

**Insights Move Events Forward — Areas to Benchmark**

Through the discovery session, you asked questions to define desired outcomes and how to measure them. To fully gain the exhibit performance picture, you need to benchmark those objectives within three core stages of the event lifecycle: strategy and planning (tailored to the target audience), the event experience itself, and the results.

**Valuable Questions Provide Valuable Answers**

When it comes to ROI, benchmarks also provide bankable answers when wondering:

- How and where do we lower costs?
- Are we spending more than we should?
- What is our exhibit spending compared to the industry average?

Benchmarks evaluate event financials to identify whether the objectives set are realistic and achievable relative to the investment. By tracking results, you'll see how valuable your buying audience is from one event to the next, which informs future spend.
On Your Mark, Get Set, Go — How to Put Your Benchmark Plan into Action

Getting to those informed decisions means incorporating benchmarking into your measurement plan. Here’s a step-by-step guide:

1. **Evaluate the Industry**
   *Seek out professional insights.* Comparing historical event industry benchmarks against your own event helps illustrate where you stand in the marketplace and can also guide assessments moving forward. You can also find out what’s already been evaluated and what paradigms and patterns exist to better refine your own program.

2. **Stake Out the Competition**
   *Perform a competitive analysis and/or hire a mystery shopper.* Evaluate and compare your booth design, activities, and personnel against your competition. Include observations of exhibit design, visitor experiences, demos, graphics and signage, attention-getting techniques, promotion, exhibit traffic, sponsorship activities, etc. This intelligence helps elevate your place in the field, informs and shapes your own event practices, uncovers potential challenges and opportunities, and ultimately helps establish and refine your own benchmarks going forward.

3. **Go Inside**
   *Compete against yourself.* Looking inward helps set specific benchmarks unique to your company and needs. Identify five or six key benchmarks tailored to your specific event and overall business objectives that are absolute. Then measure those absolutes for each event, as well as the program as a whole, to learn what value each one delivers to your audience and to your organization.

   *Be consistent.* Incorporating ongoing benchmarks provides a steady stream of data from one event to the next, year over year. Collecting the history of key metrics and comparing them to benchmarks will improve your exhibit program over time.

   Using benchmarks as consistent barometers will ultimately inform the best exhibit strategy to enhance your program and lead to delivering the best experiences at the best value — for you and your audiences.
Driving Results, Connections Through Data

Face-to-face marketing and personalized engagement at trade shows can truly drive amazing results. As clients increasingly expect customized experiences, your ability to deliver on those expectations will depend on gathering and analyzing the right data and setting benchmarks to deliver strategies that make your audience feel connected to your brand.

Data-driven numbers are your secret weapon and make all the difference between an everyday event and extraordinary experience.

Creating synergy between data and people helps you improve engagement and overall satisfaction, and build the best experiences possible.
Bringing it All Together: An Exhibit Measurement Punch-list

Exhibit measurement can seem overwhelming, especially to marketers pulled in a variety of directions. Don't worry! Once you get started, you will find that it's not only easy, but also makes your decision-making process much simpler going forward. Here's a quick punch-list recapping the strategies described.

1. Start with strategy to define audiences, goals, and objectives. Establish a plan and review all of your data.
2. Consider all aspects of audience engagement.
3. Establish key metrics to track each activation and assess the experience empirically.
4. Tap into key tools to drive your measurement strategy. Examples include on-site interviews, attendee surveys, post-show lead surveys, sales conversion research, and exhibit design and effectiveness research.
5. Use benchmarks to compare your exhibits against industry norms, the competition, and against your own programs.
6. Put that information to work by developing actionable insights that drive your strategy moving forward.
maximize data

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