

Freeman⁷

Your guide to boosting booth presence

Experiential marketing strategies
for exhibitors

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It's a whole new event world, and marketers are working to evolve with the changing environment while also meeting new audience expectations.

One thing that hasn't changed is the power of experiential marketing to foster deeper connections between attendees and brands. It's an effective way to reach your organization's goals — including generating leads, growing brand advocacy, making customers feel valued, and (most important of all) increasing sales.

Experiential has gone from a buzzword to becoming an essential piece of the marketing mix, and it's a necessity for exhibitors seeking meaningful connections with audiences. Especially now.

But you need to do your homework. Designing an experiential activation in your exhibit booth can't be something that "just happens." It must be deliberate. You need to understand the why — your overall company objectives and goals — before you can strategize the how — your pathway to creating an impactful and successful in-booth experience.





Keep your eye on the big picture

It's easy to be focused on the how. As an exhibitor, you're balancing an enormous number of details: to-do lists, tactics, deadlines, health and safety issues, and more. But don't lose focus. If you know your why, managing the how will become much easier.

Goals. Where is your company aiming to go? What does your marketing need to accomplish? How does experiential marketing as a whole fit into these objectives?

Objectives. How do your event-specific objectives ladder up to your company's overarching business goals?

Audiences. Are your organization and event team aligned on a vision of your target audiences? Do you understand what these audiences want from your organization?

Measurement. How will you determine exhibit, marketing, and business successes? Identify any key performance indicators (KPIs) you want to track.

Spend your resources wisely

Now that you've established your why, you can dig into the how of your strategic marketing plan by looking at what you have available to invest:

Budget

You can't cement any strategies until you understand your finances — and not just the budget numbers themselves, but also what that budget includes, what it doesn't, and what your company's fiscal timeline is.

Schedule

Many marketers fall back on the familiar and attend the same shows year after year. Be smarter. Review the list of shows you're attending (as well as the shows you're not) and make sure the schedule still makes sense for your brand.

Where should you exhibit?

Use this checklist to determine which shows provide your brand the most benefit:

- Compare each show's target audiences with your target audiences.
- Compare well-matched shows with company objectives and available budget.
- Narrow the list of shows you'll attend, based on alignment with audiences, objectives, and budget.
- Develop criteria and metrics to help you prioritize these shows.
- Get agreement from stakeholders on the final schedule.

Show and booth strategy

Customize your plans for each event to complement your overall strategy, whether it's to launch a product, generate buzz, or nurture partnerships. Or, it may simply be about developing brand recognition.

Once you've established each show strategy, develop your booth strategy, which will include factors such as:

- **Booth property.** Will you use an existing, rental, or custom booth — or will you require some combination of the three?
- **Booth configuration.** What size and floor plan will help you meet your show objectives? Based on the space and floor location, what can you anticipate about traffic flow and how to maximize location?
- **In-booth needs.** Consider your goals and any extra needs like demo stations, product displays, theater and meeting rooms, and graphics.

Sponsorships

Be selective. Define how the promotional goals for each sponsorship opportunity align with your organization's goals. What constitutes an ideal opportunity for you at each show? Develop specific activations to meet these objectives.





Think like your audience

With your business and marketing objectives firmly in place, and a solid financial strategy established, it's time to really get to know your target audience.

Audience research and persona development

Dive deep into your target audience: Define and prioritize distinct audience segments, based on how well each segment aligns with your business goals and objectives.

Digital marketing tailored to each segment

Digital strategies give you the data you need to understand your audience segments even more. Plus, they do double duty to reinforce your messages and outreach.

Digital reinforcements

Consider these approaches to gain the data you need to meet objectives and reach target audiences:

- Microsites/landing pages
- Targeted SEO
- Email marketing
- Social media
- Lead tracking/CRM
- Webinars
- Remarketing and digital advertising
- Custom apps
- Location mapping
- Surveys
- QR codes

Turn insights into action

Finally, you're ready to pull your why and how together and create an amazing in-booth experience! Use the information you've gathered to:

Build and train the right team. Your show goals — which could be any combination of customer service, sales, and marketing — will dictate the best team for your exhibit. Look for team members who represent your vision and have a knack for drawing in and engaging visitors.

Design a memorable in-booth experience. Whatever its size, your booth should tell a seamless brand story. Maximize touchpoints by designing an interactive experience that circles back to your brand and event objectives and creates opportunities for personalized connections.

Incorporate technology. The right technology can drive attendee traffic and increase engagement. For example, maximize small spaces with interactive touch screens, lighting, video screens, and digital signage. Your audio visual partner should be able to help you establish objectives and set budgetary guidelines to deliver the greatest impact within the space.

Market the event. What is your message? What is your call to action? Clearly communicate with attendees at every stage.

Pre-show. Know what type of communication works best for each audience segment. For some, it might be emails and social media; for others, it could be the show's landing page.

During the show. Staff your booth with sales and marketing individuals who are trained to qualify leads. Also, capture additional opportunities through speaking engagements, sponsorships, social media, contests, and giveaways.

Post-show. As soon as the show closes, follow up with leads to keep the conversation going. Have a post-show email written and ready to send, welcoming booth visitors home and recapping your key messages with a call to action for next steps.

Budget-conscious engagement ideas

Creating a memorable experience doesn't have to break the bank.

Consider these low-cost solutions to drive engagement:

Crowdsourced innovation. Great ideas can come from anyone, at any time. Encourage booth visitors to become part of the innovation process.

Personalized interaction. Offer fun ways to interact with your brand and products, even in touchless, digital ways. The key is allowing visitors to make choices and personalize the experience.

Comfortable atmosphere. Create open areas with plenty of breathing room. Consider securing appointments to host key clients in a relaxed atmosphere that ensures ease and comfort.

Targeted social media. Create interactive calls to action that encourage the purposeful use of social media. Keep in mind that what you're asking them to do should be engaging. Fun = share-worthy!

Heightened senses. Don't neglect the senses. Incorporate sound, visuals, food, and smells to give activations additional sensory impact.

Prove success with data

The crowds have gone home, doors have closed, and exhibits have been dismantled. You know initial feedback from your booth was positive, but you still have more work to do before you can determine whether it was a success or not.

When it comes to metrics, the devil is in the details. Analyze too many variables, and you'll muddy the waters with an over-abundance of information that obscures the most useful insights. But analyze too few, and you won't have enough information to make solid conclusions.

Once you've established your end goal — for example, to increase sales or build brand awareness — follow this three-step process to objectively evaluate your exhibit's performance and quantify its success.

Measure.

Because following your business strategies from the beginning ensures you're getting the right data, look for metrics that:

- Show a holistic picture of exhibit health
- Give stakeholders the data they're looking for (what does your boss want to see?)
- Measure audience engagement
- Show the best year-over-year (and show-to-show) picture
- Are unique to your event(s) — ones that must be reported to tell the full story.

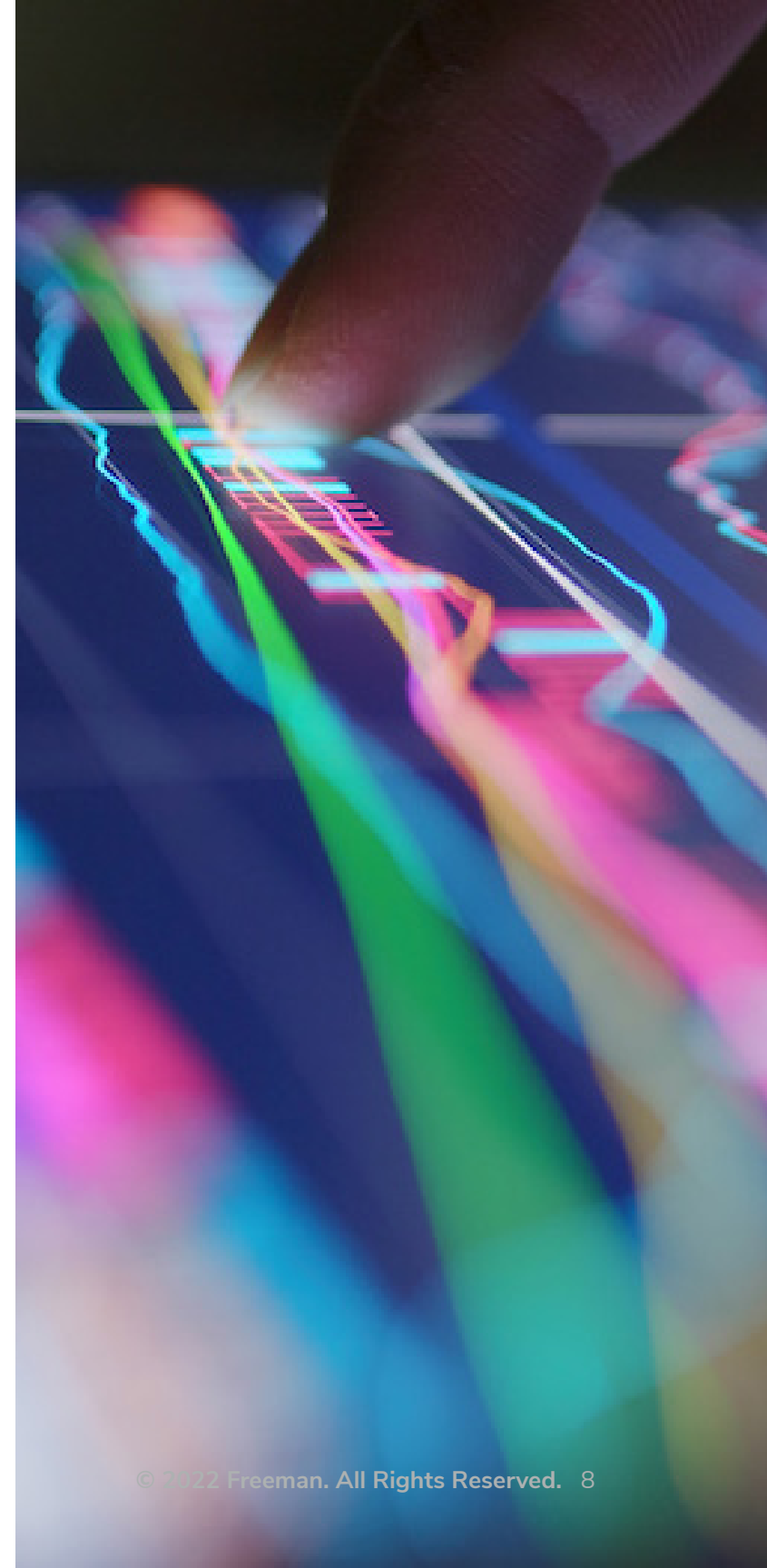
But metrics aren't the only things that capture valuable information. Benchmarks can also be useful for comparing your events against industry norms and the competition — and even against your own programs.

Debrief

Use the KPIs identified during your planning session to thoroughly analyze the results. Look for the patterns that emerge to tell your story. What do they tell you about your exhibit strategy? What worked well? What could be improved?

Implement

Mine the data from both your successes and areas for improvement to help fine-tune your strategy. Even better, you don't have to wait for the next event to test your findings; start implementing new strategies immediately. Making these modifications will be a process that continuously circles back to your business and marketing goals as well as future planning efforts.





Remember:

Each metric isn't independent. Instead, it must ladder up to your overall marketing strategy, which is driven by your organization's goals.

As an exhibitor, you must be mindful of both an individual show's goal as well as your goals across your exhibiting schedule.



Engage attendees all year long

You came, you exhibited, you conquered. But don't think your work is over just because the show is.

The most successful exhibitors continue to engage with attendees year-round. Use these two strategies to maximize the valuable connections you've made:

1. Post-show debrief. Secure the feedback of your sales teams, colleagues who attended the event, and your exhibit house and audio visual partners. This is also the time to review your KPIs and measurement strategies to determine your ROI.

After each event, incorporate these lessons learned into your booth strategy moving forward. This continuous refinement will make each exhibit execution stronger, with greater benefits for your organization.

2. Continued engagement. Keep the conversation going year-round by maintaining an active social media presence: Post highlights, promote additional insights, and ask for event feedback. And offer ways to connect digitally through virtual outreach,

activations, newsletters, and online activations that maintain contact until you meet again.

Discovering which education sessions were most popular at a particular event can help you curate similar marketing content, like blogs and emails, that connect to your products and services.

Impactful engagement is what drives today's best experiential moments. It's also what helps develop brand recognition and draws audiences to your booth. Thoughtfully planning your exhibit strategy with experiential elements in advance is critical to helping you achieve your company's goals and objectives while also creating a memorable experience for attendees.

Start planning now to capture your audience's attention with your next exhibit booth. The following step-by-step engagement guide can help you navigate using experiential to create meaningful moments in your booth.

Your turn

Strategic planning worksheet

Defining goals and objectives



The overall goals of my company are:

My exhibit program objectives are:

My audiences include:

The KPIs my company cares about include:



Budgeting

What’s your overall exhibit budget?

Use this space to jot down all the trade shows, pop-ups, and potential sponsorships in your current exhibition schedule.

Can you identify high-value opportunities from the list? Can you identify low-value opportunities from the list?

Is there anything you should stop doing? Anything you should start doing?

How much could you save or spend if you did so?

The KPIs you need to measure for event success include: (make sure they ladder up to those identified above).

Attracting your audiences

Create a profile or persona for each of the audiences you identified on the previous page. Give each a name and a title to make them more real and personal, then list their wants, needs, challenges, and opportunities. Consider which generations and geographies that they fall within. What publications do they like to read? What are their preferred means of communication? Have fun with it!

Persona 1

Persona 2

Persona 3

Persona 4

With your audience personas in mind, identify which of these digital strategies will resonate most with each one. Add your own ideas as well!

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Email marketing
- ☐ Remarketing and digital advertising
- ☐ Websites
- ☐ Targeted SEO
- ☐ Custom apps
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Measuring Success

Refer back to the business and event KPIs identified earlier. With these in mind, create a short list of a few metrics you can track from event to event to create a holistic view of your portfolio performance.



Want more?

Request a consultation to learn how experiential strategies can drive value for your exhibit and audiences.

Contact us

Freeman is a global leader in events. Whether virtual, in-person, or hybrid, we are on a mission to redefine live for a new era. With a data-driven approach and the industry's largest network of experts, our insights shape exhibitions, exhibits, and events that drive audiences to action. Our integrated full-service solutions leverage a 100-year legacy in event management as well as new technologies to deliver moments that matter.

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