

# Is your trade show strategy gellin'?

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Your sales and marketing staff probably think working trade shows are a long, exhausting ordeal. How would they feel about working a booth for 6 months? The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, considered to be the first trade show promoting products of the Industrial Revolution, ran from May to October, occupied 991,857 square feet of exhibit space showing over 100,000 products and services. Now that's a lot of gellin'.

6,039,205 people attended. Wow! Now that's a lot of prospects.

But that was 1851. What did they know about trade shows? Vendors thought they could just show up and people would buy stuff. But we're way more sophisticated than that 106 years later, right? Fact is, many companies today think they can put up a snazzy booth and offer a cool giveaway gizmo and the leads will just pour in.

Not true. As with any other marketing program, a successful trade show depends on a plan derived from strategic thinking about objectives, and developing the most effective ways to engage prospects. It's not just about "the booth". It's about communicating with prospects before, during and after the show. Consider the following tactics to touch potential customers beyond a handshake in your booth.

A successful **pre-show direct mail campaign** begins with a good list. Pre-registration lists exclude on-site registrants. Past attendee lists assume the same folks are coming back. Depending on the integrity of your internal database, consider customizing your own list based on prospects that your sales staff is already working who are likely to attend. This takes more work and lead time, but it ensures that you're inviting people to your booth that already know you and have an interest in your products.

Your pre-show mailer should give them a reason to show up in your booth. A chance to win something is always a hook, but the piece should do a good job of highlighting any new products you are rolling out and/or sell the benefits of core products you'll have on display as well.

**Booth graphics** should tie into the pre-show mailer so your targeted prospects recognize the connection. Remember that your list was highly refined and that the majority of show attendees

haven't been invited in before walking by your booth. Treat signage like a billboard that you drive by on your daily commute; communicate key messages in 3-5 seconds.

If you're rolling out a new product, remember another key audience: **trade editors**. Call them before the show (and early) to schedule an appointment for them to come in and get an up-close-and-personal walk through of product benefits with your technical experts. Coach presenters on focusing on benefits, not features. Always ask: what will be interesting to the magazine's readers, a.k.a. your prospects?

Close the loop. Track booth visitors who were on your pre-show list. Follow up with those who didn't stop by with a **post-show mailer**. Circle back to the information about new product intros or special offers promoted in your pre-show mailer. Better yet, have your sales staff (who hopefully helped develop your contact list in the first place) follow-up.

Speaking of follow-up, a recent Center for Exhibition Industry Research report found that more than 80 percent of leads gathered at trade shows are never contacted. A critical part of trade show success is a structured plan for getting back to prospects with brochures, organizing leads by territory, doing everything you can to make it as easy as possible for salespeople to make that call.

If you'd like help gellin' your next trade show campaign, contact Adfinity Marketing Group, [www.adfinitymarketing.com](http://www.adfinitymarketing.com) or call 319-363-3338. We'll help you stand out in the crowd.

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