

Comprehensive Follow Up Planning is Essential for Tradeshow Success

You need to do more than pay lip service to the idea of post-show follow up. More than a few companies make a token attempt at follow up, with a plan that 'someone' will follow up with the best leads collected at the show 'shortly' after the show.

It's sad but true: when everybody thinks somebody's going to do something, nobody does it! Token, cursory follow up plans are no help to the serious exhibitor. To be effective, you need a comprehensive follow up plan.

The First Step

Prioritizing leads is essential. Most companies opt for a three-tiered approach: hot prospects, prospects worth cultivating, and non-starters: leads that aren't likely to lead to a sale. Remember: every lead should be followed up with. However, not all leads require the same follow up approach.

Use your pre-show planning period to create a follow up plan. Determine the criteria that will qualify someone as a hot lead, a worthwhile prospect or a no-go. Make sure that everyone on the team understands these criteria.

The Rough Draft

Next, discuss with your team exactly how leads will be handled. New staff members may not know the procedure you want followed, while veteran staffers might be operating under false assumptions. Take the time to spell out your expectations.

Obviously, hot leads need to be followed up as soon as possible after the show. In fact, savvy exhibitors often book appointments to see their most promising prospects at or immediately after the show to capitalize on the new relationship.

The other leads you gather may not be as promising as the hot prospects, but they still deserve time and attention. You never know where your surprise sale will come from -- big accounts sometimes lurk in unexpected corners.

Send a thank you card to everyone who visits your booth within a week of the show. Have a plan in place how you'll follow up with the potential leads, and how you'll keep in touch with those folks who aren't likely customers yet still indicated interest in your organization.

Danger Zone!

It is at this point where most companies stop their follow-up planning. They realize they have to do something after the show, and they even have a rough idea of what that something is.

That's not enough. You can't form a good plan without including all of the essential elements. Here's what those elements are:



The Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan includes more than a list of what needs to be done. It's imperative that your team knows who is responsible for implementing the follow up plan, as well as when the plan needs to be implemented.

Without all of these elements, your plan will not work. It is no good to assume that volunteers will magically appear to do the work, nor that your booth staffers will make show follow up their number one priority upon returning to the office. Instead, take a pro-active approach and formulate a plan that involves all of the parties affected by the plan.

To be truly effective, a follow up plan must answer all of these questions:

What is going to be done?

Who is going to do it?

When is it going to be done?

Let's look at each of these questions in turn.

What is going to be done?

Use the information you gathered during the rough draft phase to create a final plan. Spell out exactly how hot leads, likely prospects, and other leads will be handled. Will there be follow up e-mails, calls, or mailings? Specify your message and your delivery method.

Who is going to do it?

It's time to name names. Designate which team members will be responsible for which group of leads. Try to be equitable -- there's no surer way to breed resentment than to give all the plum assignments to one rep and all the grunt work to another -- while still utilizing your team's strengths. Make sure not only that each individual knows what they're responsible for, but that they know they'll be held accountable for following up on their designated leads.

When is it going to be done?

Create a timeline dictating when initial contacts, follow up calls and sales meetings should be made. Obviously, you want to have some degree of flexibility here, but not so much that follow-up can be postponed indefinitely. Time is of the essence! Leads get cold very quickly, so you want your team to move quickly. Again, this is the time to introduce accountability into the follow up procedure. Your team needs to know not only what they're expected to do, but when they're expected to do it.



At the end of the day

Any plan is only as good as its implementation. By investing all affected parties in the creation of the plan, keeping all team members informed and engaged with the plan, introducing accountability and monitoring implementation, you'll have a follow up process that will guarantee results!

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