

Booth Staff Training Essentials

Never underestimate the importance of your trade show booth staff. They are your front line ambassadors and the critical links to your overall trade show success. It makes sense that if you want to have a positive experience at your trade show display, you need to pay attention to all the elements of trade show exhibiting. By putting a premium on grooming and training your trade show booth staff, you can rest easy they will be performing at their best.

The first step in your company's trade show venture, then, is to recognize the importance of the trade show booth personnel. The second step is to invest in the training of your booth people.

To launch this process, make sure you get executive "buy in". If top management respects and values their trade show team, then face- to- face training skills become effective. Remember the key value of exhibiting at the trade show is to engage real people about real products/services in real time. A typical company representative can often hold meaningful conversations with about 3 or 4 people in a ½ hour at a trade show as opposed to spending an entire day in the conventional field selling process.

Not only are the number of prospect contacts at trade show increased, but the entire sales cycle can also be sped up as well. Trade show display training helps fine tune this process, making it a positive experience for prospects and your staff.

What is the logical end benefit? A boost in sales productivity is more likely to follow. On the other hand, untrained booth staff can trigger negative reactions and turn prospects away.

According to Matt Hill, a trade show trainer and president of The Hill Group, in San Jose, California, "The finishing touches of booth staff training usually take place at a pre -show meeting either the night before the trade show begins or early in the morning of the first day of the show. The training covers all those fundamentals that a lot of people don't understand or don't think to do."

He says that research shows you must engage the person within 15 to 20 seconds of their presence at your trade show booth or lose them. What attracts people to the trade show booth is a friendly staff in addition to alluring exhibit elements such as sound, motion, and color. Your staff generates excitement by being enthusiastic and helpful. If one staff person cannot respond to a visitor's inquiry, that staff member is trained to escort the visitor over to another staff person who has the answers and can be of help," he adds.

Hill has conducted trade show training for many companies for shows around the

world and close by to home at the Henry J Kaiser Convention Center in Oakland, to Moscone

Center in San Francisco to Convention Centers in Santa Clara and San Jose. He has trained Silicon Valley companies headquartered in Cupertino, Milpitas, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, San Jose and beyond to Sacramento and throughout Northern California.

With regard to the nuances of booth staff training, Hill says, "A lot of technical people never thought their jobs involved anything but answering questions or talking to each other. We get them to look at the strategy of the trade show. The basic strategy of going to a trade show is to get face time with people who might become customers. It's really quite that clean and simple."

Some booth staff behaviors to avoid include: talking to other booth members when they should be engaging prospects, talking rather than listening to booth visitors and making social mistakes that turn customers away such as chewing gum, avoiding eye contact, sitting rather than standing, etc.

Even when training is done properly, keeping the momentum going over 3 days of a trade show is a challenge, so here are some things for the trade show exhibit manager to consider to keep their trade show display staff motivated:

Give them the confidence to successfully understand and manage visitors by using sound training techniques

Give the staff constant feedback during the show. Give them a specific goal and tell them exactly where they are in reaching that goal.

Listen to their feedback - make them feel like an integral part of the show and that they are truly making a difference. Ask them what they like about the booth and what they would change.

Give the trade show display staff a say in what is going on

Give them incentives for a job well done

And provide lots of water to keep them hydrated

A clever incentive offered by Matt Hill is a \$2 dollar bill given out when he sees someone doing something right. It is a real morale booster and even the CEO of a company who gets a \$2 dollar bill gets a big kick from it. Hill specially orders the bills from the bank and hands them out to booth staff people who are asking the right questions of visitors or who do their work with style, enthusiasm and, of course, good boothmanship.

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