Of the thousands of trade shows taking place each year, each represents an opportunity for you to present your company, brand and messages to prospects, customers, members of the press, financial community, and strategic partners.

But with hundreds of brands and messages vying for attendees’ attention, exhibitors are looking for proven strategies and new techniques to capture attendees’ attention, connect their messages with key interests, and convert attendees to prospects, and prospects to customers.

To position your company for success and help to get the most out of your trade shows, this Planning Checklist gives you the latest trends, best practices, tips and techniques in trade show marketing.

**Set Your Objectives:**

Go into your trade show planning process knowing what you want to accomplish and how you will measure its success. Make sure your objectives are SMART…

- **S** - Specific
- **M** - Measurable
- **A** - Actionable
- **R** - Realistic
- **T** - Time-Based

**What are your top objectives for Tier 1 trade shows?**

- Introducing/talking about a product/service in a live setting: 91.4%
- Capturing leads to generate sales: 58.9%
- Using shows as live extensions of my company’s marketing mix: 81.5%
- Generating p.r. and media hits: 78.2%
- Generating high traffic and quality conversations with attendees: 58.1%

(Source: Event Marketer Magazine survey of brand marketers)

**Involve the Decision-Makers**

Getting Executive/Senior Management involved is crucial. Involve all decision-makers early on in the input and decision-making process, but make it easy and fast for them.
Here are 7 questions to ask:

1) What are you trying to get out of this trade show? What would success look like to you?
2) Who are you targeting based on these objectives?
3) What do you think our target audience is currently looking for? What are their top-of-mind concerns?
4) How does our product or service fulfill their needs/solve their problems?
5) What is the personality of our brand/our brand promise?
6) What is our competition doing and saying?
7) What will help you determine if this program is a success?

Know & Respect Your Target Audience

Now that you know what you want to get out of the trade show, it’s time to focus on your target audience. Ask yourself: “What does our target audience need to get out of the experience? What do we have to offer that will solve their problems, meet their needs, or get them excited about working with us?” Don’t forget: the overall creative tone, style and content should be right for the industry and your target audience, but it shouldn’t overshadow your message.
Maximize Your Visibility

Consider a vehicle like a live presentation, experiential demonstration, booth activity, briefing zone or booth tour to effectively communicate your message to as many people as possible. One-to-many strategies can be used in any size exhibit and within any budget range, and serve as a magnet to attract and focus large audiences—providing opportunities to retain key customers, reinforce your company’s branding and positioning, introduce new products and services, and generate qualified sales leads.

Use an Integrated Marketing Strategy

Don’t just think of the experience on-site—think of the pre- and post-event communications, and how you can extend the experience to those. Plus, the on-site experience goes beyond the booth; for example, consider keynotes, breakout sessions, hospitality events and more. Here is just a sampling of activities to integrate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Show:</th>
<th>At-Show:</th>
<th>Post-Show:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Social Media</td>
<td>• Sponsorships</td>
<td>• Event-specific microsite</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Advertising</td>
<td>• Exhibit</td>
<td>• Social media</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Event-specific microsite</td>
<td>• Booth activities</td>
<td>• Targeted direct mails and emails</td>
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<td>• Web site banners</td>
<td>• Business theater</td>
<td>• Follow up sales calls to A/B leads</td>
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<td>• Direct mail</td>
<td>• Social media</td>
<td>• Post-event surveys</td>
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<td>• Email campaigns</td>
<td>• Participation/signage in partner exhibits</td>
<td>• White papers</td>
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<td>• New product announcements</td>
<td>• Speaking opportunities</td>
<td>• Promotional incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• White papers</td>
<td>• Lead capture</td>
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<td>• Promotional incentives</td>
<td>• Giveaways / incentives</td>
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<td>• Offer to meet a rep on-site</td>
<td>• Product launch</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pre-event survey (ask what they want to see on-site)</td>
<td>• Webcast from the booth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Customer meetings/hospitality</td>
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Train Your Staff

The Pre-Show Meeting is a great way to ensure your team is on board with the mission, objectives, and the program’s strategies and tactics. But because the results of thousands of studies on exhibit effectiveness show the performance of the booth staff affects booth efficiency more than any other single factor, it’s also the perfect time to polish your booth staffers’ skills. Whether they’re newbies or seasoned veterans, it’s worth reviewing do’s and don’ts with a training program.

And the latest Pre-Show Meeting trends also include:
• Integration of pre-show emails and a meeting microsite to build anticipation and excitement
• Adding techniques like Audience Response Systems (ARS) to increase attendee interaction throughout the meeting, and test knowledge learned and retained
• Sharing the results from the show and continuing the excitement with post trade show emails and updates to the meeting microsite

Measure Results

Don’t get so carried away with creating an exciting or emotional experience that you lose sight of your end result and your overall objectives. Remember to think about how you’re going to measure the success of the experience, so you can communicate to your stakeholders and your management—in a tangible way—the value of your program. Make sure to reflect your initial goals and objectives, so you secure continued/increased funding for future programs as well as provide a tool for continuous improvement.

Amortize the Event

You’ll probably spend hundreds (if not thousands!) of man-hours preparing for your trade shows. But once it is over, how do you make your event efforts live on? With a little pre-planning, activities like keynotes, special events, demos, presentations, etc. can be documented, repackaged and help continue your messaging long after the trade show is over. Leverage your program by creating additional assets—like viral videos, customer testimonials, product demos, etc.—for microsites, other events, keynotes, press conferences, meetings, stand-alone CD’s, and sales/marketing videos. Plus, you can deliver your messaging to those who couldn’t be at the trade show!