

Capturing Quality Leads at Tradeshows and Customer Events

Trade shows and consumer expositions provide the opportunity to meet and speak with hundreds of potential customers. Some are qualified prospects that could become sales in the near future. Others will require some time to capitalize on their value and many others will be uninterested in your offerings. Instead of making long sales presentations to a small number of potential customers, you should evaluate and qualify as many people as possible for detailed follow-up later on. There are many effective ways to acquire a name, address, phone number and email address. You can hold a drawing, have a contest or take a survey. You can also have attendees sign a guest book or be put on a list to receive your newsletter. Another option is to rent an electronic lead-capturing machine from show services. This is an easy and sophisticated way to obtain attendee information. Your list of prospects will become a valuable database and marketing tool for the future. The wise sales manager will establish written quotas for the sales team and offer incentives and a reward system to motivate the staff toward collecting a higher number of qualified leads.

At a tradeshow most attendees will have business cards to drop into a bowl. Writing notes on the back of the business card works fine in the USA, but remember that it will be viewed as an insult in Europe or Asia. Other options are to design a lead slip or survey card for gathering contact information. This is especially important for exhibitors selling at a consumer show where attendees are not likely to have a business card handy. A lead slip is better than a business card because you can include a few questions that help you qualify the lead and determine what product or service is desired, when the prospect plans to buy, budget considerations and how and when to follow up with them. At the bottom of your lead slip leave a place for the staffer's initials and develop a code to identify what leads came from which show. This will help when tracking the lead's value and will help identify the most productive shows. If you use the lead slip approach instead of taking business cards, then place the lead slip on a clipboard and require staff to approach prospects to gather the information. Leaving the slips on the table expecting anyone to pick them up and fill them out will leave you disappointed.

After you acquire a lead go one step further than your competitor probably will and rank the lead. A simple ranking system will help evaluate and prioritize the leads. Your ranking system can be as simple as ABC. On the back of the lead slip, survey sheet or business card, mark a letter "A" for any prospect that has an immediate need. "B" leads will be those that will probably buy within six to twelve months warranting regular follow-up, while a C lead is not a good lead and probably just wanted your promotional products.

Lead follow-up traditionally happens in the days following the close of a show, although



there are some exhibitors who actually fax or email leads back to the office each day for immediate follow up. If you are not one of those companies, then you may not be looking at those leads for several days, maybe even a week. You will never remember the conversation you had with the prospect by the time you get around to making the contact. The leads may also be distributed to other staff members, office help or sales representatives in other departments for follow-up. If you are gathering business cards or your lead slip doesn't offer all the answers to your important questions, just jot down a note on the back about the conversation you had. What question did the customer want answered? What product or service are they interested in?

What information do you need to get back to them with? Go one step further and add a personal comment that will help to jog the person's memory about what was discussed. The note might say they were from your home-town, you talked about the local sports team or she just had a baby. This reference, along with the sales dialog, will make the call more personal even when you are not doing the follow-up yourself.

Why not skip the follow-up call completely? When you can't close the sale on the spot you can increase your chances for a post-show sale by scheduling an appointment for a future sales call, booking an in-home demonstration, an office presentation, or consultation right there on the spot. Be ready to respond quickly by having your appointment book and calendar handy. Don't forget that it's all about the numbers. The more qualified leads you capture the more chances you have to make a sale. Prepare for every event well in advance. Order show services and schedule shipping early. Evaluate display properties for damage. Attention to details will eliminate headaches and save you time and money.