

“You never have a better chance of getting your message across than at an exhibition ...”

Arnold Vink, Head of Marketing, Xerox International Systems

.... Revealed

The 17 Key Success Principles To Maximise Your Exhibition's Return-On-Investment

by David Charnley, Managing Director, LoveExpo.



Engaging exhibition stands + proven strategies
to build more business from your exhibitions

INTRODUCTION

Visitors to exhibitions are 'hot' prospects

Exhibitions are a form of 'Live Marketing' and offer you the opportunity to market your business, in a 'live' environment, to people who can buy, recommend or advocate your products/services right now or in the future.

Think about your hottest prospects. What is their most valuable commodity?

Their time!

Given the value of your prospects time, what does it say about someone who invests a day to visit an exhibition?

It says they're motivated. It says they have a reason to be there. It says they're a serious buyer in active buying mode.

This is the power of exhibitions: no other medium concentrates your efforts on the most active buyers in your markets at any given time.



Arnold Vink, Head of Marketing, Xerox International Systems is quoted as saying...

“You never have a better chance of getting your message across than at an exhibition. All those months of running ads and sending mailings and, suddenly, there in front of you is the customer and at last marketing has a human dimension.”

Exhibitions or 'Live Marketing' events are often described as the 'Antidote' to the Internet as they are all about people, being face to face in a live environment providing dynamic and exciting business development opportunities!

Event attendees choose to be there, making this media the truest representation of 'permission' marketing available.



They offer the chance for multi-sensory marketing; the only business environment where your customers can see, touch, hear, smell and even taste your products!

This great quote from Emperor Confucius says exactly why exhibiting can be so effective.

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

Through exhibitions you can give people the opportunity to experience and interact with your brand, rather than just being told about it or shown it.

If exhibitions are potentially so effective at gaining new contacts and customers why do some companies get it so wrong and not reap all the benefits?

The basic answer to this problem is that they are NOT adhering to the following 17 Success Principles.

After 25 years in the exhibition industry I have witnessed what works and what doesn't and I guarantee that, by following the crucially important Success Principles which are contained in this guide, it will have a dramatic effect on the success and ROI of any exhibition your company attends.

David Charnley, Managing Director, LoveExpo.



Success Principle #1: Do your homework



Exhibiting, like any marketing activity, needs to be targeted, measured and executed completely to maximise results. You need to identify the right show which delivers the right audience and make sure you have the right proposition to offer.

Ask the show organisers to provide you with a breakdown of the type of people who are likely to attend the event, if it is an existing event they should have a list of past visitors and demographics.

The total geographical area served by the exhibition should match your marketing needs.

Also checkout who else is going to be exhibiting especially if they are your competitors - most organisers post an up-to-date list of exhibitors on their show websites which you can easily access.

If you are planning to exhibit at a show for the first time then it might seem common sense but it may be a good idea to go along as a visitor first to check out who's who and maybe get the chance to chat to some of the exhibitors to find out their thoughts on the show and the types of people that visit.

As with all marketing, the more you know about your customers purchasing habits the better. Which shows do they go to, which ones do directors and senior managers attend and which ones are visited by middle managers? Who is going to be most excited about what you have to say and why is it relevant to them.

Success Principle #2: Set yourself some specific objectives

The sad truth is that 71% of exhibiting companies do not set objectives or plan strategies for their participation. Even worse, only half of these companies with objectives ever follow through with them on their stand. This is despite those companies that establish and measure objectives consistently achieving greater success.

Objectives provide direction for every aspect of your company's exhibition participation: your marketing strategies, branding plans, budgets, exhibit architecture, graphics, products, literature, IT support, and the necessary staff.

Objectives also stimulate sales performance on the stand, particularly if they are measured in terms of their quantity and quality of contacts by the staff. This means you should turn your company objectives into personal goals for each member of your staff to achieve at the exhibition.

Research consistently proves that companies that exhibit successfully make sales related objectives their priority.

To set objectives, you must define what your company wants to sell, promote, market, brand, or communicate at the exhibition - and to whom.

Bizarrely, exhibitions are often treated and managed very differently to other projects or marketing activity. Exhibitions should be treated in exactly the same way as all your other communications and activity and should demonstrate a measurable ROI.

71% of exhibiting companies do not set objectives or plan strategies for their participation

There are a multitude of show objectives which include:

- 1) Increase sales through new orders or qualified trade show leads
- 2) Introduce new products or services
- 3) Enhance your relationships with current customers
- 4) Conduct market research
- 5) Obtain contact names for the company's e-mail list
- 6) Open new markets or territories
- 7) Gain media exposure
- 8) Check out the competition
- 9) Enhance the company image or brand
- 10) Conduct sales meetings in conjunction with the exhibit
- 11) Provide education to the visitors
- 12) Recruit new employees.

Before finalising your show objectives however, you need to consider:

- 1) What profit/turnover is required by your current business plan?
- 2) What is your average customer value?
- 3) How many new customers do you need to fulfill your current business plan objectives?
- 4) How many customers can you service effectively?
- 5) What is your average success rate following meetings with potential new customers?
- 6) How many sales leads can your sales team effectively deal with?

It is important that your exhibition objectives take the answers to these questions in to consideration.

Exhibitions are incredibly versatile, but your objective needs to focus on your most important goal(s). For example,

- Do you want to demonstrate your product to 250 top buyers?
- Make 40 new appointments?
- Do you want to generate 200 sales leads?
- Launch your new product to customers, prospects and the media?
- How about meeting at least 25 qualified new prospects?
- Finding three new dealers?
- Handing out 5,000 product samples?

Make sure you have the resources to achieve your objectives. From a resourcing perspective, make sure when setting objectives based on numbers of leads generated, that your overall sales activity is based on the number of persons working in the stand, as well as their ability to interact with the visitors.

For example: If it takes about ten minutes to discuss, demonstrate and qualify a visitor/prospect in your stand, then each staff member could possibly make six leads per hour. However, this doesn't allow time for breaks, lunch, etc.

Also, the number of visitors in the aisle varies from hour to hour, so there will be times when your stand activity is very slow. So, for this example, perhaps four leads per hour per staff member is a better target. By multiplying the number of hours a person works in the exhibit by this four leads per hour, you have an individual's total lead-making opportunity. Add up the totals for everyone working the stand and you have the maximum lead activity you can expect for the show.

At certain exhibitions, your company may be gathering prospects' names and addresses for post-show follow-up or to add to your e-mail database. In this case, obtaining great quantities of leads per hour is possible.

Establishing specific, measurable goals is probably the single most important thing you can do before every exhibition. The tighter your goals the better the chance of achieving them.

Success Principle #3: Market the exhibition before you go

Invite existing customers to your stand

The simplest and most obvious tactic of all is amazingly the least practiced - tell the world what you're up to!

Research has shown that 83% of the most successful companies at a range of exhibitions (in terms of business generated and leads collected) were the ones that took the trouble to mail their prospects and customers before the show.

If you are serious about attracting a particular company or individual to your stand, you need to make contact with them prior to the show most likely by sending them something that presents the value you attach to their visit. I would strongly advise you to identify the top 50, 100 or 150 prospects that you would like to do business with and create an individualised, and possibly themed promotion, which will communicate to them, "I value your attention to this item, and I would value your attendance on our stand even more".

Spending an extra £100 on exotic floral displays will not guarantee increased revenues, whereas time spent inviting the right visitors to your stand could. The biggest mistake exhibitors make is to rely completely on the organisers. You can do your bit and attract or invite potential clients. Some exhibitors are reluctant to invite their key prospects in case they meet their competitors at the show. Well, the facts are that in all likelihood your key prospects will visit the event anyway. I suggest it is far better for them to attend with an invitation from you than from a competitor.

Invite prospects and companies you don't know

Use bought in databases or the event's list of pre-registrants (organisers often make theirs available).

Typically you can segment the visitor data provided by the show organisers in a number of ways to suit your target profiles and the data is normally available for rent for between £250-350 per 1,000 names. Usually you send your html or direct mail to a third party mailing house so that you don't get to see and keep the data yourself.

It's common sense, but tell visitors what you'll be doing at the show and why they should take the time to visit you. Stress the benefits. Add some intrigue. Have a bit of fun. But never skip this vital step.

It's a known fact that more than half of all exhibition visitors want to see "what's new" in products and services. "New" is one of the two most effective words in communications today, which is why "new" and exhibitions are synonymous.

Therefore, make sure that whatever pre-show marketing you decide to carry out it should always include your new products, new services, new personnel, and even new facilities.

Direct mail is a highly effective motivator, and you should try to send at least three mailings with the first piece sent out around 4-6 weeks prior to the show date. Research proves that each mailing increases the response rate on your stand: one mailing gets 25 percent visitor response, two mailings generate 50 percent and three mailings create a 75 percent increase. Furthermore, the buyers' perception of your company's presence at an exhibition increases positively with

each mailing you send. If nothing else, have some entry tickets in your reception area and give them to all your sales people to distribute to their contacts. Companies such as <http://www.cfhdocmail.com> are perfect for these mailings as you can upload your database onto their system along with your flyer design and they will print and mail them out for you saving you lots of time you probably haven't got!

Another very simple and cost effective way of letting people know you are exhibiting is by adjusting your email settings to include a signature panel informing your clients the show you are exhibiting at and where they can find you at the event. Many shows have web sites to promote the

event and register visitors. If you've got a website, it's a great place to promote your presence at the show. Find out from the organisers if the show site can provide a link to yours.



Use your own website to promote your presence at the show by placing an advert on your home page during the run up to the event and even create a page dedicated to the show telling clients what they can expect to see on your stand and create a link to this page from your new email signature panel and from the Exhibition's website links. Use all of your social media tools such as company Facebook pages, LinkedIn and Twitter to inform others about the exhibition any why they should take time out to visit your stand.

Never doubt that your pre-show activity is worth the effort, since 75 percent of all visitors arrive at an exhibition with a predetermined agenda as to whom they plan to see and very often what they plan to evaluate and buy.

You want your company to be one of them and pre-show promotions are the best way to do that. Also, for the larger mega-shows where visitors must be highly efficient with their time, they are greatly influenced by what they see/ hear prior to the show.

Some companies mistakenly think that the exhibition organiser is solely responsible for getting a quality audience to the event and it is important to note that you have a major responsibility to make sure that any show visitors take time to visit your particular stand. Smart exhibitors know that they share the responsibility and promotions are the key. The bottom line is that everything you do in advance pays real dividends at the show.



The organisers will work hard to attract visitors to their events.....



....but it is your job to get these visitors to take time to visit your stand.

Success Principle #4: Engage in PR before you go

Exhibitions are an opportunity too for clients to meet current and potential customers, journalists and analysts together in one place. It is also easy to be one of the many exhibitors overlooked. This can be because of announcements made by major players or simply because you haven't planned your PR strategy around the event very well.

I believe that the most important time for PR surrounding an exhibition is in the activity before hand rather than what actually takes place at the event. Below are five points which will help you get the most out of your investment in PR around exhibitions:

Exhibitors need to ensure that they appear in the news in the run up to an event. Try and create a buzz about what you will be announcing at the exhibition or demonstrating. PR needs to drive traffic to the booth.

Ask the show organiser to tell you which media are doing show previews (many summarise this in the Exhibitor Manual). Get the editors' names and addresses and send them some engaging content based around what you will be promoting on your stand. Editors love facts and statistics so use them wherever you can and they also love gossip and controversy and something that's totally new or different.



Meet the media

Too many companies place too much focus on securing interviews at an exhibition and build their PR strategy around this. All too often I have heard a client say we want six interviews at the exhibition and if achieved think that this is then a tick next to PR on their to do list surrounding the event. Interviews at the exhibition are always hard work as journalists often only stay for 20 – 30 minutes before they head off to their next interview. Also consider that the journalist may interview between 10 and 15 companies over the course of the day which means you have a lot of competition for inclusion in their write up.

Why not conduct a media tour ahead of the exhibition instead? Two or three weeks ahead of the exhibition get your PR agency to set up interviews with all of the journalists that you would have liked to speak to at the exhibition. They will have more time to speak to you and you will be under less pressure to get to your point in a short time scale. This tactic also gives you the opportunity to offer them the chance to see a demo or speak further at the exhibition.

Timings of news announcements

What are you announcing? Are you the biggest player in your market? Will you be heard amongst all of the noise at the exhibition? These are all questions you should ask yourself and discuss with your PR agency to decide when and where you should announce your news. Maybe it is worth distributing your news just ahead of the exhibition rather than at it. With so many companies holding back their news for the big event you may have more space to make a bigger splash with your story before rather than at the same time as everyone else at the event.



Speaking opportunities at the exhibition

Are you speaking? This is a great tool to use at exhibitions but you need to get organised well in advance. Unless you are a big name, you may also need to find a customer to talk with you, so approach some with this in mind. Organisers putting together speaker schedules love case studies and this can be a great platform to show off what your company does and the problems it solves.

Are you in the show guide or newspaper

Increasingly exhibitions have their own daily which is handed out to people as they arrive. Make sure your PR team has contacted the organisers and knows who is producing this and the type of content they are using. Most daily newspapers have a few news pages and then a section which has been pre-written to fill space where you could put a bi-lined article or a case study forward for.

The same goes for show guides. These are handed out to everyone who attends and is an opportunity to drive people to your stand. Get your PR team to investigate whether you can include an opinion article or case study but be prepared for the fact that the organisers may ask you to "sponsor" this opportunity as most have cottoned onto the power of this tool.

Place case studies with your industries trade titles

Most good PR campaigns will have activity based around drafting case studies and we all know how powerful a tool this can be. That said, it can also be a time consuming one and needs to be carefully planned.

If you are attending an exhibition, try to plan for the completion of all interesting case studies up to three months ahead of the event. This allows your PR agency to try and secure placements for the case study in the pre-show or show editions of trade titles. The end result is to drive people to the booth and create an excitement about your story.

Success Principle #5: Offer special treatment for your VIP's

Most show organisers run a VIP campaign which enables you to make your most important customers and prospects feel extra special and thus more receptive to attending. Tangible benefits of being a VIP can include better car parking facilities, a seat on the front row of the conference or seminar theatres, avoiding the queues with fast track entry, enhanced corporate hospitality and much more.

You can take this one step further and offer these VIP's something as simple as an 'invitation only' drinks reception on your stand or creating a stakeholder event, such as a forum, to take place ahead of or during the exhibition to discuss trends or industry news. Not only would this underline how much you value these key leads and their opinions, but also generate brand excitement and increase brand touch points.



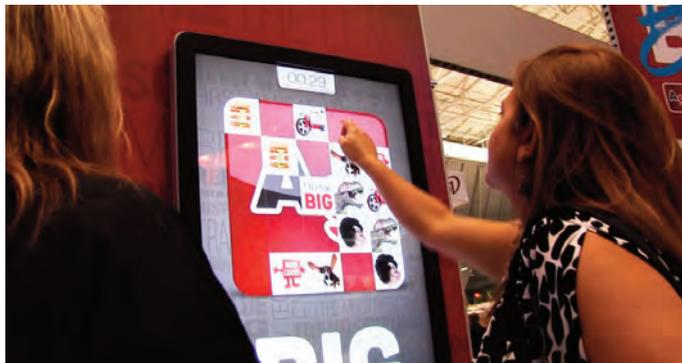
Success Principle #6: Offer incentives to visit your stand

Whatever promotional vehicles you use, make sure that you give visitors a reason to come and visit you. With a hall overflowing with fascinating products/services, combined with time constraints, people need an incentive to come and visit your booth.

Giveaways or specialty items creatively used in conjunction with direct mail are also quite effective. Choose a unique item, if possible, one that is memorable and environmentally friendly. It needs to be sufficiently intriguing to entice them onto your stand and possibly something with a redeemable element.



Consider this approach - An insulation company with an excellent customer service reputation once sent out a left footed slipper to potential local authority customers, with the message "If you want to feel warm and cosy about your insulation supplier visit stand X and claim the right." This may seem cheesy but it turned out to be very effective and provided the high impact brand awareness desired.



Promoting & running a simple competition on the stand with the chance of winning a prize which prospects can participate in (especially one which both entertains and reinforces your key marketing messages) is another great way of encouraging prospects to visit your stand before they even get to the event.

Success Principle #7: Make use of sponsorship opportunities

Sponsorship can be an extremely cost effective way to make a greater impact and gain more exposure at your next exhibition. There is usually a list of off-the-shelf packages available at most budget levels. But some of the best sponsorships are often bespoke programmes designed by the organiser and exhibitor sitting down together and brainstorming. Talk to the organiser. Tell them your goals and your budget. The only limit is your imagination. Make sure your target audience knows that you are a sponsor in the exhibition, as it underscores your commitment to their industry.



Success Principle #8: Make sure your stand quickly conveys what you do and how this might benefit the visitor

I attend several shows every month, I constantly pass stands that have a great logo, masses of colour but it's extremely rare that the immediate appearance of a stand tells me what the company does and more importantly how their products or services might be of benefit to me. I recognise that for some businesses this may be deliberately done to create an air of intrigue but the reality is that the majority of exhibitors are so consumed with the smaller details of their stand that they have simply overlooked the biggest messaging requirement of all.

My advice is therefore to make it very clear about what it is you do! Why should visitors, busy and stressed as they can be, stop as they walk around a show and feel suitably enticed into walking onto your stand? What benefit do you offer, how can you make their life easier, affect profitability and drive business forward? Do not make your potential customers have to work it out for themselves - be obvious, be direct and be bold.

Make sure your graphics/signage deliver your clear defined message simply and with impact and inform visitors exactly what the benefits your product(s) and services offer and provide a compelling reason for them to come onto your stand. Your graphics should not consist of lots of information about the company and its products/processes – far too many companies simply uplift information from their company brochure or websites which is for an altogether different type of marketing – there should never be an opportunity for a visitor to stand and read loads of waffle on the walls of your stand as this is hardly an example of LIVE marketing – keep them simple and in line with your brand and your key message(s). Remember that you are simply trying to stop visitors and spark their interest, the selling comes later.



This exhibitor seems happy to make the visitor try to work out for themselves exactly what products and services they offer as although they have very prominent branding they have absolutely no visible information as to why a visitor should be interested in stopping and engaging with their staff. The 2 colour posters look like an after thought and add no value to the look of the stand and the information printed on them is excessive and far too small.



I prefer stands which have minimal information printed on the walls around the stand (visitors are there to speak directly to your staff and not to read printed information on the walls of your stand) but these stands have taken it to an extreme and provide no information to the passing visitor as to what they do and how this might be of benefit to the visitor - the best information to present on your stand close to your brand would be your USP.





This stand has clear branding but also tells visitors exactly what volac specialises in. They have a minimal amount of printed information on the walls to explain their key areas of expertise and it is big enough to read from a distance.



As above, this stand also has good prominent branding and clearly tells visitors exactly what MIRADA specialises in.

Success Principle #9: Aim your sales messages accurately

Getting the results you need means generating the right kind of leads. Even if you have a product or service that could be bought by anyone, you'll still have key markets and demographics.

Getting high quality leads is a bit like fishing! You need to send out a carefully selected bait (sales message) for the fish you are hoping to catch because you don't want to catch every fish that swims near your hook!

So, getting the right quality of leads invariably means keeping certain people away from your stand, So it is essential to prequalify prospects to make sure that the visitors on your stand are the types of prospects you want to speak to or otherwise your time will be consumed with interacting with visitors who are not going to help you meet your show objectives. Make sure your staff have some prequalifying questions to ask visitors as well as a polite way of moving them on if they are not your target customer.

To do this you first need to understand a little bit about who the show visitors are. Then identify how you will engage them in a meaningful and relevant way.

From the answers to the questions below we can anticipate and influence visitors behaviour and therefore maximise the opportunity.

- 1) Who is the show targeted at, who ends up going?
- 2) Are they involved in procurement, specifying, recommending?
- 3) What is the decision making behind their purchase?
- 4) What is most important to them right now, what things do they like or dislike?
- 5) What are visitor's expectations about attending the show?

Success Principle #10: Select your staff carefully and make sure they are well trained

The number of staff manning the stand and the mix of disciplines should also be goal-driven. Do you need technical staff to explain things in detail or top managers to meet blue-chip decision-makers? Perhaps you need energetic extroverts for maximum smiling and sampling? Let your goals be your guide.

The people on your stand make the difference between a good event and a great event. A highly motivated, well informed team does more than any other factor to differentiate you from the other stands and make an impact on your market - now when was the last time an exhibition contractor admitted this fact!!! You may have noticed at a show, two stands separated by a metre of carpet, one very buzzy and the other very quiet, and the answer is normally always the people. Who is on the stand, what they do and how they behave will forge visitors first impressions of your brand and organisation.

Statistics suggest that you have approximately 12 seconds to influence your visitors' first impression so no matter how well designed and creative your stand may be, you need to make sure your staff can deliver in line with your objectives for being at the show. The people you put on your stand have to embody the best about you and your business ethos and the outstanding reasons for your prospects to talk to you after the show.

First impressions are influenced by:

- 1) The content of what you say, your choice and order of words.
- 2) Your tone of voice, enthusiasm, phrasing, intonation.
- 3) Body language, hand gestures, posture, what you're wearing and even what you smell like!

Time after time when I walk the show floor I am amazed by the lack of interest by exhibitors to engage with me as I pass their stand and worse still I see many of them eating and drinking on untidy stands, negative body language, staff huddled together chatting with their backs to the aisles, and people on mobiles or laptops.

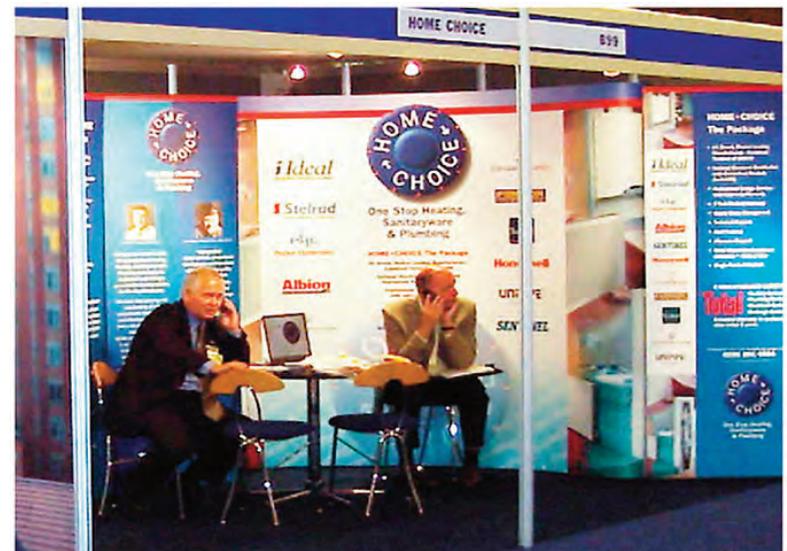
You Must Engage, Engage, Engage!!!

The fact is, you can have the most amazing eye catching stand, the most innovative product the world has ever seen but unless your staff have the confidence to actively engage with show visitors (and I don't mean speak with prospects that come onto your stand and ask a question) your results will never reach their true potential.

Engaging with visitors who walk the isles close to your stand is not optional it is essential and I can guarantee few of your competitors will be doing so.

In my opinion the two main reasons why exhibitors don't actively approach visitors are:

- 1) They have a lack of confidence due to a fear of rejection
- 2) A lack of staff motivation, more often than not because no targets or objectives have been set and staff treat the exhibition as a bit of a jolly and don't put in the effort.



Use of mobile phones, laptops and consuming food or drink whilst manning a stand should be avoided whenever possible - plan staff breaks so these activities can be carried out AWAY from your stand.

For me, pre-show training is the perfect opportunity to emphasise the importance of avoiding this behaviour and for giving your stand staff the tools and confidence they need to deliver your objectives. This should be as close to the event as possible – indeed it's good business practice to always hold a pre-show seminar in your exhibit or a nearby conference or hotel room before every exhibition. Everyone working the stand should attend this meeting.



How engaging do these staff look to you - they certainly don't inspire you that they can deliver a great product or service - they haven't even bothered to get their video presentation working!

Here's a possible meeting agenda to guide you:

- 1) Introduce everyone on the team, including translators
- 2) Review the stand, the exhibit structure & graphics, its layout
- 3) Discuss the marketing plan
- 4) Review objectives for each member of the team and inform them of all the rules they must keep whilst managing the stand
- 5) Discuss the products to be displayed and/or demonstrated
- 6) Outline plans for greeting prospects and current customers at the exhibition;
- 7) Present the staffing schedule
- 8) Discuss the lead qualifying and selling processes
- 9) Explain how to complete lead forms on prospects
- 10) Finally, discuss how to relate effectively to the prospects with buying power.

Outlining plans for greeting visitors is particularly important if you are going to encourage your staff to maintain high levels of engagement with prospects. Make sure they are provided with some well thought out open questions and not the usual “can I help you” or “how are you today?” type of question which is normally only going to get a response along the lines of “no thanks or I’m fine thanks”.

My favourite open question which works well regardless of the product or service that you provide and which immediately starts the pre-qualifying process is “**good morning/afternoon sir/madam, what are you hoping to find at the show today?**” Always ask with a smile and enthusiastic tone of voice which goes a long way to helping break the ice during the early interactions. Remember, people like positive people and they like to talk and listen to positive people and work with positive people. So try to keep all your conversation positive and upbeat and even if you feel you have nothing to offer your prospect right now, be positive in your parting words as you never know what could change in the future.

If possible organise a staff rota so that they have regular breaks as this will help keep them fresh faced and give them the opportunity to have refreshments and check and respond to urgent emails/call backs **AWAY** from the stand.

Sometimes, it can become all too easy to get wrapped up in the planning of an event without thinking about the execution. But, with the importance of the quality of leads generated from exhibitions far outweighing quantity, it is as important to invest time in fully preparing your exhibition staff, as it is to invest finances in creating the perfect stand.

Put simply, a lack of effort to engage with show visitors who are walking past your stand at a LIVE marketing event is without doubt the biggest contributing factor why companies fail time and time again to maximise their potential from their events.

Success Principle #11: Check out your competition

Before the show opens go and check out your competitors stands and make sure your staff are clear how your offering is different (and hopefully of more value) to theirs - for example if they have a price offer highlighted on their stand make sure you are able to explain why your offer is better value than theirs. Observe their stand activity during the show and, if possible, visit with the competitors to learn what they are introducing, demonstrating, selling, etc. This is particularly helpful to new employees of your company, as it permits them to watch the competition in action.

Success Principle #12: Consider hiring promotional staff

Stopping people you have never met before and trying to make conversation with them (which is the very start of the relationship building process critical to generating new customers and the life-blood of any company) is not easy and takes a certain kind of person to be able to do it effectively for several hours a day. It's very similar to telesales and cold calling but in this instance you have to do it face to face and like cold calling there will always be prospects who you will speak to who are simply not interested in your company, its products or its services.

Often, if you engage with a number of consecutive prospects who don't have any interest in what you have to offer, you can soon become disheartened and your enthusiasm wanes and you end up wandering towards the comfort of the back of your stand as far away from those disinterested show visitors as possible. Like I say, it takes a certain type of person to be able to work the isles and it is vitally important that if you feel you and your team are not confident that you can fulfil this essential role that you consider hiring in staff that are highly experienced and motivated to take on this role.





There are plenty of companies out there who can supply promotional staff who are incredible at engaging with prospects and who can simply pre-qualify them and then introduce them to one of your own members of staff. These promotional staff think nothing of receiving negative responses time and time again as they have no attachment to your company and therefore they don't take it personally and simply move on to the next show visitor - **in my opinion quality hired promotional staff can increase the number of leads generated at an event by as much as 80%.**

Just as you should with your own staff, make sure any hired in staff are also well briefed and understand your show objectives and who you are most interested in meeting with as it will often be their job to pre-qualify each prospect before introducing them to a member of your own staff.

Success Principle #13: Spend the 'optimum amount of time' with your stand visitors

The key to success is to find the right people and then spend the right amount of time with them – not too much (there are lots more to meet) and not too little (you need to get that lead or appointment).

You must always bear in mind that you are not the only person your prospect will engage with at the show and therefore bombarding them with everything you do in 10 minutes will only serve to confuse. **I would strongly recommend you spend most of your time asking questions and listening to your prospects instead of trying to pitch to them.**

The optimum time per visitor will depend on your show objectives but generally it should include enough time to glean sufficient information from them to ascertain if they are potential customers and to set up a future meeting.

Rarely should an exhibition stand be treated as a platform from which to try to get your prospects commitment to purchase from your company as often the sales process requires much more involved and lengthy discussions/presentations/meetings between yourself and the prospect before they can make an informed buying decision.

Rarely should an exhibition stand be treated as a platform from which to try to get your prospects commitment to purchase from your company

Suggested information to glean from your stand visitors:

- 1) Establish what their specific requirements are;
- 2) Establish whether your products and services can meet with their specific requirements (and if they can't then politely end the interaction and move on to the next prospect);
- 3) Establish whether the prospect is the person responsible for making purchasing decisions relating to your products/services and if not confirm the contact details of the person who is;
- 4) Gather information about their existing suppliers and any problems they are experiencing with them so you can determine how your products and services can better meet with their requirements;
- 5) Establish their annual spend/budgets associated with your products and services and how often they make purchases;
- 6) Establish whether any of your other products and services not mentioned by the prospect may also be of interest;
- 7) Obtain some commitment from your prospect for a future appointment to give your company the opportunity to build a relationship and further the sales process.

The information you gather from your interaction needs to be carefully documented which requires a well thought out **LEAD FORM** (see [Principle #14](#)).

Success Principle #14: Make sure you carefully document AND get commitment from your leads

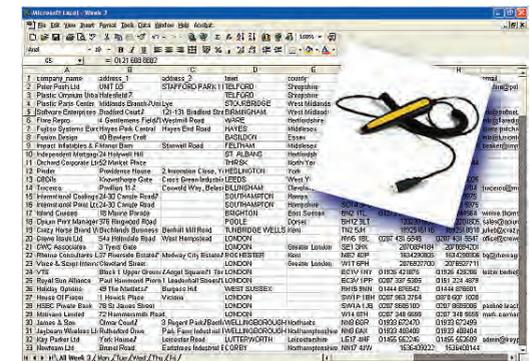
The key to turning your leads into real sales is getting some kind of commitment from your prospects, as clearly not everyone who visits your stand will be in a position to commit to buying your products or services straight away.

You need to have a compelling reason developed which you can offer your visitors to increase the likelihood of them agreeing to an appointment after the show.

But firstly, it's worth thinking about what actually is a lead?

A big pile of business cards in a bowl, excellent! Yes they contain contact details, but they are not leads on their own. It would be much cheaper and easier to go round a large commercial park asking everyone for their business card if this was your objective! They are not qualified and not necessarily interested in what your company has to offer.

The data capture pen, you'll know more about them than they know themselves! Yes, you can swipe all and sundry in seconds, but even these are not necessarily leads because you still have not captured vital personal information during your interaction and certainly no commitment! Once at a show an exhibitor scanned me after offering me a few jelly babies whilst I walked past their stand! What does she know about me, that I like Jelly



Babies? Not incredibly useful information to follow up on after the show however. It was a pointless exercise which was costing the company a lot more than the cost of a few sweets.

So, business cards attached to some specific notes about a prospect – that must be a lead! Well perhaps we are getting closer but this will very much depend on the quality of the information you have stapled to the business card.

So what should your lead form contain? Well the information you will want to gather will very much depend on what your objectives are for the show but at the very least the form should have fields to confirm:

- Prospect Name
- Prospect Position
- Prospects email address and direct telephone number / mobile number
- The prospects areas of interest - which products and services are they showing the most interest in
- Contact details of other colleagues who would also be interested in your products/services (a referral)
- Any other useful information which was presented by your prospect during the interaction which can include the name of their existing suppliers (your competition), problems with their existing suppliers products/services, budgets/spending patterns, personal information (hobbies, holidays, family) which can be referred to in future communications to break the ice and start to build relationships.



It should also have an area where you can include and agree some commitment options for continuing the relationship building process beyond the show. For example, when Love Displays exhibit we have commitment options such as:

- I am interested in arranging a demonstration of the xxxx display system
- I am interested in receiving further information on the xxxxx modular exhibition system
- I would like to arrange a time to visit your showroom to look at the options for exhibition stands
- I am interested in meeting to discuss a brief for an exhibition stand design requirement
- I am interested in receiving a free 30 minute review our overall exhibition strategy

Finally, as the follow-up process can take up a considerable amount of staff time **it is always a good idea to ask your staff to grade each lead in terms of its quality**, or in simple terms, how likely they are to purchase your goods and services in the immediate future. The grading can be as simple as 'Hot', 'Warm' and 'Cold". In this way the better quality leads can be given priority during the follow-up process so that the chances of not speaking to a "hot" prospect soon after the exhibition is minimised.

Success Principle #15: Conduct daily briefings with staff

Daily briefings remind everyone of your goals, your key messages and the role of each team member. Report on your progress towards your goals. Discuss how the team feel the interactions are working - are they too long and limiting the number of visitors you can talk to or is there some information that your visitors keep requesting that your staff don't know about or don't have immediate access to.

Daily briefings are an opportunity to take stock of how things are going and make changes if necessary to improve the visitor experience. Most importantly, they should be done to keep the energy up and the attitudes of all your staff positive.



Success Principle #16: Always have an after-show debrief

So, you've been there, done it and got the t-shirt! What's next?

Well it's essential to have a debrief at the end of the show to:

- 1) Collate all the market intelligence you've gathered from clients, prospects and competitors.
- 2) Determine what went well and what could have been improved so that you know what you would do differently at your next show.
- 3) Determine whether you accomplished what you set out to do - did you achieve or even exceed your show objectives.

This kind of debrief is probably best done back at the office within a day or two following the show so the show is still fresh in every one's minds. Gather all the members of staff who were involved in the planning stages and the manning of the stand itself and simply ask them all 2 simple questions:

- 1) What did we do well?
- 2) What would we do differently next time?

It can be difficult just after the show to determine just how good the leads you have generated really are or how much brand awareness you achieved but there are many things you can assess immediately such as:

- how successful your pre-show marketing was (did it generate a high volume of stand visitors of the right target audience),
- did your VIP invites get them to your stand,

- did the layout and functionality of the stand work well,
- did your staff perform to the best of their ability and were they the right staff to manage the stand,
- was the information you had printed for the show relevant and was the volume produced necessary etc..?

Make sure this information is well documented and revisited when planning your next event or exhibition.

Success Principle #17: Follow up on your leads

You've had a great show! You've carefully planned your objectives, chosen the right exhibition, understood the audience, presented the right message in an amazing creative and memorable way, recorded your interactions, and met your commitment targets (for leads, appointments, distributors, etc). Fantastic, now your real work starts! How do you turn those leads into business?

80% of leads generated by businesses at exhibitions in the UK are never, ever followed up on!

I'm sure it would surprise you to learn that 80% of leads generated by businesses at exhibitions in the UK are never, ever followed up on! Meaning the whole investment and effort for the show was a pointless exercise.

Of the 20% that are followed up, many of those are not followed through to any real business.

These figures are staggering (for all the wrong reasons) but represent an opportunity for you to take advantage of what others are plainly not doing!

Have a followup plan for after the exhibition but make sure the time it requires is booked in the diary BEFORE the exhibition.

As with all your sales communications, have a purpose, story or message to follow up from the show. If you had created a memorable experience for prospects and visitors then they will recall your brand, so use this with your follow ups.

One thing is for sure, in the days following any show or exhibition, people's propensity to buy goes down dramatically. If they have been excited by something you've had to show or tell them, why not capitalise on that quickly?

Research shows that if you contact a customer on the same day of the show, maybe to clarify what you have discussed on stand, then they are twice as likely to commit to the next stage.

With this in mind it can be well worth considering setting up a small back office area on your stand with a laptop and internet connection where all the leads are collated and emails are sent to arrive in your prospects inbox before they even return to their office - just think what this will say to them about your high level of customer service and your professionalism. If internet connection is out of your budget then simply call all your 'Hot' leads from the show and leave them a voicemail message thanking them for their time and confirming you will contact them after the show and action whatever commitment they agreed to on the stand.

What-ever form of communication you choose to send out to your prospects it is really important that the content is personalised with relevant information gathered by the stand staff and documented on their lead form.

Put it this way, if I have taken the time and trouble to visit your stand and had spoken to one of your staff about my current problems, which products and the services interested me, it would not make me feel like a valued customer if I then receive a generic email from you that had obviously been sent to all your visitors.

This first form of communication is your chance to show them that you are a company that listens and values each and every customer. This is your first and best opportunity to start forging a long term relationship. It is good to recall some of the personal information that may have been discussed on the stand such as hobbies, holidays etc. as this is always a great way to break the ice and an easy way to give the follow-up a personal touch.

Free consultation offer

.... to ensure you correctly apply these Success Principles and get the best results and ROI from your next exhibition.

If you're reading this guide and are not an existing customer of LoveExpo you will not have experienced the advice and mentoring service that we provide to all our customers (which is completely free of charge).

We provide this free support service to ensure that you get the best result and ROI from your exhibition stand.

I would like to offer you an opportunity to benefit from this expertise. So the next time you're consider attending an exhibition just call our office and let us know what you would like to achieve from the exhibition. We can then advise and mentor you from the conception of your objectives, the design and message of your stand, staff training through to your post exhibition conclusion and ROI calculations.



LoveExpo is a trading name of Love Displays Ltd

So if you're considering exhibiting in the coming months then please **call me on 01253 769911** or email david@loveexpo.co.uk to discuss how to reap the full benefits that this exhibition could offer your business.



*David Charnley
Managing Director
LoveExpo*