

Why Event Marketing?

Events are designed to let entrepreneurs meet potential customers face-to-face in a brief period of time. According to the Trade Show Bureau for example, more than 4,300 event tradeshows were held nationwide in 1994, attracting 85 million visitors.

Events can be an extremely effective promotion and sales tool for small businesses. Whether you're an event novice, or an experienced event participant, these tips will help you get the best return on investment from any event you attend.

Reasons to be part of a business event

Sales

- Generate sales leads
- Make direct sales
- Build a contact database
- Customer Relationships
- Build relationships with current customers
- Educate customers
- Upsell and cross-sell customers
- Collect customer testimonials
- Re-sell lapsed customers

Market Research

- Market test a new product
- Research your marketing campaign
- Test market awareness and perceptions

Brand building

- Create or raise market awareness
- Position or re-position your brand
- Educate by demonstrating
- Boost financial analyst/investor perceptions
- Develop new markets

Channel Support

- Identify and recruit new distributors or partners
- Support your current sales channel
- Build your reputation as a partner

Media Relations

- Get on the 'media radar'/generate coverage
- Build relationships with key editors and journalists

Event Strategy

1) Do your research.

You need to choose the events that will give your business the best ROI in terms of your goals.

2) Have a plan.

What do you want to get out of it?

Are you focusing on promotion or hoping to launch a new product?

You can have more than one goal, of course, but the point is that you need to be clear about what your participation in the event is going to achieve.

You want to choose an event that best targets the audience that you want to reach, and best suits your goals. Find out what the particular events objectives are, and investigate and evaluate the show's audience.

3) Plan a budget and reserve a space.

Find out everything you can about your space, including where it is on the floor, what kind of other exhibits will be around it, whether it's a high or low traffic area, and the physical conditions of the booth space, like lighting.

4) Know your audience.

Who is it that you're targeting with your event display? Retail customers? Wholesale buyers? Other businesses in your industry? Different audiences "shop" events differently, and have different needs.

5) Advertise in advance.

Put the word out that you're participating in the event, by inviting your clients, customers, suppliers, and other contacts to attend. (Be sure you give them all the details, such as your booth number.)

Event Display Tips

Your event display is one of the most important features of your event. Just being there isn't enough. You need to have an event booth that's going to draw and engage potential customers and contacts. Here are some event display tips:

1) Think visibility when creating your event display.

Use a display board to hang some of your products at customer eye-level to draw them into your display. Make sure your display is organized and neat; customers will be turned off by messiness or by having to do too much searching to find what they want.

2) Build the impression of demand into your event display.

Customers will want your products more if they think they're in high demand.

Place a strategic sold sign on one or two items. You might even leave a display spot empty, giving the impression that you've been too busy to restock.

3) Pull a crowd to your event booth.

Use an interactive display, such as a quiz or game on a computer, a contest draw, a scheduled demonstration; it doesn't need to be fancy to draw people's interest and get them to cluster around your event display rather than the others.

4) Have a stock of promotion items that you can use as giveaways at your booth.

Small items that people can take away and use (while being reminded about your business) are best. Be sure you place these items in a location where people will have to walk into or through your event display to get them.

5) Use a prize draw or contest.

Having some kind of prize draw or contest is a great way to collect contact information from booth visitors. You can give away promotion items to encourage people to participate.

6) Make it easy for booth visitors to get information.

Use signs in your event display to give information about prices, minimum orders, shipping costs to save them the trouble of having to wait to ask when you're busy with another potential customer.

7) Make sure you have plenty of promotional literature on hand.

You'll want to have a good supply of marketing materials like color fliers, brochures, order forms, price sheets, and business. You should also have a press kit prepared for the trade media.

8) Be ready to do business.

Be sure you have a good supply of order forms, pens, credit card slips, or anything else you need to conduct sales and keep track of people's orders.

9) Have your event booth staffed at all times.

Someone has to be there to greet browsers, engage them in conversation, and take their questions. If you can't be there every minute the event is open, you'll need to have at least one other person help staff your booth.

10) Actively engage trade booth visitors.

Give people who approach your event display a friendly welcome. Be prepared to offer specific solutions to their questions. Draw them in without intimidating or overwhelming them.

11) Follow up promptly.

Send out email, regular mail, or make the phone calls to follow up on the contacts and leads you made during the event as soon as possible. The faster you send them out, the more your business will stand out from the rest.

Events can be incredible sources of contacts and customers for your business - if you choose your event venue carefully and plan in advance to have a successful event experience.