

Your Most Powerful Marketing Tool—Your People

The most crucial aspect of any exhibit is its people. Your image does not stop with an elaborate display, fancy advertising or impressive literature. It is *people* who sell your company and its products and services. The team chosen to represent you becomes your ambassadors. It's your people who make or break future relationships with attendees. It is your people who are your most powerful marketing tool.

Use the PEOPLE formula to select your best personnel. Choose **P**eople-oriented personnel, who are **E**nthusiastic, **O**bservant, have excellent **P**roduct knowledge, are keen **L**isteners and finally, are **E**mpathetic to their visitors' situations.

Training is essential for a unified effort on the trade show floor. Use a knowledgeable employee or hire a specialist to ensure your people have the necessary exhibiting skills. In particular, your staff members need to know:

- 1) Why your company is exhibiting, or the purpose for your involvement in the show and what you are expecting to achieve through your participation.
- 2) What you are exhibiting, i.e., the specific products/services you plan to exhibit. There should be no surprises when your team arrives at the display.
- 3) What you expect from them. Your team must be encouraged to set their own goals based on overall exhibiting goals. They also need to know what you want them to do on a daily basis, for example, how many prospects you expect them to interact with and what kind of information you want them to gather.
- 4) How to do what you expect from them. Train your representatives to be more effective on the show floor. Show them how to demonstrate the products displayed, and to effectively qualify prospects.

To keep everyone on track, meet with your team regularly, before the show begins and at the end of each day. Remind them of what needs to be accomplished, evaluate performance, answer questions, monitor goals and generally keep everyone motivated. Take a few minutes at the end of each day to debrief the day's activities and look for ways to improve performance for the following day.

Your team's personal presentation.

You and your team are on display, so your personal presentation is vital. A first impression is made within three to five seconds as customers scrutinize your gestures, mannerisms, attitude, clothing and grooming. How do you measure up—professional, approachable, hospitable or bored and indifferent? The following seven guidelines will help improve your team's personal package.

- 1) **Approachability.** Does your first impression say, "Come on in," or more like, "Back off?" A smile and open body language convey friendliness and a likeable, accepting personality. Always be ready to reach out to welcome the attendee.

- 2) **Hospitality.** Attendees want to feel welcomed into your booth space. A simple, "Please, come in and see our new product," is a personal invitation to an attendee.
- 3) **Professionalism.** Is your demeanor one that commands respect and creates instant rapport? Being outgoing and interested in the attendees needs are indicators of how you will serve them in the future. Exhibitors who give visitors undivided attention have the best chance of building new business contacts.
- 4) **Nonverbal Communication.** Nonverbal communication speaks even louder than verbal communication. Your overall appearance and behavior should be congruent with your company's image and industry ranking.
- 5) **Color.** People react to the color and their surroundings each day. Consider appropriate uniforms that expand the corporate identity beyond the physical booth space. Realize that your staffers are walking billboards wherever they go in the exhibit hall.
- 6) **Clothing.** Clothing is a personal expression of who you are, how you feel about yourself and what you want others to know about you. Whatever image you want displayed, have strict, written dress guidelines. Do not rely on vague terms such as appropriate or business casual or dressy. You risk different interpretations of these words. Include proper dress suggestions for both men and women for any entertainment or hospitality functions.
- 7) **Grooming.** Your detail mindedness will set you apart from every other staffer. The following need to be taken into consideration:
 - Hair: clean, controlled and current is most appropriate.
 - Makeup: natural looking is best.
 - Facial hair: beards and mustaches should be neatly trimmed.
 - Nails: attendees notice nicely manicured nails on men and women.
 - Eyewear: update your eyewear to look current.
 - Shoes: make sure they are comfortable, clean and polished.
 - Personal hygiene: use deodorant daily, brush your teeth and use mouthwash. Avoid heavy scented perfumes and colognes, as many people have allergic reactions to fragrance.
 - Posture: good posture will keep you energized.
 - Eye contact: good eye contact reveals honesty and sincere interest in the person you're speaking with. Don't look over the attendee's shoulder to see if someone with more potential is coming along.
 - Handshake: a firm, web-to-web handshake creates instant rapport, is welcoming and is barometer of one's self-confidence.

Make sure that everyone understands that they are company ambassadors. By being helpful, courteous and having a professional demeanor, staff can strengthen the company's image and gain new customers. Trade show research states that 85% of the visitor's impression about your exhibit is determined by your staff's attitude and behavior, and 80% of a final buying decision can be influenced by the booth interaction. Your people are without a doubt your strongest marketing tool. Make sure they fully understand their role.

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