Over 66 Tips & Tricks to Supercharge Your Trade Show Promotions

by
Steve Miller

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The Adventure LLC
T 253-874-9665
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E theadventure@theadventure.com
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Why Promotions are Important
or
Woody Allen Would Fail at Trade Shows!

Woody Allen supposedly said that 95% of success in life comes from just showing up. That might be true about life, in general. But that would make Woody a lousy trade show exhibitor or attendee. You can’t just “show up” at a trade show and expect success to just happen to you.

Yet that, in fact, is what the vast majority of exhibitors do when preparing for trade shows. Does the following scenario sound familiar?

You realize that the National Widget Show is coming up in a couple of weeks. Yes, you signed up for exhibit space long ago (hey, getting that good location is critical to success, right?). But once your space was assigned, you forgot about it ... until now. And now it’s crunch time. Where is your exhibit? Do you even HAVE an exhibit? What about products? What should you be exhibiting at this show? Do you have any OLD literature you don’t need anymore that you can pass out and get rid of? Who’s going to work the booth? Well, who’s new? Or, who lives closest to the show site? Or, who’s in the doghouse with the company? Do we have hotel reservations?

OK, we’re at the show now. Everything’s set up. Now ... why are we here? What is it that we want to accomplish?

Sound familiar? This is what I call the Woody Allen approach to exhibiting. It certainly doesn’t guarantee much of a return on your high trade show investment!
A much better attitude would be to follow Jerry Garcia’s advice. The leader of the Grateful Dead, one of the most successful rock bands in history before his untimely death, Garcia once said:

“It’s not enough to considered merely the best of the best. You want to be considered the only one who does what you do.”

The same thing applies to trade shows. Let’s look at some statistics regarding the trade show industry:

• According to the Tradeshow Week DataBook, the average trade show in the U.S. has 534 exhibiting companies.

• Studies also show that the average attendee will only spend about 8.5 total hours on the exposition floor visiting approximately 30 exhibitors!

• The average attendee will already have approximately 15 exhibitors on his or her agenda before they arrive at the show.

• The average attendee receives approximately 30-50 preshow communications before attending a show.

So, let’s see if we can make some sense of these statistics. Let’s say the average attendee gets 50 communications from exhibitors at an upcoming show. That attendee is going to select about 15 of those to be on her agenda. Then, at the show, she will have to uncover around 15 more exhibitors out of the remaining 519!

Why are promotions so important? Well, would you rather be one of the 15 chosen out of the 50 preshow communications, or would you rather wait and hope to be one of the 15 discovered out of the remaining 519 exhibitors? This should help you understand the importance of preshow promotion.

But it should show the importance of effective atshow promotions, too. Obviously, you won’t be on the preset agenda of every targeted prospect you want to see. As a result, you want to take advantage of every possible marketing tool to get those people in your booth! Yes, a well designed exhibit will help attract qualified attendees, but you also want to use promotions to give that extra incentive for them to stop.

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Why use promotions? There are five other good reasons for using promotions in your trade show plans.

1. Preshow promotions actually EXTEND the show for you. By sending out some type of preshow promotions four to six weeks in advance of the show, you’re actually lengthening the amount of time you are putting your company’s name on the mind of your customer or prospect.

2. Preshow promotions help you to INFORM your target market. Maybe you have a new product to announce and you want to generate some excitement for it at International. Maybe you’ve had a major success with a product and you want to share that with your target market. Maybe you’ve had some significant changes in your company’s upper management and you want to introduce the new people to the industry. Announcing all those through preshow promotions creates interest before the show starts.

3. Preshow promotions help you to PREQUALIFY the people you see at the trade show. While it’s great to have thousands of potential customers walking the aisles, the problem you encounter is that you don’t know most of them. When you have a conversation with an attendee, you must then go through a qualifying process to determine whether or not they fit the profile of your target market. Using preshow promotion, you have the ability to compile a list of those people who most closely fit the prospects you specifically want to see. You can predetermine a target list that closely matches your most valuable customers and use preshow promotions to attract those people to your booth.

4. Preshow promotions help to MOTIVATE that target list of prospects to put you on their list of “must-sees.” In focus groups and surveys, retailers say that it’s important for you to give them a REASON for selecting your company for a visit. In your promotions you can clearly explain the benefits they will receive by stopping by.

And

5. Preshow promotions allow you to PERSONALIZE your meetings. If you are able to predetermine who is going to visit your exhibit, you can actually prepare personalized presentations designed especially for that prospect.

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It was only a few short years ago when just a small percentage of exhibitors used preshow promotions. Unfortunately, that’s not the case anymore. Most exhibitors utilize some form of preshow communication - telemarketing, trade ads, direct mail, postcards, etc. That’s the bad news.

The good news is that most preshow communications just aren’t very good. They aren’t thoroughly thought out and planned. They aren’t very creative. They look like everybody else’s and mostly blend in with the crowd.

They also don’t follow some of the rules of effective promotions:

**Rules for Effective Promotions**

- First, FOCUS all promotion efforts on your target market and your show objectives. Don’t fall into the trap of just getting a full list of registrants and sending blanket invitations. And don’t do something at the show that will attract everybody. You don’t want everybody in your booth, you want the right people in your booth.

- Be CREATIVE. You can be innovative without spending a lot of money. Look for ways to make it fun, different, and exciting.

- Try very hard to PERSONALIZE each mailing. Avoid using mailing labels and bulk mail stamps. Even if you get labels from the show management, take the time to retype the names on the envelopes. It makes a huge difference in whether or not your target even opens and reads it.

- It’s always better to plan for FREQUENT preshow contacts, rather than depend on a one-shot promotion. If a prospect receives a personal letter, a fax, and a postcard over a period of 3 or 4 weeks before the show, they’re much more likely to remember you and stop by.

- Give them a compelling REASON to visit you. Do you have a show special they can take advantage of? Do you have a new product line or service? Make sure you say that in your promotions. The top complaint
from attendees regarding promotions is the fact very few actually give a good reason to visit.

• And make darn sure you send any preshow promotions out EARLY enough. It is truly distressing to hear over and over again from attendees about this. It’s far too common for an attendee to return from a trade show and find several invitations waiting in the pile of mail that arrived while they were AT THE SHOW! Send everything to ARRIVE at least ten days in advance. What a waste of promotional dollars when a preshow communication doesn’t get there before the show.
TEN REASONS WHY A TRADE SHOW IS THE BEST TOOL YOU'VE GOT

Before I get into specifics about creating and implementing effective promotions, it's also important to understand the true potential value of trade shows. Unfortunately, the vast majority of exhibitors don't understand that trade shows are very powerful marketing tools. Consider these points about trade shows:

1. **You can get hundreds of leads.**
   And, I really mean, qualified leads. Not names...but people who you have determined have the need for your product or service. A typical trade show has hundreds, possibly thousands, of prospects coming to see you!

2. **You can control the encounter.**
   You have the ability to design and build your booth to control the encounter with an attendee. You can make your booth fun and bright or serious and business-minded; you can create an open, inviting environment or close it off for private meetings; you can present live demonstrations to hundreds of attendees or maximize one-on-one encounters. The way you interact with customers and prospects is entirely up to you.

3. **You can build trust with your qualified leads.**
   Keep your promises. Send them the information they requested, call them when you say you will, get their questions answered in a timely way.

4. **You can demonstrate your product live and give prospects a hands-on experience.**
   This is particularly wonderful if your company sells big things that you can't carry around in your car or on the plane. The real thing speaks much more loudly for itself.

5. **You can enhance and build on your current relationships.**
   Let your current customers and prospects know you will be there. This could be your first chance to actually meet someone you've been talking to on the telephone for a long time.

6. **You can launch a new product.**
Use the 'bigness' of the trade show environment to build on the excitement that an unveiling can generate. Get immediate feedback.

7. **You can provide competitive comparisons.**
The presence of competitors stimulates the buying process. Not to mention you can check out the competition first hand with a minimal amount of work.

8. **You can test the market.**
Whether a new product or one in your existing line. How do people really like what you're selling? is the price to high, to low? What would they like to see? How do customers like to be serviced?

9. **You can write orders.**
Why not offer a show special to encourage new clients to sign up right on the spot? With the right product, service and incentive, you can turn the show into an immediate profit-center.

10. **You can accomplish more in a few days what might otherwise take several months...or more!**
12 Ways to Get the Most from
*Over 66 Tips & Tricks to Supercharge Your Trade Show Promotions*

1. Exposition managers should send a copy to all their exhibitors.

2. Assign *Over 66 Tips* .... to all of your trade show staffers to read in the next 3 weeks.

3. Ask them to write down the 12 best ideas they see in the book as they read through it. At your next planning meeting, have each person read his/her list.

4. Have your trade show staffers agree on the most significant ideas they got from reading the book and list them on a flip chart.

5. Have your trade show staffers prioritize the ideas and set specific timetables for implementing at the next show.

6. Make *Over 66 Tips* ..... required reading for every new trade show staffer in addition to your regular in-house training material. Design a 20 question quiz that tests the basic material.

7. Use the brainstorming ideas described in *Over 66 Tips* ..... at your next trade show planning meeting.

8. Send a copy of *Over 66 Tips* ..... to the highest level sales manager, marketing manager, and corporate communications manager in your company for his/her feedback and comments.

9. Design and post a planning chart in your office showing the objectives and ideas created and encourage staffers to add their ideas.

10. Look for your own tips and techniques and add them on the blank pages in the back of the book. Then fax them to The Adventure of Trade Shows for inclusion in future editions of *Over 66 Tips* .....!
11. Have a pre-show meeting immediately before your next major show to thoroughly plan your show strategy and tactics using *Over 66 Tips .....* as your guide.

12. From now on, before every trade or consumer show, quickly scan *Over 66 Tips .....* as a refresher course for staying on track.
**What is Your Objective?**

The problem with trade shows is that most corporations have a difficult time setting and measuring objectives of any importance. And before you can effectively plan any type of preshow or atshow promotions, you need to know exactly what you want to accomplish. Remember, you are only productive when you are accomplishing something in terms of your goal.

The first step is to understand that every marketing tool is used for one purpose: to help your corporation move closer to achieving your overall objectives. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a trade show, or a trade ad, or a direct mail campaign, or your new website, it MUST help achieve overall corporate objectives.

So how do you set clear, measurable objectives that have any impact on your company’s bottom-line?

Let me start by asking you a series of questions. You might want to jot down the answers as we go:

- What is your company’s overall sales objective for this year or the next fiscal year?
- How much will the average customer spend with you in that year?
- What is your closing rate? In other words, if I were to give you or one of your salespeople 10 qualified leads, how many new customers would they close within a typical sales cycle? 10%? 20%? 50%?

Okay, now I want you to think about my first question about your overall objectives and let’s look for ways we can use your next trade show to achieve those objectives.

In my experience with corporations, the top corporate objective usually falls under one or more of four categories. The first is gross revenues. The second is net profit. The third is market share and the fourth is ROI — return-on-investment.

In setting specific and measurable objectives for the show, you simply want to look for those objectives that you can define clearly and measurably AND that will also tie directly back into your overall
corporate objectives. In other words, how can a trade show directly impact gross revenues or net profits or market share or return-on-investment?

The two factors you want to keep in mind in setting objectives are the number of exhibit staffers you will have working and the number of attendees they can have quality meetings with. Both of these are critical to your setting realistic and achievable objectives. Your individual staffers can only talk to a limited number of attendees and the length of those meetings is directly based on the quality of the conversation.

You simply cannot have a quality meeting in two or three minutes. Yet most exhibitors seem to think that’s all the time they have! Attendees, on the other hand, say, “If you give me a reason, I’ll give you the time.” Attendees have told the trade show industry that they spend an average of 15-20 minutes in “quality” conversations with exhibitors. If you have a qualified prospect or customer standing in your booth, who is also eager to spend time with you to learn more about your company and product line AND is also eager to establish or reinforce a solid relationship ...... well, why would you want to cut that conversation short? The answer is, you wouldn’t.

So you must keep objectives realistic. For example, let’s say you’re preparing for a trade show that will be open for a total of 20 hours. If you have four staffers working, and if they have an average of only four quality meetings per hour, then you can expect to have a total of 320 quality meetings over the 20 hours the show floor is open.

Now, think about this. After only 20 hours of exhibiting, you can walk away with 320 quality meetings? Granted a percentage of those should be with current customers and a percentage will be with new prospects. Even if it’s a 50/50 split, that means you’ll have 160 meetings with current customers and 160 with new prospects!

Remember I asked what your closing rate was? If you are closing only 20% of the leads you get, that would mean you would get at least 32 new customers as a result of 160 quality meetings with prospects. How would you feel about knowing in advance that you have the opportunity to create 32 new customers and, in addition, have the opportunity to reinforce your relationship with 180 current customers? How long would

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it take you in the field to open 32 new accounts and meet with 160 current customers?

Now, with 32 new customers and 160 quality meetings, how would those encounters tie back into your overall corporate objectives — gross revenues, net profits, market share and ROI? Very well, I'm sure.

You will notice, from my example of focusing on quality conversations, that it would be totally impossible to talk with a few thousand attendees, much less set-up any kind of quality post-show follow-up. Yet, that is exactly what most exhibitors do by focusing on generating high volumes of traffic. The amount of traffic in your booth is not important — just the number of quality conversations.

Be realistic in setting your objectives! Don’t fall into the trap of “I want a crowded exhibit.” You’ll never be able to cash a check on traffic.

So, from a primary objective perspective, take a look at how many people you have working in your booth. Determine a realistic objective for how many QUALITY CONVERSATIONS they can have during the show. Set a specific and measurable objective based on those numbers and then look for a way to tie it directly into your overall marketing objectives.

Once you’ve set those objectives, you now want to clearly identify who those targeted prospects are.
Who is Your Target?

According to Tradeshow Week DataBook, the average trade show has 10,933 total attendees. Sounds good, huh? In fact, total attendance is typically the top reason why corporations choose to exhibit at a trade show. But ask yourself two questions about this:

- **Can you effectively interact with 10,000 people?**
  Only the largest exhibitors would be able to talk with that many people. Consider the example in the previous section. Four staffers can only have quality encounters with 320 people. In order for a company to have quality encounters with 10,000 attendees, you’d either have to have a show that’s open for 625 hours or you’d have to have 125 staffers working your booth!

  In bad english - it ain’t gonna happen.

- **Do you really want to talk with 10,000 people?**
  More realistically, we must admit to ourselves the fact that only a percentage of attendees actually fits our target market. According to Exhibit Surveys, Inc., of Red Bank, NJ, the average exhibitor has 16% of total attendees who fit their target market. It’s imperative that you focus your promotional efforts on just that percentage of attendees who fit your target market.

But what constitutes a qualified prospect? There are four criteria to consider:

1. **What role do they have in the decision-making process?**
   This obviously goes beyond just looking for a decision-maker. In today’s business world, there are also influencers, specifiers, end-users, and who knows wh who else might be involved. The point is that you want to talk with someone who is somewhere in the decision-making loop. Also, at many of today’s expositions, companies send “buying teams,” so you might need to talk with several different people.

2. **Do they have an acknowledged need for your product or service?**
The old adage, “Find a need and fill it,” is total bunk. Hey, we think everybody NEEDS our products and services! I’m a trade show marketing consultant. I’ve personally worked with dozens of corporations around the world and they’ve generated millions of dollars in additional revenues as a result. I think every corporation who goes to trade shows needs my services. But, the fact is, not every corporation agrees with that statement. That’s okay. I can’t work with everyone, so I’m only going to look for those corporations who happen to agree they need help. You can cut down your sales cycle tremendously by only attracting those prospects who have an acknowledged need.

3. Do they have the ability to pay?
I often find this to be an important issue.

4. When will they be in the market to buy?
What is your typical sales cycle? Three months? Six months? Two years? You need to determine, in advance, when you want your trade show prospect to ready to buy.

The bottom-line is this: don’t attempt to attract anybody to your booth who you wouldn’t make an appointment with in the field.

Think about effective trade show marketing as filling a funnel. You might have 10,000 people entering the top of the funnel, but only a percentage of them will be in the decision-making loop, and only a percentage of those people will acknowledge a need, and only a percentage of those will have the ability to pay, and only a percentage of those will be ready to buy when you want them to.

But consider this, if you were to find someone who fits the profile of all four criteria, what do you think the odds are of you creating a new business relationship? Pretty good, I’d say. So what happens is that your closing rate is no longer around 20%. It goes up. Maybe it goes to 40% or 50%. You go from 64 new customers to 128 ... 160 ... or higher.

So what does all this have to do with promotions, you ask? Plenty.
It just makes sense. The more specific you can be about what your trade show objectives are and exactly who you want to meet, the easier it is to plan your promotions to attract only those people!

Through the rest of this book, I’ll discuss many different promotional tools you can use at your next trade show. It is by no means a complete list, but you’ll find a lot of ideas.
Promotion Mistakes

Do you already use promotions? Odds are, you do. Do you send out a postcard, or a personal letter inviting prospects and customers to see your company? Have you ever given away some type of gimmick (keychains, pens, nerf balls, etc.)? Have you ever had a magician or celebrity in your booth? These are all different types of promotions, and all can be great marketing tools.

Unfortunately, the majority of promotions used by exhibitors are both a waste of time and money. Let’s look at some reasons why corporations fail to use promotions effectively and profitably:

• Can your promotion stand on trial for its life?
Whenever I’m involved with a client in creating a new trade show plan, promotions are inevitably included. The problem arises when a promotional tool is thrown in that has no connection with the ultimate objective. Remember the fact that you are at a trade show to achieve objectives that will ultimately impact your corporate goals. Everything in your booth must clearly tie in to that objective. If it doesn’t, throw it out.

• Spending the budget because it’s there.
I’ve watched a lot of corporations spend money on promotions simply because it was included in the budget. Bad idea. If your goal for a show is to generate 100 highly qualified leads and you can do that by offering a $10 Swiss Army knife, then you don’t need to give out $75 binoculars.

• Focusing on the many, rather than the few.
As I’ve already indicated, I’m not a fan of traffic. I interested in a crowded booth. I don’t want everybody in my booth ... I want the right people in my booth. I want people who are highly qualified, based on my criteria, and who are very likely to become customers within my projected time frame.

That said, I will pull out all the stops to get those right people in my booth. If I know there are 50 Super Qualified Prospects attending an upcoming show, then why on earth would I create a promotion for the 10,000 attendees? I wouldn’t. I’d create a killer promotion for the 50.
• Confusing busyness with effectiveness.
I still laugh about the exhibit staffer who exclaimed at one of my training seminars, “Hey, I passed out 5000 brochures. I must have had a good show!” And I cringed when a major beverage company told me they measured success by counting the number of cups used to give out samples.

While funny, this type of attitude is all too common at trade shows. The fact is, most corporations don’t know how to measure their success, and most exhibit staffers have never been trained on what to do at a show that will have any type of real impact on the company!

Don’t fall into this trap! Don’t do stuff just to keep yourself and your staffers busy. Make sure that all efforts are directed towards effective and measurable objectives that have real impact on your company’s big goals.

• Me-too, me-too.
Ask yourself a simple question: who taught you how to work a trade show?

Odds are you had the same teacher most of us had - nobody. And this is a real problem at trade shows. The reason is simple. If nobody taught us how to exhibit, then how did we learn? Trial and error? Maybe, a little. But odds are you actually learned by doing what most of us did ... you WATCHED the other exhibitors.

As I said, this is a big problem. Think about it for a moment. You watched another exhibitor. You decided they knew what they were doing because you saw a ton of traffic in their booth. You asked yourself the question, “what are they doing to attract all that traffic?” Aha! The answer is “... they have a popcorn machine! That’s what we’re going to do next year!” What’s wrong with this picture?

But then you also have to ask yourself another question. Who taught that guy across the aisle how to do trade shows? Guess what? He learned the same way you did. From watching the other guys. In fact, the whole time you’re watching his booth ... he’s watching yours.

As a result, everybody at the show starts to look alike and act alike. That’s not standing out from the crowd. That’s blending in!
• Same-old, same-old.

Basically, this is the sin of never changing. You’ve had that same booth for five years now. Hey, you can squeeze one more year out of it! And we’ve been doing postcard mailings for thirteen years now. It’s a tradition!

Yeah, well, guess what. Everybody knows that’s an old booth and an old tradition. You know it. Your competition knows it. Your customers know it. And anybody who has been to the last two or three shows knows it.

If there is one sin in marketing that will just kill any real results you may be looking for, it’s being boring. And using that same old exhibit and promotion year after year is boring.

• Bulk mailed with labels.

Think about this one real hard and fill in the blank. You go out to the mailbox. You pull out the pile of stuff, that is mostly _________ mail.

Yes! You got it right the correct word is “junk,” as in junk mail.

And what do you do with junk mail? Do you:

a) Throw all that crap out without so much as opening them.
b) Scan the envelopes, picking out those that seem to be a little bit interesting.

or

c) Sit down and carefully open and read every word of every one of those really exciting offers!

Okay, I’m being smart guy. But the fact is that very few of us really enjoy getting a load of junk mail and even fewer of us actually read that stuff.

Now what tells us, just by looking at it, that this piece of mail fits the category of “junk?”

Basically, there are two criteria and sometimes three.
1. Your name and address are on a computer-generated label stuck on the outside of the envelope.
2. There is some type of bulkmail stamp or imprint
And some times:
3. There is a message printed on the outside in large letter saying something like, “OPEN IMMEDIATELY. IMPORTANT MESSAGE INSIDE.”

Ummmmm. Let me ask you this: if YOU are bugged by those types of mailings and YOU don’t open them or read them, then why do you think trade show attendees who have no relationship with you open one?

Preshow Marketing

Preshow marketing can determine your success or failure at the show. The primary reason behind this assertion is also the most obvious; if your target customers don't know you're going to be at the trade show, how can they be expected to look for your booth? Do you really believe that you can just rent booth space, put your exhibit up, and wait for the crowds?

Other than the obvious reason of getting people into your booth at a trade show, there is one more compelling reason for using preshow marketing. It helps stretch out the show. Typically, a company treats a trade show as a two- to five-day event, depending on its length, with the focus almost entirely on making those few days as productive as possible. This approach utilizes only one-third of a show's potential marketing power. A trade show is actually utilized at its fullest in a four- to five-month campaign, with the show situated in the middle. A trade show has three definite time frames—before, during, and after. Each of those has its own unique marketing forte. By effectively tying your marketing campaign in with the upcoming show two to three months before its opening, you can create enthusiasm and anticipation for the event, emphasizing exciting and new products and services you'll be offering. This not only generates interest in your customers and prospects, but in your employees as well. Then, by working an exciting show followed by a slam-bang postshow campaign, the synergistic result will most certainly be successful. A strong preshow marketing campaign ensures the success of a show before the show opens. 

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There are a myriad of promotional tools available for you to use today. Let’s look at some examples:

**Personal Invitations**
By far the most effective way to reach potential attendees is through personal invitations. Every survey and focus group I've facilitated for trade show and corporations supports this. After giving a seminar to the exhibitors of the Food Marketing Institute's annual Supermarket Industry Convention, I led a panel discussion with several major buyers. They agreed that the best way to attract them to your booth was by sending a personal letter (not something addressed "Dear FMI Attendee") along with a strong motivating reason, specifically addressing their area of responsibility, suggesting why they would want to visit you.

The first step in this process is to identify your target audience and assemble a mailing list; include current customers and prospects. Assembling the current customer list is easy, but it will probably require extensive work to gather a prospect list. Several ways exist to gather these names and addresses. Your sales reps should know the names of several prospects they haven't been able to sell, yet. You can also get mailing lists through reputable list brokers, a specific trade or professional association, a trade publication, even from the trade show itself. Be sure to ask only for the list segments most applicable to your target audience.

Once you've compiled these lists, start using them two to three months prior to the show. Begin with a personal invitation from the most prestigious person in the department (how about your company president?). Don't make the letter too long; just briefly tell them the name of the show, its dates, what products you'll be showing, why it would benefit them to visit you, where you will be located, and the name, address, and telephone number of someone to contact for more information. The important thing about personal invitations is that: they are personal. The prospect feels cared for as an individual. Don't, therefore, send your invitations via bulk mail and don't stuff them full of product sheets and pricing information - Save that for the show.

One week after this initial letter, the contact person should follow up with personal phone calls, letters, and invitations to persuade the prospect to visit your booth. Don't be satisfied with a mere confirmation that they'll
visit the booth. Get even more personal and ask for an appointment. There are two very good reasons for doing this. First is commitment; they have an obligation to show up since they set an appointment. And second, the salesperson responsible for that prospect can arrange to be in the booth for that appointment. Such appointments are key to trade show success. If every salesperson books an average of four appointments per hour, then the show radiates success even before it opens. Primary goals are already accomplished; if anybody else comes into the booth it's a perk.

The personal invitation doesn't work all the time. Sometimes you have to be a little more creative to get your prospect's attention.

I tried, with no success, to make a trade show appointment with the president of a Fortune 500 corporation. Although I didn't have a problem getting him on the phone, he maintained that his show schedule was already packed and he couldn't possibly see me; he just didn't have the time. I was waiting for a flight from Los Angeles to Chicago a couple of weeks prior to the show when an idea came to me. I ran over to the flight insurance counter and took out an insurance policy. I made the president of that company the beneficiary, attached a "thinking of you:" note to it, and sent it to him. Two days later, after I returned from Chicago, he set the appointment. (Maybe he didn't want me to show up for the appointment.)

Telemarketing

So you don't have a big advertising budget. That's okay, it isn't necessary to spend a fortune to have an effective advertising campaign before a trade show because there are several different types of advertising available. Remember, as you plan, think "collective advertising" and spread your ad dollars over more than one vehicle.

If you currently use telemarketing in your marketing mix, then it will be easy to implement it in your preshow marketing plan. Simply compile a list of your target market and have your telemarketing staff phone for appointments six weeks prior to the show's opening.

If you do not use telemarketing in your business, you may be getting left behind. I strongly encourage you to learn about it through books, tapes, and the web. Visit our website at http://www.theadventure.com/
and seminars. A simple beginning, however, would be to compile your list of target prospects, then write a very simple script. Here is an example:

Hello, may I speak with Mr./Mrs./Ms.____________?

Good morning/afternoon Mr./Mrs./Ms.______________.

This is_________. I am calling for the Widget Manufacturing Company in Seattle. Are you planning to attend CONAGG/CONEXPO in Las vegas next month?

(Pause)

(If no) We're sorry to hear that. We were looking forward to showing you_____________. Will there be anyone else from your company whom we might be able to see?

(If no) Thanks anyway, Mr./Mrs./Ms. make sure you still receive information about the_____________. Goodbye.

(If yes to the first question) Great! We'd like very much to set up an appointment for you to visit our booth. Would Monday morning at 1:30 be all right, or would Tuesday afternoon at 2:00 be better for you?

(Pause)

(If they pick one) I've got you down to visit our exhibit on_____________. I'll put a confirmation in the mail. Thank you for your time, Mr./Mrs./Ms.______________

(If they don't want to set an appointment) I understand, Mr./Mrs./Ms._______________. Can we at least set up either Monday morning or Tuesday afternoon? (I've never been turned down for this.)

(Pause)
Fine, thank you so much. I'll pass on this information to Mr./Mrs./Ms.____________, who will be looking for you. Goodbye.

Such calls are very simple and shouldn't take more than a few minutes. If you can't spare anyone to make those calls, hire people for temporary work. Give them the list and the script. You can pay them hourly or, better yet, pay them per appointment made.

**Direct Mail**

Direct mail is a very popular tool used in preshow communications. Compile a list of current clients, known prospects, people who have requested product information in the last twelve months, and other likely sources. Again, you can add to the number of names by purchasing a list from a reputable broker, business association, or trade publication.

Follow the same plan as that designed for personal invitations; but instead of personal follow-ups, send two or three mailings beginning three months before the show, spaced three to four weeks apart. Include a small premium or incentive to encourage them to visit your exhibit. There are literally thousands of ideas available, so don't just fall back on the standard pencil, calendar, or keychain. Get out your local yellow pages and look up "Advertising Specialties" for a distributor near you; then go visit the showroom and explain your objective and budget. The distributor should have plenty of samples and catalogs for you to choose from. This is a specialized industry; let the distributor help you.

If you do plan to use a premium or incentive, be sure to give the advertising specialty distributor plenty of time (at least four to six weeks) to get the products for you. Also, expect to put a 50 per-cent deposit down on your order. Unless they've been working with you for some time, you probably won't get away from this.

Use your imagination when designing this series of mailings; obviously, the bigger your budget, the more options you have. A professionally produced audio tape inviting the prospect to visit you is a great idea. It's common practice for people to throw away junk mail before it's even read

(especially if it's bulk mail), but I've never heard of anyone automatically throwing away an audio tape received in the mail.

Maybe you don't have a budget that will cover audio tapes, yet need something eye-catching. When you run your series of ads in the trade publication, ask the publisher to run off an extra thousand copies of the page with your ad. It's inexpensive and you'll then be able to incorporate the ad in your direct mail campaign, including a note stating, "As seen in Widget Trade News."

**Fax**

Sending fax invitations can be a great way to contact your best prospects and customers. While fax machines probably have a short lifespan, it will still be a few years before they completely disappear.

There is still a bit of a stigma in sending an unsolicited fax you need to be sensitive to, though. Because sending a fax is fairly inexpensive, some companies go overboard. How many of us have had the fax machine taken up at 9:00 a.m. by an unwanted five-pager while we were actually waiting for something important? Several states have actually passed laws banning unsolicited faxes.

None of this is meant to discourage you. If you're going to send faxes to potential trade show attendees, just keep a couple of simple rules in mind:

- Keep it short. Don't make it longer than one page. Besides not tying up their fax machine, your prospect doesn't have the time, nor the inclination, to read anything longer.

- Send it at night. Again, you're not tying up their machine during the day. In addition, you're now going to be the first thing on their desk in the morning! Faxes sent at the right time can really be attention-getters.

**Email**

Fedex wasn't fast enough. We had to have fax machines. But even that wasn't fast enough. Now we've got email. Is this finally fast enough for us?
Using email for promoting our participation at trade shows can be a good thing. The thought of instantly sending hundreds or thousands of personal invitations with the push of one button gives one a great sense of power and effectiveness. But the truth is, we’re really a long ways away from accomplishing that.

Sure, we can type up an invitation and send it quickly through the Internet, America Online, or whatever mail server we have. The good news of email is that it doesn't cost a lot of money or time. It's basically a local phone call. And once you’ve compiled an email list of your top prospects and customers, they’re just a mouseclick away!

**Cyberspace**

As Nicholas Negroponte, of MIT's Media Lab, puts it, the essence of the information revolution is the difference between atoms and bits. The former are the building blocks for physical stuff, which until now has formed the basis of our physical communications. Bits are evanescent; a big word for something so small. But from something so small, we have created the information age and new way of communicating. More of our experience comes through the computer, and through modems, more of our contact with customers, prospects and suspects.

Will we be able to promote our own participation at trade shows through cyberpsace? Maybe yes, maybe no. The singular problem of using the I-Highway is exactly the same as using trade shows to reach our target market. With thousands of potential exhibits to visit, how will our prospects find us? Online services are the same thing. Unless someone already knows where we are and has a reason to connect with us online, we can't tell them to visit us at the trade show. Sort of a cyber-Catch 22.

Of course, if you already have a well-attended Website on the World Wide Web, then by all means use that opportunity to invite your online visitors to meet you in person at the exposition. You can use that opportunity to create a page with photos of new products that will on display in your booth. You can scan in and upload a map of the show floor with your own location highlighted and blinking. They can save and print an invitation to your hospitality suite. And they can even respond to an online survey about a new service you're planning on offering.

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Trade Publications

Trade publications are a good way to reach your target market; however, steer clear of show issues, especially if your ad budget is small. In the advertising world, it's better to employ frequency over size. That is, it's better to run a series of smaller ads for a few months before the show than to have a full-page, four-color ad in a show issue, even if the publisher passes out thousands of bonus copies at the show. A study conducted by Exhibit Surveys for the Trade Show Bureau shows booth traffic increases by about 40 percent for every four pages of preshow advertising. It's my opinion that the show issue doesn't get read until after the show, if at all. Attendees at a show don't arrive, pick up show issues, and then sit down to read them before visiting booths. They set their schedule before walking into the arena. Be a part of their schedule by utilizing trade publications early and frequently.

Advertising Specialties

Advertising specialties are the little giveaway items you see at every trade show, for which there are literally thousands of possible ideas. They can be one of the most powerful methods for creating brand awareness and name retention. At the same time, they are probably one of the most misunderstood and misused marketing tools available. The Advertising Specialty Institute was founded to help bring some semblance of order to a very confusing industry.

An item must meet three qualifications with regard to function, printed message, and price before it is defined as an advertising specialty.

Function

Those plastic bags given out by the millions at trade shows are a good example of an advertising specialty product. Their function is to hold things. They hold flyers, brochures, and other small giveaways. The problem with these bags is that they don't have a long life span. As soon as the stuff inside the bag is sorted through, the bag is tossed out. These have become increasingly popular in recent years, which means there are...

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probably several exhibitors at your show already doing this. Don't copy, innovate. I don't recommend plastic bags.

*Imprinted with a Logo or Message*

Every advertising specialty product will have a corporate logo or advertising message imprinted somewhere on its surface. Ways to imprint include silk screening, engraving, hot stamping, and printing.

*Reasonable Cost*

An advertising specialty product is usually fairly inexpensive. It's not unusual for one to cost just a few pennies. If you are planning to give every attendee walking by your booth a gift and there are 65,000 attendees, you don't want to spend very much. If, however, you're planning to give a nice gift to your top 100 customers at the show, you might want to spend a little more.

*Reasons for Using a Giveaway*

You might ask why you should use a giveaway. Although I'm not necessarily endorsing the use of advertising specialty products, I do feel there is a place for them in a marketing mix. And, quite possibly, the trade show is a good place for them. If you elect to use giveaways, select something that will stand out in the crowd, something that will help your prospect think of you.

**Personalize it.** Besides having your corporate logo on it, engrave the recipient's name, on it. It adds a special personal touch; also, people rarely throw out something imprinted with their name.

**Ensure high perceived value.** One company used Swiss Army knives as part of an elaborate giveaway in a promotional campaign aimed at presidents of companies that purchased heavy equipment. Although compared to a truck costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, a Swiss Army knife is inexpensive, the perceived value was high and the giveaway was a success because of the first-class campaign.

**Build in exclusivity by limiting distribution.** My wife worked for Walker Manufacturing Company, a division of Tenneco. The company
manufactures mufflers and catalytic converters. Like other automotive aftermarket companies, Walker uses several giveaway items—T-shirts, hats, knives, coffee cups, and jackets to name a few. They also use a special black jacket that everybody wants. Not everybody has it, however, because only a limited supply exists; it's become a special prize, a semi-status symbol among customers.

**Cloak it in celebrity status.** After Jack Nicklaus won the Masters with an oversized putter, a sales bonanza started for that particular brand. Everybody likes to have a product with such status behind it. If you can create status, capitalize on its value.

**Provide a name-brand product or something designed by a renowned person.** Imagine giving away copies of a Leroy Neiman specially painted for a customer's company. It would be even more successful if Neiman did the painting at the show.

**Make it fit the taste, position, and status of the receiver.** Some companies keep using little stick-on fuzzy birds at trade shows to promote their name. The problem comes when they stick one on a CEO's $1,000 Georgio Armani suit. Be careful and be sensitive to the receiver.

**Flatter the receiver.** Create subtle pats on the back that keep silently applauding and patting for years, and, of course, are seen by the right people. As an example: I have a paperweight in the shape of a star. I did a favor for a client and received it with my name engraved. It's proudly displayed on my desk for everybody to see. I've also seen companies use specially designed pens with the corporate logo imprinted as "medals of honor" for their salespeople. When somebody pulls out the special pen to write up an order, customers automatically know this salesperson is a winner.

**Add a twist.** At one medical trade show, a company offered free teddy bears to every pediatrician invited to view a sales presentation. More than 93 percent of the invitees responded. Can you imagine a huge line of doctors waiting to get their teddy bears?

**Select a usable, functional item.** Functionality gives the receiver a reason for keeping your gift handy. It works, and that's its reason for being. It doesn't exist solely for self-aggrandizement. I use a pocket shoe...
polisher as a giveaway. Because I stress the importance of well-shined shoes at trade shows, this is a natural for me. It is very functional and people really like it. In fact, it's so well-liked that I get calls for replacements!

**Present the gift politely.** Forcing a gift on someone defeats its purpose. Respect your attendees, even if they refuse your trinket. Not one of these ten tips is the ultimate answer for every problem. But the more of them that can logically be built into the marketing tool used, the better the probability that it will be kept. And that's the name of the game.

**Literature**

This is a big, fat sacred cow in the trade show world, so I’m going to spend a little ink discussing this. My advice on literature at trade shows is pretty simple.

**DON’T TAKE ANY! DON’T TAKE ANY!**

**DON’T TAKE ANY!**

**NADA! ZIP! ZERO!**

What, you don’t want to take my word for it? You want an explanation? Who’s the expert here?

Okay, okay. I’ll give you an explanation.

Let’s start with this. When an attendee takes your literature, where is the FIRST place they put it? (No, it’s not the waste basket. That’s the SECOND place they put it.)

Right away, they put your expensive brochure into their bag. What else is in that bag? That’s right. *Everybody’s else’s literature!* Is that blending in with the crowd or standing out from the crowd? Duh!

Next question. Who taught you to give out lots of literature? Ah yes, it was that guy across the aisle at your very first show!
Let’s face it. It really isn’t that important to arbitrarily pass out brochures and catalogs at your shows. Think about it:

**Expense.** The cost of printing brochures and flyers is astronomical. Look at each brochure as money. Do you really want to pass out money to anybody who asks for it? Of course not. When you just arbitrarily give away your literature, you can bet most of it will end up in the circular file. The cost of shipping literature is astronomical. Shippers charge you by weight and paper is heavy. Therefore, shipping is very expensive. Save your money.

**No attendee interest.** You don't want your expensive literature lost in the crowd. If the show is large, attendees may collect hundreds of pieces of literature. To avoid taking it back on the airplane, they’ll cull through it at the hotel, spending about 1.3 seconds on each brochure, selecting the ones that interest them the most (about seven flyers) and tossing the other 153 four-color catalogs in the trash. Even if the show is small, it’s still not practical to give out literature. No buyer wants to lug around a few pounds of unnecessary paper.

**Sending literature later is good business.** So how do you get valuable information to a hot prospect? Send it. Tell the prospect that you don't want to weigh her down with more literature, that you will send the requested information after the show. By doing so, you accomplish the following objectives:

First, you show how professional you are. By saying you're going to do something and then doing it, you show you are dependable. And, as Humphrey Bogart would tell you, "that's the beginning of a beautiful relationship: Second, you can personalize the follow-up with a letter. Mention some specific needs she brought out in your discussion; talk about something personal you remember from the show. Was she wearing a really sharp scarf? Did she mention playing golf? Referring to such things establishes a positive rapport. Last, it gives you a good reason to follow up by telephone. This technique creates a sense of obligation on the prospect's part to take your call. It's much easier to confirm that she received the requested material than to call out
of the blue and say you met at the show. Calling then gives you an open door for moving forward in the selling process. If you just arbitrarily give out literature, you're taking a big chance. If you call, she may or may not remember you, and she may or may not still have your literature.

**Trust.** Most people would agree that trust is the primary reason your clients and customer stay with you over a long period of time. But, if you don’t have a relationship with someone, then how do you get them to trust you? By doing something trustworthy. By promising you’ll send literature after a show and then actually doing it!

**Local Newspapers and Cable TV**

Some companies run ads in the business sections of local newspapers a day or two before the show opens. Be very careful to determine that this is a good idea before you commit to it, however. Trade show visitors travel greater distances than most companies think. A survey of regional and national shows revealed that 64 percent of all visitors traveled more than 200 miles to the show.

More and more large trade shows are broadcasting reports in convention hotels via cable TV. They often offer advertising at a fairly reasonable cost. More and more exhibitors are finding this to be a good way to attract attention during a show.

**Billboards**

At large national and international shows some companies use billboards to advertise booth location. Unfortunately, there isn't any way to quantify a return on this investment. It is simply brand-awareness advertising. Also, a billboard reaches everybody who drives by, not just your target market. Don't put your money into billboards, no matter how big you are. There are many more quantifiable ways of using your trade show promotion dollar.
City Show Guides

These are specialized visitor's guides distributed at trade shows; basically, they provide information on where to go and what to do in the convention city. The main problem with these is the same as with the trade publication's show issue. It's passed out during the show. Too late! Remember, you want the prospects to have you on their appointment calendar before they arrive at the show.

Wraparounds

Some magazines and newspapers will put an information piece designed to look like their cover around an issue (hence, wraparound). Because most attendees stay at one or two hotels, you can arrange for special delivery of these to attendees' rooms. This is a very eye-catching and tactical promotion, although there are three drawbacks. First, all the attendees at these hotels, whether they are your prospect or not, will get an issue. Second, it happens at the show -- probably too late. Last, it can be expensive.

There is a way to offset the first two drawbacks of this and some magazine publishers will comply with you on it. Have the wraparound designed several months in advance, then send the publisher the names and addresses of your target list. The publisher then sends your "special issue" out with the regular mailing.

Stuffers

A must. Design and print an inexpensive flyer announcing the show, its dates, your location, and what you'll be displaying. Then starting three months before the show, include it in every piece of mail (invoices, statements, letters, shipments, etc.) that leaves your company.
Publicity and Promotion

These are very powerful and often overlooked tools. Most small businesses don't even try to get publicity, when it's actually quite simple. You can do it yourself, too.

Newsletters

If you have a newsletter, this is a great way to announce your trade show participation. Your customers and prospects are already expecting it each quarter (or whenever). Prominently display the announcement and be sure to include the name and telephone number of a knowledgeable contact in your company.

Press Releases

The purpose of a press release is to communicate newsworthy information effectively. The contents vary. They may encompass, but aren't limited to, a new product, an improvement on an existing product, an industry breakthrough, new applications for current products, personnel changes. The key thing to remember about a press release is that it is not supposed to be an advertisement. Write it like a news story. Give all the pertinent information—who, what, where, when, why, and how—in the first paragraph. Then detail all other features and benefits.

A good press release is one page long, double spaced; it's short. At the top of the page, type For Immediate Release, or For Release on ________ (whatever date is applicable). Then write the headline and story. At the bottom of the page, type For further information, contact: _____ and provide your name, address, and phone number. An editor may want to contact you for more information in order to write an in-depth story. If a photo is available and applicable, include a sharp five-by-seven black-and-white print.

Send the release to all magazine publications at least three to four months prior to when you want it published. That's how far ahead magazines work on editorial content. Newspapers work on a much shorter time frame. Just a couple of weeks notice should be sufficient for them.

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Not all publications will use your releases. But if you get one or two printed, it's worth it.

**Trade Publications**

If you are an advertiser or potential advertiser, magazines will often write about your company, your products, and you. Although this practice is not recorded in any publishers' corporate policy statements, and many of them would vehemently deny it, the fact is, publishers stay in business by keeping their clients happy. A publisher can provide additional publicity at no cost to the advertiser. The magazine is going to have editorial pages, anyway; they might as well be used to promote advertisers (and their egos). Go ahead and ask for free publicity. Ask for it just before you sign the contract. The worst they can say is no; but the odds are you will receive some very good articles.

If you're not an advertiser, or if you run into one of those magazines whose salespeople don't talk with editorial people, you can still get publicity. Give a magazine a good reason to run your story. When talking to an editor, look for an angle that will appeal to the magazine's readership. Don't just suggest they write about you. Offer some unique information about your trade. Editors aren't in the business of giving away free publicity; they're in the information dissemination business: New trends. New breakthroughs. What's happening in the industry. Give them something to write about and they'll do so.

Sometimes an editor will tell you what type of story he's looking for. He knows the audience. Give him a story he'll be eager to print. An editor of a large trade publication told me that 80 percent of his ideas for stories come from outside sources. Help make his job easier and get some publicity in the process.

**Trade Show Seminars**

I'm not talking about attending them. I'm talking about giving them. Surveys have shown that one of the strongest attractions of trade shows are the educational sessions. By participating in these, you are not only exposed to more' prospects, but they see you as an expert.
Think about what knowledge you have that might be useful to the attendees. Then contact the show management and offer your services as a speaker. Ask what types of programs they look for or what the theme of the upcoming show is. You can then custom design a program for them or offer yourself for specific panel discussions. Be sure to do this nine to twelve months in advance of the show, since that's usually how far in advance they plan.

Although it's not always easy to be placed on the program list, it is possible. And once you've been selected, publicity follows. Not only are you able to capitalize on your presentation by promoting it through your own direct mail campaign, but the show will promote it too. And, of course, your friendly, neighborhood trade publication should also be interested in doing a follow-up story about the "expert."

**Be Creative**

It's important to remember that all preshow marketing plans should be designed with your specific show objectives in mind. Regardless of whether your objectives include sales, new leads, public relations, or product research, you want attendees to visit your exhibit. Be creative in your tactics. The following are some ideas to stimulate your creative juices.

*Show Badges*

If the show has preregistration through the mail, why not offer to handle registration for your customers and prospects? Arrange for all the badges and then mail them to customers and prospects with an invitation to visit your booth. You can drop a subtle, "Hey, look what we did for you, now you can do this for us." They'll stop by.

*Arrange for a Block of Hotel Rooms*

A client of mine in Las Vegas has been doing this for years during the Winter Consumer Electronics Show. Each year he sets aside a block of fifty rooms at one of the major hotels. He then offers these rooms as well as airport pickup service to top customers. The customer still pays for the room, but doesn't have to hassle with reservations or taxis. Some
customers even joke that they do business with my client just so they will have a room in Las Vegas each year! (An additional benefit from this is knowing where your top customers are staying during the show.)

**Trade Show Appointment Books**

Put together a pocket planner for prospects to use for scheduling appointments during the show. Send it to them about four to six weeks before the show. Be sneaky and fill in one of the time slots for a visit to your booth; they'll get a kick out of it and be there at the appointed time. If they can't make the appointment, they usually call to arrange another time. This planner can also be a great way to promote your products or services through photos and "ads:'

**Hold a Golf Tournament the Day before the Show**

It's not unusual for attendees to mix a little pleasure with business, especially if the show site is a nice one. One company I know in Southern California arranges a round of golf the day before the show opens at one of the top local courses. They turn it into a small tournament, and bring in a PGA tour player to mingle with the guests. The customers and prospects pay their own way for one extra day and have the time of their lives. Very little business is handled on the course, but every one of those attendees makes an appointment to visit the exhibit during the show.

**Trade a Book for an Appointment**

Have you written a book? One author I know, whose company exhibits at a lot of shows, offers an autographed copy of his book to everyone who visits the exhibit. People walk away with something they'll keep, and he walks away with a lot of leads.

**Close Your Booth**

For the last couple of years at the Super Show, Nike has closed their booth on the first day of the show and invited their 700 closest friends for a private showing of new products. This is at a show that attracts 100,000 attendees!
Think of the impact this strategy has. To the 700 invitees, Nike is saying, "You're special. In fact, you're so special, we're inviting you to be among the elite few who gets to see our new stuff first!" Image how those 700 people feel. Do you think they plan to continue buying from Nike?

And how about the rest of the show attendees? First of all, they want to get in there the second day of the show and see what everybody else saw. And secondly, they're thinking, "I'm going to be on that invited list next year."

Another reason for closing your booth might be because you have a very limited number of prospects attending the show and you want to keep everybody else out. At a recent Westec show, one small exhibitor cordoned off their exhibit and only targeted the 60 buyers who qualified for their target market. This allowed them to stay focused on these buyers and not be distracted by other attendees simply wandering through.

OTHER EXAMPLES:

• At one Comdex, Microsoft arranged for every hotel room in Las Vegas to have a silk-screened pillowcase put on the pillow. When the exposition guests then pulled back the bedcovers that night they saw the Microsoft logo and booth number.

• Too expensive, you say? The next year, Microsoft made a unique offer to the local cab drivers. When someone got in the cab, the driver was supposed to ask, “Have you been to the Microsoft exhibit yet?” If the cab’s customer was one of the top managers from Microsoft, he or she handed the driver a $500 bill on the spot. Guess how many people were asked THAT question during Comdex? The whole promotion cost less than $5000.

• Shortly after Jack Nicklaus won the Masters Championship, one of the divisions of Emerson Electric was preparing for a show. They were keenly interested in 50 key buyers, who all happened to be golfers. Nicklaus had won the Masters with a special oversize putter, so Emerson sent duplicate putters to the top 50 targets ... in three separate mailings. The first box had the grip. The second, the shaft. The third, the putter’s head. Included
in the third box was a note saying, “Stop by the Emerson booth and we’ll put it all together for you!” 48 showed up.

• At the International Manufacturing Technology Show, Allen-Bradley invited its top prospects and best customers for a night of billiards at an upscale pool hall in Chicago. They also hired Don Feeney, a billiards expert, to share tips and promote their products.

• Empire Communications sent a video of customer testimonials in a toxic waste disposal bag obtained from a local military surplus store. The video was accompanied by a letter inviting prospects to visit their exhibit with the message “Warning — this information may be TOXIC to your competitors.”

• Preparing for the Supermarket Industry Convention, Coca-Cola sent out oversized cardboard cutouts of their new contoured can to their top 700 customers. The top of the can had a flitop, which when pulled up, activated a tiny audio player sounding like a can opening.

• For the American Society of Training & Development Show, Gap International sent out live tree seedlings to targeted prospects, with the message, “We’ll help you GROW your business.”

• To separate themselves from the hospitality suite clutter at a banking industry exposition, Scopus Inc. held a “Party After the Party” for invites guests. The party was held at a local private club in a very quiet setting, featuring after dinner drinks and cigars.

• At the National Infomercial Marketing Association trade show, Williams Worldwide arranged with the main hotels to leave small boxes of Godiva Chocolates on attendee’s pillows (with a message from Williams Worldwide, of course).

• At a computer show, Live Pix set up a mock stunt stage, where attendees could their pictures taken looking like they were doing a major movie stunt.

• Talk about a culture clash. Anheuser Busch had Carmen Electra signing posters in their Supermarket Industry Convention exhibit, right next door.
to the Kraft booth with Regis Philbin. Guess who drew the biggest crowd? Regis! Shows that sex isn’t always the best selling tool.

- M&M Mars brought in the NASCAR stock car they sponsor for attendees to sit in.

- IntelliData had one-sheet floorplans delivered to prospects rooms at the Retail Delivery ‘97 trade show. If you brought that flyer with you to their booth, you received a free pair of boxer shorts.

- Several convention and visitors bureaus from different cities in South Carolina banded together to help promote the state. They each sent out a mailing to the pre-registered attendee list with one piece of a puzzle. If you brought all the pieces into their co-located booths, you’d be registered for drawing for a free trip.

- For the All Candy Expo, Bob’s Candy Company sent a wave mail campaign of three postcards. Each 5”X7” card featured bright red and white stripes, like their candy canes, with a mystery message to “Come and Get Striped!” The theme was carried throughout their exhibit in the exhibit design, the uniforms, and the hats they gave to visitors who mentioned the mailings.

- At the Electrical Apparatus Services Association show, Reliance Electric actually created a radio station, channel WREL 100.1 (with FCC approval). They gave away 2000 headsets pretuned to the station to qualified attendees who could listen while walking the show floor!

**WHERE DO YOU GET PROMOTION IDEAS?**

First off, you need to understand where NOT to get ideas. Do NOT look at your fellow exhibitors in the shows you’re currently doing or plan to do. Unfortunately, this is all too common. Think about the last show you went to. How many exhibitors gave away bags? If more than one exhibitor is handing out bags, or popcorn, or bottles of water, or keychains ... well, do you remember any of them?

As emphasized throughout this book, it’s critical you totally stand out from the crowd. I recommend you follow the advice of two very smart, yet
very different guys — Edwards Deming, father of Total Quality Management, and Jerry Garcia, of the Grateful Dead.

Deming made it clear in his teachings that “benchmarking” was a cornerstone of the entire TQM concept. Benchmarking, according to Deming, was the “act of observing correct behavior and then emulating within your own context.” He stressed that true benchmarking went far beyond just watching the best players within your own industry. In fact, Deming was critical of companies who limited their studies to their own markets.

By watching and emulating only other companies who do what you do, then you are falling into two traps. The first is the trap of following the leader. By emulating your competition, you’ll never get better than them. And the second trap is that you’ll only commoditize what you both produce. Everybody ends up looking alike and acting alike.

Jerry Garcia’s Grateful Dead were the world’s top money-making band for several years before he died. Yet they rarely produced a new album. Most of their income came from the steady string on concerts they gave to their devoted “deadheads.”

Garcia once said, “You don’t want to be considered merely the best of the best. You want to be the ONLY ones who do what you do.”

But where do you get new ideas? Actually, the answer is all around you:

*Other Trade Shows:*

Are you in the computer/high tech industry? Then start attending shows in totally different industries — food shows, sporting goods shows, medical shows, home shows, boat shows. What do you see that’s fairly common at those shows that’s not at yours? Working with an exhibitor for the Kitchen & Bath Show, we decided to add a video wall with demos of their products. We got the idea from the Consumer Electronics Show, where EVERYBODY has a video wall. But nobody had one at the Kitchen & Bath Show. (Well, at least for that first year. The next year there were SIX video walls.)
Spend time at your Local Mall

What’s a major mall anyway? It’s just a permanent trade show that’s open to the public.

Walk through the mall with new eyes. Look at each store as if it were an exhibit. What do they do to draw you in. What catches your eye? Look at the ads in your local newspaper and see how they get you to hop in your car and head down to the mall.

Visit Las Vegas or Atlantic City

Who does a better job of promoting themselves than Vegas or Disney? What can you learn just by observing? Walk the strip in Vegas and see how the casinos pull you in. Walk through the casinos and see how they pull you into their games. What incentives and goodies do they offer to entice you?

Be Like Disney World

Take a long look at Disney. They hit you from all sides — TV, movies, radio, merchandise, promotional tie-ins with McDonalds ... and that’s just BEFORE you get to their theme parks! When you fly into Orlando, they start Disneyizing you the moment you get off the plane. The tram ride to baggage claim is narrated by the same voice you hear throughout the Magic Kingdom. When you walk through Disney World, Epcot, Pleasure Island, Animal Kingdom, or any of their other properties, you are hit from all sides. Even while standing in line for an attraction (they don’t call them rides), you are entertained and encouraged to have fun and SPEND MONEY.

Also, look at how Disney promotes an upcoming movie. By the time it comes out, you’ve been immersed in its story, toys, and you already know every character. Sort of like preparing for a trade show? Wouldn’t you like everybody to have your company name on their lips when they arrive at the convention center?

Walk through your local supermarket

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Again, like a mall, these are just trade shows in different form. You’ve got aisle of merchandise, all screaming for your attention. They get you with eye-catching shapes and colors. What new ideas can you get from all this? Getting ready for a construction industry trade show, one company found rock candy at their supermarket. A natural tie-in, don’t you think?

*Other sources*

Like I said, your sources for new ideas are all around you. You just have to open your eyes and look for them. The next time you go through your mail, ask yourself what catches your attention and why? How can you borrow that idea and emulate it within your trade show promotions?

**HOW DO YOU GET PROMOTION IDEAS?**

It’s on thing to hang out at the local mall or in Las Vegas. But the actual task of brainstorming, generating a new idea from an old one is difficult. But there are methods. I’m not about to get into a huge discussion on creative thinking. There are plenty of great books for that. But let me offer a thumbnail approach you can use.

The first thing I would suggest is that you start an Idea File. You can use a large envelope or set up a file cabinet. The basic idea here is to collect and keep all those great examples you come across. Keep those direct mail pieces you particularly liked. Tear out those magazine ads that caught your eye. Make it a habit of keeping your eyes and ears open for promotional examples. Did you hear a funny promotion on your favorite radio station? What’s the latest promo being done by your local bed and mattress store. ( Heck, they’re ALWAYS doing promotions!)

A great time to watch for big promotions is during some type of holiday. President’s Day. Easter. Memorial Day. Fourth of July. Halloween! All the holidays are fodder for research.

Do you have a local professional or semi-professional team? Sports is another great place to gather examples.

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Make it a habit to collect these examples and get a boatload of them. Then, when it’s time to actually start brainstorming for your own promotional idea, you’ll have lots of fodder.

There’s a brainstorming tool I use that always works for me. I call it the IDEA GRID. Below is an example of an Idea Grid.

Here’s how the IDEA Grid works:

First, you take out your Idea File and spend some time going through it, taking out nine different types of promotional tools. For example, you might come with this list:

- golf balls
- a drawing for a trip
- a contest that pays all your bills for one year
- free ice cream
- sightseeing tour
- personalized stationery
- baseball hats

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Now randomly write each of these into a separate box in your Idea Grid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Golf balls</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
<th>Contest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Tour</td>
<td>Stationery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hats</td>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Knife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now write down the numbers 1, 2, and 3 on separate pieces of paper and put them in a small box or envelop. Draw a number out. Let’s say that it’s the number 3. In the first column on your grid go down to the third square and circle it. In our example, it’s “baseball hats.”

Put the number back in the box. Mix the numbers up again and draw. Let’s say this time it’s the number 1. In the second column, circle the first box. In our example, that would be “drawing for a trip.”

Repeat again for the third column. Let’s say you draw the number 3 again. You would circle “Swiss Army Knife.”

Now, let’s look at the three we’ve chosen:

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baseball hats
drawing for a trip
Swiss Army Knife

What brand new idea can we come up with that somehow is stimulated by those three items?

The trick here is to not go with the obvious. Our first reaction might be to say that we'll have all of our staffers wearing baseball hats with the corporate logo, inviting attendees to come in for a drawing for a trip. If they just fill out the qualifying card, they get a Swiss Army knife.

Now, that might be a great promotional idea. And it might work. But the idea is to see how many different promotional ideas you can come up with using that combination. The more you try to come up with, the more really unique, interesting and catchy promotions you can get.

You don’t want to go with your immediate reaction. In fact, you should make every attempt to go far beyond the obvious answer. That's how you get really creative.

A great way of getting yourself to think out of the box is to follow the formula SCAMPER. SCAMPER is a checklist of idea-stimulating questions. Some of the questions were first created by Alex Osborn, a leading creativity teacher. Then a gentleman named Bob Eberle arranged the questions into the SCAMPER mnemonic.

S - substitute
Can you substitute a different word, item, approach, or process?

C - combine
Can you combine some of the elements to form something totally new?

A - adapt
What other ideas does this suggest or what other process/item can be adapted?

M - magnify or modify
How can you exaggerate this, or make it bigger/longer/faster? How can you change your idea or add a new twist to it?

P - put to another use
How can use this idea in a different way?

E - eliminate
Is there something that can be taken away or made smaller. Can I split it up into new ideas?

R - rearrange
What other arrangement might be better or give me new ideas?

To give you a brief example, one of our three items is “drawing for a trip.” The word “draw” can mean different things. You can draw a name from a hat. You can draw a picture. You can draw a gun out of your holster in a gunfight. You can play a game to a draw. You can draw a crowd. Get the picture? By using the Idea Grid and SCAMPER, you can develop an innovative new promotional concept!
That’s All Folks!

Hopefully, this little book has given you some new ideas for creating effective and profitable promotional tools for your next trade show. It just can’t be emphasized enough. You MUST have some type of promotional effort going on. You can’t simply go to a trade show, put up your booth, and then sit around expecting people to flock into your exhibit! It just isn’t going to happen.

Trade shows can be the single best marketing tool your company uses all year. But make no mistake about it. They’re hard work!

There are many aspects to planning a truly effective and profitable trade show experience. This book has only covered one of them.

To get information on other aspects of successful trade show planning, I recommend you get my other two books:

**OVER 88 TIPS & IDEAS TO SUPERCHARGE YOUR EXHIBIT SALES**

Written for booth staffers, this quick-read, easy-to-implement book is a great education for new staffers and refresher for experienced staffers.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF TRADE SHOWS**

Written for the exhibit manager, this book covers the nuts and bolts of exhibit marketing.

You can order both books through our website at www.theadventure.com.
ABOUT Steve Miller

Steve Miller is a strategic marketing consultant specializing in the trade show industry. He works with show management to develop better shows and enhance long-term relationships with exhibitors, as well as helping corporations more profitably exhibit at trade shows. Working his first trade show at age 16, Steve has since built a reputation for achieving exceptional results for his clients through innovative, results-driven techniques. His clients include the Food Marketing Institute, the International Housewares Association, CONEXPO-CON/AGG, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Association for Manufacturing Technology, Coca Cola, Dana Corporation, Volvo, and Cincinnati Milacron, to name a few.

Maintaining an elite client base, Steve has personally consulted for over 100 international, national, and state organizations, as well as speaking to over 175,000 consumer and trade show exhibitors around the world. He is the author of four books, including his first, How to Get the Most Out of Trade Shows, now in its third edition, which has been published and distributed throughout North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. His articles and video educational products have been featured in over 250 publications, including Fortune magazine, Fast Company, the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Sales & Marketing Management, Success, Expo, and Business Marketing. He has also been a regular for PCMA's Convene and TSEA’s ideas magazines.

Today's presentation focuses on Steve's philosophy and techniques that have proven effective in achieving exceptional results. Of course, your questions and comments are welcomed and encouraged throughout this session. Thank you for being here today!

Steve Miller, President
The Adventure LLC
32706 - 39th Ave. SW
Federal Way, WA  98023

Telephone  253-874-9665
Fax  253-874-9666
WWW  www.theadventure.com

Interested in Steve speaking to your team?
He can help you achieve higher ROI at your next event
through a customized and motivational presentation prior to the show!
Contact Kay at The Adventure LLC at the phone number above, or via email -
kay@theadventure.com.

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