



STRATEGIC PLANNING &  
IMPLEMENTATION ASSOCIATES, INC.

## The BIG Trade Show Problem – and How To Fix It Getting An ROI From A Trade Show

By  
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Attending or exhibiting at a trade show, conference or convention can be one of the most productive and successful vehicles to:

- Take orders from existing customers/clients
- Build new relationships with prospects that could become customers/clients
- Educate clients/prospects on the company, its products/services and its Unique Selling Proposition (USP)
- Conduct market research to check-out competitors (known and new to the game) – identify products/services which might be appropriate to your company
- Test market new products/services
- Identify potential partners who might enhance the company's ability to grow market share in markets near and far.

We find that *exhibitors or attendees frequently shoot themselves in the foot* by not preparing a show project plan.

For example, where appointments with existing customers and new prospects can be made far in advance of a show, often there's little effort made to coordinate such meetings. Where management and line staff can be assigned responsibilities to cover specific elements of a show, the plan is never created – thus the trade show/conference becomes an exercise in "spontaneous" time management (smile).

Instead of an opportunity to build an ROI, trade shows/conferences are frequently seen as a social event, a place where the company's "flag" is seen, and a chance to rub-elbows with the "players" in the industry

A very savvy trade show exhibition company executive recently told me that Trade Shows were intended to generate substantial ROI for both exhibitors and attendees. That's a fine idea but I'm told by a large percentage of the people who actually attend them that they're anything BUT.

I'm betting that you've probably attended or exhibited at trade or tabletop shows in the past. Many business

owners and salespeople have. Here's what one marketing executive had to say to me last week:

"Craig, our sales force either attended or exhibited at 32 tradeshow last year. Out of all of them, all we got was 979 random business cards. Out of the 979 cards that we got – WE DIDN'T SELL ANYTHING. The money to go to those shows came out of my marketing budget, we have no return on investment and the CFO is asking me why."

At SPIA, we don't have that problem. We have systems set up so that we get the absolute maximum from all of our trade/table top show opportunities. In fact, we have found that trade/table top shows are one of the best ways for us to develop business!

Here's the problem that is costing exhibitors and attendees thousands of dollars every year:

1. Companies pay a lot of money to exhibit at the show.
2. Companies think of a free drawing for their booth.
3. They put out that wonderful "fishbowl" at their booth to get cards for that drawing.
4. The people working the booth smile a lot at people walking by.
5. Those same people watch UNQUALIFIED people put their cards in that fishbowl.
6. The show ends, a "winner" is drawn and the remaining cards get wrapped up with a rubber band.

*The killer is - not only are the cards unqualified - but no one decides to call them anyway after the show!*

My question is "Why bother attending the show in the first place? Save yourself a lot of money and time. You very rarely get anything from the show and continue to follow the same money losing process over and over! After all, you've got all the revenue you need and who cares about the money spent on the booth. It's part of doing business – right? WRONG!

**This problem is absolutely HUGE and 99% of all businesses have it!**

Don't make me talk about the issue of you attending a show and filling that wonderful plastic bag full of "stuff" and putting it under your desk once you get back to your office only so you can throw it away 6 months later.

There are three stages to the process of generating a ROI from a Trade Show:

1. Pre-Show Planning
2. The Show Working Plan
3. The Follow-up Plan

### **Pre-Show Planning**

Getting ready for a trade show entails creating a project plan complete with a schedule, action items and a tracking monitoring process to make sure that the plan is followed. That really requires that a TRADE SHOW/ CONFERENCE Coordinator/Manager be appointed whose responsibility is to make sure the show achieves its goals (ROI).

Approximately 6 weeks out from the start of the show, a show strategy should be created – quantifying what goals are to be achieved. Each step required to accomplish the goal and the person (or persons) who the step is assigned indicated, trained/mentored, and the function completed.

These potentially could include:

- Identify who from the company will be attending/exhibiting and assign booth coverage responsibilities according to the show plan.
- Coordinate travel arrangements (if appropriate) for attendees/exhibit staff including flights/hotel/rental car(s) if appropriate
- Requesting appointments with targeted attendees – categorizing them in the order of their importance to the success of the trade show.
- Requesting appointments with Exhibitor Executives - categorizing them in the order of their importance to the success of the trade show
- Mapping out & targeting what events and exhibit booths/stands are to be visited and the goal for each visit
- A follow-up process identified if a particularly important target company/executive has not responded to request the appointment
- Make sure the trade show booth is up-to-date and reflective of the message you wish to communicate
- Determine what collaterals, ad specialty items (including the “good ol’ plastic bags” (smile) are to be brought and make sure there is a sufficient supply on-hand or reorder.
- If you are going to meet suppliers, independent manufacturers reps or equal and plan on an event to motivate them to sell more or educate them on new products, be sure to create a “meeting plan” similar to the above.

### **Show Working Plan:**

Much as we did above, create a *SHOW WORKING PLAN* for everyone attending. Keep in mind the functions, seminars, social/networking events and, of greatest importance, those appointments you worked so hard to get. A schedule should be generated for everyone who is going to the show.

During the show, the show coordinator should track and monitor each member of the trade show team to make sure that the effort is gaining traction and getting results.

### **Follow-up Plan:**

A debriefing is needed once everyone returns to the office to determine how effectively the trade show met or exceeded the intended goals/expectations.

A follow-up plan using Salesforce Automation Software (sales campaigns) to reconnect with targeted accounts and make sure that there is an action plan to ensure that opportunities identified at the show are converted into \$'s.

Approximately 30-45 days following the show, the show coordinator should meet with the marketing executive and review the results, determine what could have been done differently to get better results and start to measure the ROI that's starting to flow from the show.

### **Recap**

If you create a show plan, manage the processes identified in this article, you will get an ROI from the effort.

For more information and practical hints to help your company develop a Trade Show Marketing Plan that generates a ROI, contact Craig by calling him at (978) 640-0803 or emailing him at [cstimmel@spiainc.com](mailto:cstimmel@spiainc.com). SPIA has a very rich website where more information is also available: [www.spiainc.com](http://www.spiainc.com) – blog: <http://blog.spiainc.com> The highest compliment I can receive is the referral of friends, family and business associates. Thank you for your trust.