



## Make Your Booth “Best in Show”

By Joanne Ireland, President of Ireland Presentations

Trade shows can be viewed as a necessary evil, or as a golden opportunity. Given the amount of time, effort and money that goes into exhibiting at a trade show, our vote is to see it as an opportunity to make a big impact on a large number of people, all at once. With this in mind, it makes sense to make the exhibit the best it possibly can be. Not just best, but Best in Show. Here are some secrets to ensuring that your booth draws attention from prospective customers – in the best way!

### **Location, location, location!**

Pick the best location you can. Look at the trade show floor plan in advance and identify several locations you feel would be ideal. Keep in mind that your competition will probably be somewhere nearby, so decide which available location will bring the most traffic, yet allow you to have conversations with prospects that will not easily be overheard by competitors.

Whether you have a tabletop display, 10x10 booth, 20x30 or larger, there are ways to optimize your location to ensure maximum traffic. Carefully choose your spot where you expect to see the most traffic. Do you want to be close to the food and beverage locations, since so many people will pass by? Or near an entrance/exit door, on a main aisle, close to a partner booth, a corner location so you have traffic from two sides, next to the lounge or the press briefing center?

Take a look at the map of the tradeshow floor and identify two or three desirable locations. Remember that all exhibitors are looking at the same locations, so you may not get your first choice – be prepared to be happy with your other choices. The most important thing to remember is that you want to be in the best place possible to maximize traffic by your booth.

### **Design your booth with the audience in mind**

Do something a little different. If you have a 10x10 popup booth amid a sea of 10x10 popups, try to make your booth stand out. Consider a canopy, a stark white color scheme, a graphic that pops, or a theme (such as a sports theme) that will create buzz. Even if you have a larger booth, make sure you design it with the visitor in mind. Will visitors be able to see your awesome signage? From all sides? Is the plasma display too big to be seen while inside the booth? If so, is there space outside the booth to watch the show?

Know the environment, the placement of food and beverage stations in the hall, the location of pillars, and most of all, the location of your competition. Understand the flow and traffic patterns, to ensure that whenever a visitor arrives, from any location, they will notice your booth for the right reasons.

### **A simple, clean, inviting booth**

Have you ever packed for a vacation, and realized you could only take one suitcase? You try to cram in as much as you possibly can! The same thing happens when trying to decide what to put into the booth – exhibitors treat it like that solitary suitcase. Remember, as with anything related to marketing, less is more.

If you have an inline 10x10 booth, forget about bringing in tables, brochure stands, seating, etc. Keep it simple: a popup at the back of the space, a counter near the front, and a place to keep a small quantity of collateral material. Bring just the number of booth personnel who can fit comfortably in the booth and can handle attendees effectively. The same holds true with large island booths. Bring only what is necessary to make the biggest impact. Some of the most striking exhibits are those that are clean and clutter-free, so that the compelling marketing message really stands out.

One more tip: monitor your space from time to time. There is nothing that says “unprofessional” like cups and papers that have been left on conference tables or next to demo stations. If excess collateral material has been taken out, replace it in the racks and make sure that the racks are presentable. Run a polishing cloth over screens, demo countertops and conference tabletops. Make sure your booth is inviting and appealing at all times.

### **Keep your message simple!**

You only have a couple of seconds to grab an attendee’s attention. Again – keep it simple! Figure out the one most compelling message that best represents what you need to convey during this show: the benefits of your solution. Make that message the biggest, most impressive thing people will see. You should display, at most, one or two secondary messages at demo stations or in other areas of the booth, but they should support the main message and not fight it.

Don’t fall victim to the “spray and pray” approach in which you throw up a variety of messages, hoping one of them will resonate with the visitor. Forget it – they won’t see anything but information overload or wonder what it is you actually do or sell – and will walk by.

Use color and light to make your message pop. Often using a large area of one color with just one splash of a contrasting color will be attention-getting. And stark white, with one or two bold colors, is clean and compelling.

### **Make use of the critical first minute with a prospect**

Train your booth staff to proactively make eye contact, smile, and engage the visitor. It’s worth actually scripting two or three introductions. How many times have you approached someone at a booth, only to have them ask “Are you enjoying the show?” What a silly question – it does not engage, qualify or educate the visitor! In contrast, with a set of scripted introductory questions or statements, your staff will be able to quickly grab the attention of visitors and

understand who they are, what role they play, and what their needs are. In this way, they can zero in on true prospects and make the show worthwhile.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, a trade show can be an expensive proposition, so take the time to make sure it pays off in the end. Don't settle for second-best when a bit of focus on the location, design, cleanness and cleanliness, messaging and, especially, human interaction can make your booth best in show.

### **About the Author:**

Joanne Ireland, a 20 year veteran of the meeting and event planning industry, is Founder and President of Ireland Presentations, a meeting, conference and event planning company based in San Francisco. Joanne is one of San Francisco's leading consultants in planning, coordination & management of conferences, meeting & events. Her expertise is design, project standards/content, conceptualization & design of project strategy, and contract negotiations. Joanne and her team continue to produce successful events and meetings for a wide range of corporate and non-profit clients both large and small, domestically and abroad. More about Joanne and Ireland Presentations can be found at [www.irelandpresentations.com](http://www.irelandpresentations.com).

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