



Tips from the Pros: Taming the Trade Show

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In a down economy, many companies respond to falling revenues by cutting and even eliminating travel and development budgets.

That often means pulling the plug on events and meetings including trade shows, incentive programs and customer events.

A more effective strategy requires a counter-intuitive approach. The minute a long-time player disappears from the scene, its customers, prospects and competition assume the company is in trouble financially. Yet it's during tough times that savvy companies large and small can capture significant chunks of market share.

The important thing to remember is that companies can, and must, continue to do business as usual. That means continuing a marketing strategy with events and meetings that has proven successful in the past. The biggest challenge now is to do them with a lower budget and a cost-conscious appearance, yet still reap good results. To accomplish that goal, planners must find the right resources and think in innovative ways. Trade shows are just one area where, through careful strategizing, you can cut costs and still maintain a presence.

Think "Event," Not "Booth"

There are tremendous opportunities to make an impact at a show, and they don't all depend on booth size. If you downsize to a smaller piece of real estate, you will save money yet still having a presence (as long as you do so before committing to a booth space, otherwise penalties may outweigh the savings).

Use some of the money saved to rent a hotel suite and set up private meetings with customers and prospects. If budget allows, do a small, late-afternoon event at the suite: invite prospects, industry analysts and the press, and arrange for one of your executives and a customer to give short presentations while you provide hors d'oeuvres and drinks.

Reducing and streamlining booth staffing is another way to save. Instead of sending multiple teams to work the space for three or four hours at a time, try sending just one team to staff the booth the entire time the floor is open, with reasonable breaks scheduled in. Make sure team members are clear on this concept, and have a booth manager on site to oversee the company's investment during the show. -*Joanne Ireland, president, Ireland Presentations*

Negotiate on Audio-Visual Services

You can certainly negotiate price nowadays for technical support. Before, it was a fixed kind of thing. Big exhibitors have more leverage, of course. Another way to save is on power costs. Instead of buying power individually, provide your own power panel and cords. You will still have to have an electrician lay down the cords, but you won't be paying \$300 per 15-amp circuit. For a big booth with multiple pods and pedestals, that could save you \$5,000 in one pop. When I worked for Sun Microsystems, my team had six power kits. We had cords of all lengths, and panels and adaptors to connect with the hall source. You have to be adaptable, or you'll be dinged with a connector charge. -*Stephen Greenberg, president, SJG Services*

Stage a Drawing to Attract Visitors

Don't waste money on giveaways like candies or pens that have limited value in building brand awareness. Instead, consider buying one high-value item such as a Wii, an iPod or a similar item, and make a poster that prominently promotes the giveaway. Invite visitors to enter a drawing for the item, giving you a chance to discuss your product's fit for their needs. -*Tanya Candia, president, Candia Communications*

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