
July 2010 | Exhibition Guru

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So, what are we selling again?

I have just finished a round of shows and what really hit home was how different industries sell. The old marketing adage to 'sell the benefit not the feature' really stood out. But what stood out even more was that people want to do business with people they like, relate to and connect with.

So this month I thought I would share some of the things I saw and what they actually did to CONNECT and ENGAGE with visitors. These were all about forming a relationship which, if they didn't get business there and then, created a link for the future that would be remembered.

An exhibition produces different aspects of relationships when it comes to sales: there are the ones you make there and then, and the ones that are made over the next 12 months as a result of the exhibition. You are also reconfirming why people do business with you – and why they want to.

At the largest trade travel event in Australia recently, they touched and connected buyers on multiple points. You see, this event is a bit different; they have scheduled appointments, however they are also all bidding for buyers' attention and business.

One of the things that jumped out straightaway was the use of coffee, fresh fruit and small snacks during the day – free, for anyone who wanted them – and a number of states competed to own an aspect of this way of getting loyalty. WA, for example, provided coffee the state produces, which is Dome. Qld also offered coffee but had a noodle bar as well – just a foam cup, add water! And, NSW put on bacon & egg rolls of a morning. These all ensured a following.

Then you have the 'happy hour'. This is even more about selling the states' produce and rounds out the total offering.

But it's not just food and drink that get attention.

In a first – for me – Northern Territory Tourism had photos produced in 3-D. Here, a little landscaped area themed with red soil, rocks and grasses etc, complete with a viewing platform, provided the setting in which a screen was hung. The 3-D glasses were mounted on a handrail on the platform that tied it all together. It was unreal – and a sign of what's to come.

On another stand, the use of an illustrator and artist drew a lot of attention (pardon the pun!). The illustrator had an A4 page with a scene pre-drawn on which he did quick character drawings of visitors. They lined up – and not only got a drawing, but it also provided a lot of entertainment for those waiting and watching!

The painter was another clever ploy, as it wasn't only the images of Australia he did that got a lot of attention (it was, after all, an event selling Australia), but also buyers at the event were able to enter a competition to win the finished work.

The other aspects were the free gifts and gimmicks they gave away. Whilst the usual DVD featured again, USBs pre-loaded with information and pictures showed how much technology was being used. These came in all kinds of forms and finishes from those mounted in an enviro-friendly bamboo, standard silver or odd-shaped frame, to a credit-card-style unit. What was also interesting was that most could be deleted for reuse, although some set the USB as non-delete.

One of the quirkiest things was a small brooch-like electronic picture frame. This was pre-loaded with images that ran continuously. However, although I found it quite captivating on one hand, I also found it really distracting. At networking functions such as morning-tea breaks, they were probably good as conversation-starters, but during a serious meeting, I personally think it would work against you as it is so off-putting.

The final aspect was how people dressed. This event had it all. On the first day, one company came dressed in pyjamas and strong-pink dressing gowns with the logo embroidered on them – and, of course, slippers! Did they get attention? Indeed, yes! But is that something you can sit opposite and talk serious business? I, personally, don't think so. It's one thing to be clever, but I believe you need to focus on why you are there and what you are trying to achieve. This event was focused on writing business rather than flag-waving and getting attention. Others had polo shirts with slogans and the various states' logos embroidered on them, and all this linked to signage and electronic presentations running in the area.

Well, there you have it – some of the great ideas that were used to connect and engage.

IN A NUT SHELL:

The lesson is not to lose sight of what the ultimate goal is. It's easy to get carried away and forget why you are there.

The other message is that, to sell a product or service, sometimes it's just as important to connect in other ways and stimulate the senses – the more you connect, the greater the long-term results.

See you on the floor with maybe a different approach to the usual one!