
June / July 2013 | Exhibition Guru

EXHIBITIPS JUNE / JULY 2013

CALLING IT AS I SEE IT. 39 OF THE MOST COMMON EXHIBITION MISTAKES.

You can probably imagine that over 30 years I have seen it all; companies that meticulously work through every aspect of their participation at an event, right through to those whose mistakes leave you wondering, 'why did they even bother to turn up?'.

I have always said exhibiting needs to be well planned; a journey that joins the dots, so to speak. So this month I thought we could look at some mistakes I have seen over the years and continue to see today. They are in no particular order but they cover mistakes that have been made prior to, during and following the event.



Careful what you say!

It's interesting to see how much damage just one exhibitor's careless throw-away lines can do to their stand, their product and other colleagues at an event.

It's funny, but at two shows in recent months we've had feedback from both exhibitors and visitors citing comments about the shows. These comments were traced back to an exhibitor. In all cases they were complete hogwash, serving no purpose other than to dampen the visitors' experience. The comments also more than likely impacted on visitors' spend at the event.

It's great to strike up conversations that don't need to relate directly to your product, as it eases the visitor, making them feel more comfortable. However, be careful what you say.

An opening line could be something like, "is it hot outside/raining/where did you travel from?" An opening line shouldn't be about how much you pay for your space or how many units you need to sell, or discussing how another exhibitor has an inferior product and is ripping people off!

The buyer is more aware and informed than ever before on pricing and product information, so bagging out any aspect of the show to other exhibitors and visitors just derails the event for everyone.

My best rule of thumb is *two ears, one mouth*.



1. No planning. This is fundamental. It has to be the starting point.
2. Selecting the wrong show.
3. Not appointing one person who is responsible to oversee, and partake in, the whole process from start to finish.
4. Failing to set objectives that are achievable and measurable and having tactics on how to implement them.

5. Poor budgeting – this falls into two groups: 1) not setting a budget; and 2) trying to do it à la French champagne on a beer budget!
6. No integrated program preceding or following the event. You can't leave it to chance – customers need to know you're there. But you need a promotional plan in place that links your customers to your presence before, during and after the event. It's a bit like having a party and not sending any invitations to it!
7. Poor stand design. Not thinking about the customer or how they get onto the stand.
8. Booking the wrong sized stand – either cramming it all onto a space that's too small, or looking uninviting with a stand that's too big.
9. Exhibiting without a billboard message. If you don't have a sign that grabs their attention and clearly states the benefits, you're not telling them why they should step up to your stand.
10. Poor quality display material. Using support material that looks like it was dragged to the show.
11. Graphics that you can't read due to size and font selection.
12. Doing the 'same-old-same-old'. People want to see and learn about new things.
13. Not focussing on what's new.
14. Failing to take advantage of the free stuff like educational workshops at the event and pre-show publicity.
15. Not paying attention to deadlines and missing opportunities, or having to pay more for services because of missed deadlines.
16. Failing to include activity that will build a database for ongoing customer communication.
17. Rushing the process of filling out forms then filling them out incorrectly.
18. Poor staff selection for your stand.
19. Not training the staff to understand the objective of the stand's presence at the event. Also not ensuring they understand the stand rules for eating and drinking, personal appearance and presentation expectations.
20. Not working as a team. Staff need to complement each other, not work against each other. Not planning breaks to cover the busy periods can lead to staff becoming exhausted and unhelpful.
21. Not identifying the target audience, understanding what information you need from them and they need from you.
22. Not balancing your time. You can't possibly speak to every visitor, but in order to maximise your hit rate, you need to have a pitch to ensure your targets are being met, and you have techniques in place to move people on who are time-wasters.
23. Underestimating your customer. The growth of social media means they have access to a global source of information from specifications, price points and so much more.
24. Not being prepared to change and adapt. If it's not working the first day, seek input from the organisers and be prepared to change your stand around. Who said it was set in stone and couldn't change for the next day?
25. Not using social media whilst at the event as a driver to your stand and finding ways to allow visitors to capture your details through things like QR codes.
26. Having poor lighting on the stand. This is one of the most common mistakes.
27. Not planning for items to be re-used, whether at another event, back at the office, etc. Consider what you can donate to a charity as well – it's a good news story which you can share on the stand.

28. Not following up leads in a timely manner.

29. Failing to have a planned activity that starts with event pre-promotion and rolls on for six months after the event closes.

30. Forgetting to take pictures or make notes of what worked well and what you would change next time. Also failing to look around and note things that other stands have done that could be massaged into ideas for your stand next time.

31. Blaming the organiser, government, weather and other exhibitors for any failure. The person responsible for the stand has a lot of influence over the results and blaming others isn't constructive, nor is it going to help achieve better results next time.

32. Forgetting to have fun and smile. If you're enjoying yourself, visitors will gravitate to you and more importantly they will remember you and your product/company. Smiling is infectious.

33. Not seeking feedback or getting a debrief from the staff and (if possible) visitors. This insight will help shape future shows.

34. Forgetting 'two ears one mouth' – you need to listen and accept others' perceptions and perspectives.

35. Not rebooking the same site. By rebooking the same site you have trained visitors to know where to find you and it's surprising how many remember from year to year.

36. Forgetting to create a scrapbook file for next time.

37. Not having a Plan B. Consider the 'what if' from staff turning up, graphics being damaged, event material going missing, etc.

38. Forgetting to celebrate the success with the team. Ensure they know what was achieved and the role they played in it. Maybe do this over a morning tea or lunch.

39. Not starting to plan the next one before the previous one is over!

An event will be as good as you make it. If you can avoid as many of the above points as possible it will be reflected in your results.

See you on the floor,

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