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**March 2011**

## **ARE YOU READY FOR CHANGE?**

More than ever it's important to stand apart from your competitors. What's the sense of looking like them and acting like them? You may as well be them or even not exist!

Ironically, by not being different, you might well find that, eventually, you really don't exist.

Too often, exhibitors have no real plan for participating in an event and in some cases, exhibit for all the wrong reasons. More importantly, like all aspects of business, there needs to be an annual review of how the market may have changed and what you need to do to capitalise on it.

Trade shows and fairs have existed for hundreds of years but things nowadays are much more complicated than simply setting out your goods for sale. Exhibiting today is a marketing tool that showcases your company's products and services in a three-dimensional manner and this has long-lasting links to your customer.

In recent years, communication has changed dramatically. This is the age of sound bites, text messages and brief email notes. Generation X and Y have short attention spans and are not necessarily touched by traditional advertising methods, while social networking has an enormous reach with many people feeling compelled to belong to some kind of social network group. There are so many more television channels available than there were 15 years ago – it's a different world.

However, there is still nothing that replaces actual experience. Trade and consumer shows continue to thrive; the senses can be stimulated only by being there and business is still based on relationships. Personal experience is irreplaceable.

Presenting in the same old way is not enough though. To maximise exhibiting potential, it needs to be part of an overall marketing plan which may use other tools such as direct marketing, advertising, promotions and other grass-roots methods. Turning up at a fair with the same old stand and last year's products is not a recipe for success. You need to keep evolving and changing to keep your customers interested.

You need to develop a number of plans, such as re-thinking your approach and training staff for your company's exhibition, which includes setting goals, figuring return on your investment and all the stages in between. I want to challenge you to think differently in order to create unique exhibition experiences that distinguish the company

and brand they represent. Exhibiting is just as much about the appearance and attitude of the staff, and the true impact they can have.

My Exhibitips are taken from experiences and witnessing exhibitors and how they exhibit at events over a number of years. I receive regular feedback about the tips and how exhibitors are using them. It worries me that quite often I see other exhibitors doing so many things that work against them.

So, think about putting real ideas and activities in place that you can not only implement, but also measure their results. But keep an open mind-changing what you have done for years is sometimes more difficult than you think. So, my challenge is that you push yourself to look at how you can 'tweak' your involvement to get better results.

I look forward to seeing you to take your exhibiting to a whole new level.

See you on the floor.