

No business like show business



Racecar's Tony Tobias shares his wisdom on exhibiting at trade shows, drawing on his experience organising Autosport Engineering

Trade shows are my favourite marketing communications tool because they are so interactive. Traditional advertising and PR are primarily one-way communication, yet a trade show offers real 'face time' and a rare opportunity to experience the people in our market segment as real people and to observe what they are doing.

You also get to spend some time with existing customers, as people who already use our products stop by the booth to chat. Some simply want to meet us in person, some tell us how happy they are with the product, while others tell us how we have disappointed them in some way.

Trade shows also provide a perspective on the space in which you operate that cannot be obtained in any other way. Here's a few tips about making the most of such events as a marketing tool for your company.

CHOOSE A SHOW

The first decision is which of the many motorsport events to focus on. Regardless of your particular market segment, there are almost certainly a variety of shows from which to choose - global, local and regional, and all have a part to play in your marketing mix.

USE THE MEDIA

Most established trade shows have a media partner and such publications nearly always produce a show preview. It is imperative to take advantage of the opportunity to be seen in both that preview and any



Trade shows offer an invaluable opportunity to promote *your* business

post-event reviews that may be generated. Likewise, advertising in special show-related issues adds to the benefit and will help bring visitors to your stand.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A trade show is a non-stop series of beginnings. Every moment a show is open is a moment when you could be meeting customers for the very first time.

If all goes well, these crucial first moments will launch a mutually profitable relationship that will last for years. On the other hand, if the impression you create is not so positive, then you have potentially waved goodbye to a lifetime's worth of business.

Remember, beginning well means you're already half done. Once you've established a rapport with a client, the hard work of negotiating a deal and closing a sale becomes much easier.

SELL YOURSELF

Whatever your company makes or offers, when you're at a trade show, what you're selling is **you**.

The world is going through uncertain economic times right now yet people still have to do business. But how does a potential customer know who he or she can trust?

There will always be a cautious approach as people walk around a show. But remember, when you're checking out the visitors, they're checking you out too, assessing what they perceive to be your intentions and motivations.

Trade secret: *people have to 'buy' you before they will buy your products.*

LOOK APPROACHABLE

Non-verbal communication plays a huge role in creating first impressions. If your body language says you don't want to be at the show or would prefer not to engage with visitors they'll pick up on that and go elsewhere.

Standing at the corner of your trade show exhibit with your arms folded tells visitors, 'Stay away! I'm on guard.' Sitting down, flipping through a magazine or

chatting with colleagues says, 'I have better things to do.' Taken together, it means, 'You're not important to me.'


Trade secret: *people won't come on to your stand if your body language says 'go away!'*

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

You have to approach visitors, engage them and welcome them to your stand. Unfortunately, many exhibitor representatives take this to mean they must offer a constant stream of conversation, from the welcoming hello to assurances that 'We'll be in touch!' as the attendee hurries off in search of a calmer, quieter trade show exhibit.

Talking is important, but listening is even more so. Shift the focus from your own sales talk to actually listening to customers and you'll find results immediately improve. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Give them your full attention, offer appropriate responses and never forget to exchange business cards before they move on.

Being focused on your visitors, wholly engaging with them and committing, however briefly, to solving their problems is one of the most effective ways to create a positive first impression. It also gives a good indication of how you will do business with clients in the future, so lay the foundation for a positive, profitable relationship from the start.

Trade secret: *focus on the visitor for maximum results.* 



Talk to TT

Are you thinking of exhibiting at the show? Talk to *Racecar's* Tony Tobias. Email: expo@tonytobias.com, or call direct on 07768 244 880