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## Privileged Information for Exhibitors

### Your Guide to Successful Exhibiting

Insider's Information from the experts

Exhibitions are one of the most powerful, versatile and cost-effective tools available. To get the most out of them, check out our Insider's Information on effective exhibiting, covering everything from setting objectives and designing your stand, to following up and measuring effectiveness.

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#### 1. Part of your strategy

A strategic marketing tool Exhibitions, like advertising, publicity campaigns, PR and direct selling, are a strategic sales and marketing tool. They should be used as part of an overall marketing strategy, not in isolation.

Consider the benefits: To make the most of your participation, you need to understand exactly what benefits **Pathway Exhibitions & Conventions** offer:

- Highly targeted - With carefully focused profiles, and highly targeted audiences, Pathway expos allow you to direct your sales and marketing effort accurately and cost-effectively, with minimum wastage.
- The potential client comes to you – Pathway Exhibition visitors are pro-active clients. They make a conscious decision to attend, and set aside valuable time to do so. Many are 'specifiers' and 'influenced' who it might otherwise be impossible to identify.
- Multi Dimensional sales & promotion – Nothing beats the impact of a live demonstration. At Pathway Exhibition's the potential clients better understand the available career choices through demonstration, counseling, and observation for themselves.
- Face to face contact - The most persuasive form of selling, and of building customer relationships.
- Neutral sales environment – The potential client feels under no great pressure to buy, while the exhibitor will also not be intimidated by visiting the potential client on his home territory.



- Fast market penetration – You can reach a large proportion of the market in a short space of time, achieving more in two days than you might otherwise achieve in months.
- A powerful combination – Pathway Expos combine the mass reach of advertising, publicity campaigns, the persuasive power of face-to-face selling, and the networking benefits of the Internet, to create a unique environment in which a wide range of sales and marketing objectives can be pursued, either singly, or side by side.
- Prepare Some Preliminary Costing

Costs vary enormously depending on the type of presence you want to have. A shell stand/pipe and drape can cost you less than a page of press advertising, but you will need to spend at least the same amount again on equipping, manning and promoting the stand.

- Be Realistic About Your Expectations

Expos generate hundreds of thousands of rupees worth of business every year – but it is unusual for exhibitors to do so during the event. For most institutions, the admissions will come in the weeks and months after the expo. You must be prepared to pursue your leads vigorously, and to track them on an on-going basis, so that they can trace as many sales as possible back to source.

- Exhibitions Require Time and Effort

Don't underestimate the amount of planning and preparation required to exhibit successfully. Effective planning and follow-up can mean the difference between a bad show experience and a good one. But it can also mean the difference between a good show, and a truly exceptional one.

## **2. Setting objectives**

Maximise the opportunity: Exhibitions are suitable for a wide range of specific sales and marketing goals, of which the most widely used are:

- Generating sales leads – Reach large numbers of potential clients in just a few days, and maximise sales impact through program/course display and demonstration. Exhibition enquiries have an excellent conversion rate when followed up after the show.
- Launching a new program or course - Stands featuring new programs are a major attraction for potential clients and the media, the vast majority of whom attend exhibitions 'to see what's new'.



- Penetrating a new market - Exhibiting is one of the quickest and most cost-effective means of exploring and entering a new market, providing mass exposure and an instant database of qualified sales prospects.
- Building customer loyalty – Regular contact with customers shows that you care and exhibitions are an extremely time and cost-efficient means of keeping in touch.
- Positioning/repositioning a institution/brand - Exhibitions can be used to quickly establish a new identity or change market perceptions about a institution and its capabilities.
- Market research – Exhibitions bring together a complete cross-section of a market, making them ideal for customer research and offering instant feedback.
- Building media relations - Exhibitions offer a rare opportunity to meet and influence the press 'en masse' and to generate coverage on new products or services, and or institution developments.
- Recruiting new agents or consultants - Agents and consultants use exhibitions to find new institutions to represent. If you are looking for new representatives, be sure to highlight the fact in your catalogue entry, and on the stand.
- Obtaining competitive intelligence - Exhibitions are an excellent place to observe competitors and assess their programs and marketing messages.
- Be consistent: Exhibition objectives should be consistent with your institution's wider marketing strategies/goals. This way, advertising, PR, and exhibition activities are working to reinforce each other, rather than in isolation.
- Set achievable targets: Nothing is more likely to demotivate staff than goals they can't possibly achieve, whereas realistic targets when accomplished are a real stimulus to effort.
- Prioritize your objectives: If you have more than one objective, rank them in order of priority so you are clear where your greatest efforts should be directed. Don't try to do too much, or your resources will be stretched and your participation will lack focus.
- Communicate your objectives: Objectives, having been established must be communicated to the entire exhibition team, so that everyone pulls together and shares a common sense of purpose.

### 3. Planning for success

- Appoint an exhibition co-ordinator: Put one person in charge of the project with overall responsibility for planning, budgeting, stand management etc – someone with authority who can see the project successfully through to its conclusion.
- Appoint a reputable stand designer
- Set measurable objectives: Set achievable targets against which to measure your success. If generating sales leads, for example, base your target around your potential audience, number of stand staff and total number of opening hours.
- Read the manual: Read your exhibitor's manual carefully, as soon as you receive it, paying particular attention to stand rules and regulations, and noting the deadline dates for returning order forms.
- Confirm your exhibits: Give your program managers plenty of warning, to ensure all program information is available and in a proper deliverable condition for display.
- Publicize your presence: Prepare your press release(s) and submit them by the deadline date. Mail out invitations to your prospects, giving them an incentive to visit your stand. Event web sites offer many publicity opportunities - check out your options.
- Check out stand packages: Many organizers offer 'stand packages' comprising space, furniture, lighting etc for an all-in price. Promotional packages are also commonly available. They are an excellent aid to budgeting and cost control, and can save much administrative time and effort.
- Co-ordinate media activities: Maximize your promotional budget by coordinating your exhibition promotions with other media activities. Drop a flash on your adverts saying 'see us on stand XXX', include invitations in direct mail, and publicize your participation in customer newsletters and on your web site.
- Prepare a detailed budget: Anticipate all likely items of expenditure before committing money, prepare a detailed budget breakdown, keep a close eye on expenditure, and a central record of all purchase orders and invoices.
- Select and brief stand staff: Select staff early to ensure availability and allow adequate time for training. Draw up a duty roster and ensure all staffs are fully briefed on the stand exhibits, their role, and the institution's objectives.

- Devise an efficient system for handling enquiries: The way you capture and qualify visitor information at show will determine the speed and efficiency with which you can follow up leads. Devise an 'enquiry form' for use by stand staff on which vital visitor details can be quickly recorded (e.g. programs of interest, date of intended start etc).
- Draw up a timetable of key tasks: Using the manual, and working backwards from the exhibition, draw up a timetable of key tasks, highlighting who is responsible, and deadline dates for completion. Copy it to all involved in the exhibition effort.
- Establish clear lines of communication: Breakdown of communication is a major cause of problems at exhibitions. Make it clear to your suppliers and the organizer who their points of contacts are. Hold regular briefing sessions with the team to keep everyone up to date on developments.
- Prepare to follow-up leads: Exhibition leads are hot leads if properly qualified. Fast and efficient follow up is essential to reap the maximum sales return. Establish a plan of action before the event, and be sure to allocate sufficient time and people to the task. All leads should be contacted within a week of the exhibition if possible, two at the most.

#### **4. Budgeting and cost control**

- Plan ahead: Consider your exhibition requirements well in advance.
- Consider a stand package: Many organizations offer stand package options for shell scheme and drape exhibitors, inclusive of everything from furniture and floor coverings to electrics and power - an excellent way to control costs, as you are aware of your commitments up-front.
- Draw up a detailed budget: Look at your objectives, determine the essential tasks necessary to achieve them and then estimate the costs involved. This will give you a minimum budget on which to build. Be sure to anticipate all likely items of expenditure. Be generous when allocating funds: add 10% to all anticipated costs.
- Record your spending: Keep an on-going record of expenditure against budget and a central file of all purchase orders and invoices. Note reasons for overspend to help you plan more efficiently and budget more effectively next time around.
- Return all forms by the deadline: Late orders and last minute charges often incur a problem. Remember to allocate sufficient funds to promotion, staff training and subsistence, and post show activities such as telemarketing and direct mail, to convert leads into sales.





- Take advantage of free publicity: Editorial coverage is one of the best endorsements your company can achieve (assuming it's positive!). And it's free. Take time preparing your press pack and circulate it in good time to the exhibition's PR agent and trade press.
- Sales literature costs money: Don't leave expensive brochures on the stand for all and sundry to pick up. Produce a concise sales leaflet for general distribution and keep the glossies back for those with a genuine interest.
- Keep a tight control on expenses: Establish at the outset exactly what costs the institution will pick up. Give staff a 'per day' allowance for meals and entertainment - any expenses over and above this should be paid for by the individual and re-imbursed after, if appropriate.

## 5. Publicising your presence

- Start with your objectives: Different objectives require different promotional strategies. For example, if you want to raise awareness of a new institution or program, banner advertising and sponsorship will ensure a high profile. If you have already identified your prospects, carefully targeted direct mail and exclusive stand invitations would be more appropriate.
- Co-ordinate your activities carefully: Exhibitions should be treated as an integral part of your marketing effort not as isolated events on the marketing calendar. Use the event to re-inforce themes running in other media; put 'see us at..' flashes on existing advertising; promote your participation on your web site, and in customer newsletters.
- Read the publicity guide: Most events prepare a full guide to publicity. Make sure it is forwarded to the right person (your marketing manager, or PR agency); take advantage of all free publicity opportunities; and be sure to meet all deadlines.
- Invite your customers and prospects: Recent research has shown that 83% of the most successful exhibitors (in terms of business generated and leads collected) had mailed their customers and prospects before the show. (Source: Center for Exhibition Industry Research). You can mail your own lists, buy a list or mail the event's list of pre-registrants. Include a covering letter giving them particular reasons to visit your stand.
- Submit a Directory entry: Exhibition directories/catalogues are the definitive guide to who's exhibiting, what they are showing and where they can be found. Available at show, they are increasingly published on event web sites to help attendees plan their visit. Use your free editorial entry to highlight new programs/launches and institution developments, stressing benefits over features.

- Prepare a press pack: Ideally, your pack should contain a press release (or releases) on new program launches or institution developments, stressing the benefits; background information on the institution, preferably in the form of a fact sheet; and photographs, clearly captioned.
- Inform the media of your activities: Find out from the organizers which media are doing show previews (most show publicity guides carry a list). Note the deadlines and submit your news and photos in good time. Send your news to the event's publicity manager too, for inclusion in the official show preview and review.
- Consider sponsorship: Use sponsorship to stand out from the crowd. Use the event's offer of sponsorship opportunity.
- Use the web to maximum advantage: Most events have their own web sites, and these are increasingly being used by visitors to plan their visit and maximize their time at show. Take advantage of all publicity opportunities including on-line listings and product directories, news pages, banner advertising and hyperlinks to your own site.
- Mail additional prospects after the event: Mail the prospects you didn't have time to meet, after the event. Many organisers make their attendance lists available to exhibitors, and you can often target very selectively, for example, by job title, program interest, educational qualification etc. You can either rent the list for single use, or purchase it for adding to your own database of prospects.

## 6. Stand staffing and organization

- Appoint a Stand Manager: Stand managers need to be efficient, flexible, and diplomatic to deal with the many responsibilities at show, from motivating stand staff to liaison with contractors and welcoming important guests.
- Choose your team carefully: Ensure the right balance of sales and technical staff, as well as senior managers. One of the greatest complaints from visitors about exhibitions concerns the lack of knowledge of stand staff. Potential Clients attend exhibitions with very specific questions on program scope, price, requirements and opportunities. Make sure you have staff available who can answer them.
- Pick staff who are willing *and* able: A positive attitude is vital if staff are to make the most of the event, and not undermine the enthusiasm of others.
- Don't skimp on numbers: Exhibitions are hard work. Allow for adequate cover during busy periods and rest breaks. The costs of bringing one or two more people will be outweighed by increased productivity.
- Involve stand staff in the planning: If stand staff feel part of the project from the outset you'll be much more likely to win their commitment and support.

- Draw up a duty roster: Give staff adequate breaks to avoid fatigue and boredom. 2-3 hours is about the longest most people can sustain their energy levels. Copy the rota to all team members, so they know who is on duty at any given time.
- Brief the team thoroughly: Hold a briefing session before the event, covering exhibition and personal objectives, exhibits, enquiry handling procedures, dress code, logistics, catering etc. Give each team member a written summary for reference on the site.
- Stand 'selling' is a specialist skill: Set aside a day to teach the fundamentals of how to encourage visitors onto the stand, how to open and close conversations, how to qualify visitors, and the impact of their own body language. It will make a dramatic difference to performance.
- Use an efficient lead-recording system: Devise a tailor-made lead recording form for fast completion. Products of interest, type of business, purchasing authority etc. can all be listed so each interviewer has simply to tick the appropriate box.
- Use incentives to motivate staff: Set individual staff targets for lead gathering, and reward achievement. Run light-hearted competitions with prizes for the winners.
- Look after staff comforts: Stay as near to the exhibition as possible to avoid long journeys. If you have a sizeable team, hire a minibus to ferry yourselves to and from the hotel. Provide wholesome food on the stand and plenty of soft drinks.
- Establish some basic stand rules: Discipline is essential on an exhibition stand. Establish a few ground rules for staff, covering punctuality, dress code, wearing of badges, and use of the hospitality area.
- Keep your 'house' in order: Put a member of the staff in charge of everyday 'housekeeping', with responsibility for ensuring that the stand is kept tidy, literature is replenished and any damages to the display are quickly fixed.
- Ensure adequate security: Lock away valuables in an office or cabinet at night or better carry it back with you. Depending on the value of your exhibits, you may wish to hire your own security guard overnight.
- Recognize and reward achievement: After the show, tell your team what was achieved, and ask their opinions on how the results could have been bettered. Repay their effort and commitment with a small token of thanks. If they feel appreciated they'll be much more likely to try even harder next time around.



- Say what you do: Don't assume that everyone will know what you do from your institution's name alone. If you're not a household name, or its not immediately obvious from your display what you can offer, use graphics to spell it out.
- Promote benefits, not features: Exhibits should be presented as solutions to specific needs and problems. Don't bury benefits in a long list of features. Keep detailed technical data to hand in a brochure.
- Keep your stand messages brief: Visitors are bombarded with information at exhibitions and can only take in so much. Where possible, stick to bold headlines and, if necessary, bullet points.
- Don't skimp on photography: Photographs are a universal language and have got great visual appeal assuming of course, that you use good images. One of the most common complaints from stand designers concerns the poor quality of photographic material they are given to work with. If photographs form an important part of your display, plan ahead.
- Ensure text can be easily read: Text should be placed at eye level or higher on the stand. Upper and lower case print is much easier to read than block capitals. If you do use longer text, stick to short sentences and paragraphs and use clear, well spaced type.
- If it's new say so: The word 'new' is one of the most powerful words in advertising. If you are exhibiting a program or institution for the first time, label it accordingly on the stand for all to see.
- Leave your site as you found it: At the end of the event, you will be required to leave your stand space as you found it and pay for any clearance or make good any damage.

## 7. Following up after the show

- Plan your follow-up *before* the show: Set a deadline for making initial contact, and a system for ensuring that ALL leads not just the hottest, are pursued to a conclusion. If you don't have the resources in house you should consider using the services of a mailing house or telemarketing agency.
- Clear diaries for a week after the show: Make sure those responsible for lead follow up set aside sufficient time to complete the job. Set aside a week, possibly two, depending on the number of enquiries you expect to take.
- Prioritize leads according to urgency: Categorize all enquiries as soon as possible – preferably as they are taken on the stand. For example: A (definitely interested/immediate admission intention); B (actively considering admission within the next three months); C (gathering information for future reference.)

- Follow up immediately: To maximize response you need to strike while the iron is hot. Category A leads should be dealt with immediately. Have a fax machine or office-linked computer on your stand, so they can be relayed to the office for immediate action. ALL leads should be responded to within a week, two at the most.
- Be persistent: Most exhibition leads take between three and eight months to come to fruition. Those involving the admission in expensive programs or courses can take much longer. Prospects must continue to be contacted at regular intervals until a admission is concluded, or the lead dries up.
- Track all leads: Establish a central database of enquiries on computer. When distributing enquiry forms, retain a copy of each one in a central file, and record on it the name of the person to whom it has been distributed. Assign each lead a code so that it does not merge with the general sales database and can be tracked through to the accounts department for when the customer is invoiced.
- Establish an effective sales reporting system: Getting sales people to record and report on the progress of enquiries is important if you are to have any financial measure of success. But it can be a problem, especially when dealing with regional offices. When distributing leads, attach a report form which must be completed and returned by a deadline date, indicating lead status. If the sale is ongoing, issue a second report with a new deadline, and so on until the lead is pursued to its conclusion.
- Carry out a sales audit: An alternative to on-going lead tracking and sales reporting is to carry out a sales audit at an agreed period after the show. Ask each sales person to prepare a report indicating the status of all leads passed to them, the value of sales achieved, and anticipated value of future sales. Repeat the exercise at a later date.

## 8. Evaluating exhibition effectiveness

Measure your results: Depending on your objectives, there are a number of ways to measure exhibition success. It is a good idea to use as many as possible, to get the fullest picture of your achievements:

- Value of sales achieved – providing an efficient tracking system is used, it should be possible to ‘close the loop’ on many exhibition enquiries and assign a value to sales achieved.
- Number of leads qualified – does the number match your target? What is the quality of the leads?
- Cost per useful contact – divide the total cost of exhibiting by the number of leads generated to help establish the cost-effectiveness of the exercise.



- Number of new contacts made – compare the list of enquiries with your existing customer database. How many are new contacts? How would you have otherwise made these contacts?
- Levels of customer/market awareness – survey a cross section of visitors after the event asking them what they can recall about your company, your exhibit etc.
- Media coverage generated – keep a log of all press cuttings, including local and national press, official show preview and review, show daily newspaper. Use a press monitoring agency if necessary. Get a circulation figure from the organizers for the show preview and daily. Establish the area of page space you received in editorial and calculate the cost of an equivalent advertisement. Evaluate the content of the editorial achieves. To what extent did you succeed in getting your message across?
- Other – some benefits cannot be measured scientifically but are important when considering overall exhibition effectiveness. Consider the role the event has played in generating customer good will, building team spirit within the organization etc.
- Evaluate your performance: Having measured results, you need to pinpoint and analyze the causes of success or failure, so you can make improvements next time around. If targets were not met, to what extent was it caused by the organizers (quality/quantity of visitors, organizational problems) or by your own efforts? Consider all areas of your participation, from planning and budgeting, to stand design, promotion and staff performance.
- Debrief the exhibition team: What did the team think of your performance? Hold a debriefing session while the event is still fresh in everyone's mind.
- Prepare a post-show report: Write up your conclusions and recommendations in the form of post-show report. Include samples of promotions undertaken and photographs of the stand. It will give you a huge head start next time around; and will provide a solid foundation on which your successor can build, should you move on!

***BEST OF LUCK FOR EXHIBITING WITH US!***