



A Management Update from Your CFO for Rent

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# How to Get Exceptional Trade Show Performance

Most small and middle market companies that exhibit at trade shows do a poor job of representing themselves. Many seem to think that showing up and perhaps renting a booth is all that is needed to make an impact. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Some shows are primarily to sell product and take orders. Others are for image, to demonstrate that you are a factor in the industry, and some accomplish both. Regardless of the purpose, you have a limited time to connect with the best

customers, the best buyers, the best resources, and perhaps hundreds or even thousands of new leads, all in one place without having to make a zillion sales calls.

*How do you take best advantage of these infrequent and expensive opportunities to show your stuff?*

We asked one of the country's top trade show consultants to give us his ground rules for managing a show booth. Randy McDonald, is founder and president

of Magnum Marketing (415-435-5550), a Tiburon, California-based consulting firm that really knows how to do trade shows. Randy ran sales and marketing for a start-up company I was a part of many years ago. He created that company's image from scratch and made it known across the US in a variety of ways, including smashing performances at trade shows coast-to-coast. Here is the first of a 2-part series outlining Randy's (edited) checklist for successful trade show participation.

## Before the Show

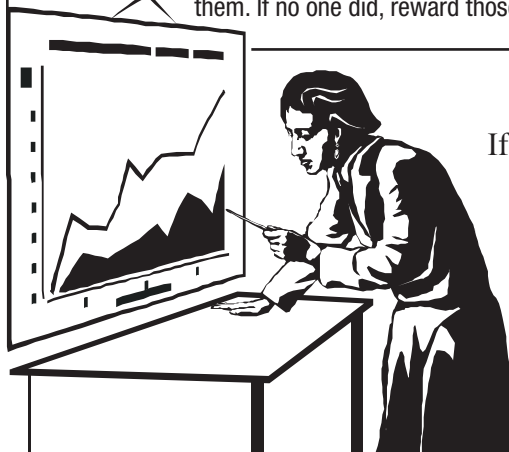
<p><b>1. Booth Design.</b> Designing your booth is a team effort. Make sure your sales managers are involved so you know what they need in terms of space, location of display areas, closing rooms, etc. Weigh the choices between cost and features carefully, because the booth will be around for awhile.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>2. Invitations.</b> Get a list of registered attendees in advance, and mail prospects invitations to visit your booth. Offer them special benefits to do so, including free admission, a special report, a month's free service, etc. Make appointments with key buyers who will be there too.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>3. Booth Location.</b> Many people just accept a poor booth location. Don't be afraid to ask for a better space, and keep on asking right up to the point that you have to set up. Randy has even moved a booth to a better location after the show started because of a last minute cancellation.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>4. Goal Setting.</b> Find ways to measure your success beyond exhilarating reports from your booth staff. Set goals in advance for number of leads, dollar value of orders, new customers signed, etc.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>5. Checklists.</b> Prepare lists of everything you will need, in minute detail, and make sure someone is responsible for each list. Anything you must buy at the show will cost more, in cash and in stress levels.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## *During the Show*

<b>1. Staffing.</b> Put the company's best salespeople in the booth to start establishing contacts for future sales calls. Also, attractive people serving as host/hostess, or stationed at the front of the booth to chat with visitors until a salesperson is free, is an old line idea that still works magic.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Reconnaissance.</b> Walk the convention floor and find out what the competition is doing as soon as possible. Don't risk having a potential customer telling you about a competitor's new product without you knowing it first.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Daily Sales Meetings.</b> Despite staffers' desires to call it a day, make sure you have a daily meeting to review what's working and what's not, leads, new competitive issues, etc.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>4. Booth Manners.</b> Don't sit in the booth. Everyone should be on their feet and ready to greet anyone who approaches. No eating, smoking, chewing gum by booth personnel. Anything less may make those approaching your booth feel like they are imposing on its occupants.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Staff Appearance.</b> Everyone should wear suits, with company name badges on their right side (to permit easy reading while shaking hands), an attentive look, and a SMILE.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Live (not video) Presentations.</b> This depends on the show and the size of your booth, but it is VERY effective in drawing people to your booth and keeping them interested while they're there. Trust me, this works. (Ed. Note: I was the announcer for one of Randy's trade shows, and we always had a crowd during those presentations.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>7. Booth Captain.</b> Assign a booth captain with the authority to schedule attendance. If someone wants to take a break, they should have permission and an estimated time of return to ensure the booth is adequately staffed at all times.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Qualifying visitors.</b> Try to recognize unqualified visitors early so that you can "disengage" and work with qualified prospects. Be polite but brief and move on.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Commitment.</b> Focus on getting a commitment from the visitor. Whether your objective is to get an order or simply to get an appointment to provide a demo or close the sale, you don't get what you don't ask for.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>10. Before you tear it down.</b> Before the show ends, review the booth and make lists of things you didn't like, what didn't work, and what could have been better. Take photos if you need to, but don't rely on your memory.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## *After the Show*

<b>11. Leads.</b> Follow up on leads within 90 days. This "no-brainer," says Randy, is violated by more companies than you can count. The reason, not surprisingly, is usually that their sales people think the job is too daunting in such a short time. The timeframe is not short because you want to over work your staff, it's because people forget they saw you or simply lose interest unless you remind them soon afterwards.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>12. And more leads.</b> Consider what you can do to follow up more effectively on leads, even if the follow up seems to be going OK. Consider ways to distribute leads more quickly during the show. Perhaps using carbonless forms and distributing leads before sales staff even leave the show. Or categorizing leads at the show by degree of interest to facilitate later follow up. Well, you get the idea.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>13. Reward your best.</b> Tabulate your booth staff's performance against the original goals, and reward those who met or exceeded them. If no one did, reward those who did best and revisit how you set your goals for next time.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



If you follow these suggestions, you are guaranteed to get significantly more benefit out of your trade show appearances. The keys are thoroughness and diligence. The reward is greater sales for your marketing dollar.

**You'll wish every dollar you spent paid off so handsomely.**