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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO EXHIBITING SUCCESS: TIPS FOR TRADE SHOW NEWBIES



displayit



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on signing up for your first trade show! If you're reading this, the initial excitement has probably worn off, you're overwhelmed with the "to-dos" that are piling up, and you've entered the "What have I done to myself?!" phase.

We put these 7 tips together to help first-time exhibitors navigate the unfamiliar waters, but the content is relevant for ANY exhibitor (lookin' at you, seasoned veterans!).

Before we dive in, let's make one thing clear: **advanced planning is essential for your success**. The more effort that you put into planning - your target audience, your message, your exhibit design, even your giveaways - the more you'll get out of your show.

Now that the soapboxing's out of the way, are you ready to learn some secrets of success? Of course you are! Read on to find out how to dominate at your next event.

1 YOUR EXHIBITOR SERVICE MANUAL IS YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND.

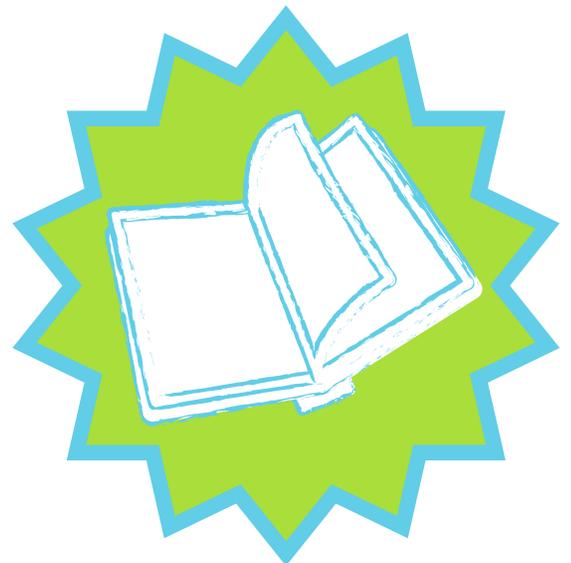
Yeah, it's about as riveting as that book you were required to read for English Lit, but it's chock-full of valuable information. Your exhibitor service manual (ESM) includes everything from show dates/times, order forms, and critical deadlines to booth standards and important safety rules. Violate any of the regulations outlined in your manual, and be prepared to pay hundreds of dollars in fines for EACH infraction (and risk your exhibit being removed from the show floor altogether).

Your ESM's not ALL about penalties, though! Often, you'll save a small fortune on things like show services by staying on top of "early bird discount" deadlines.

If multiple teams are involved in your trade show (ex: Marketing and Logistics), make sure that everyone's familiar with the manual and knows who's responsible for what.

By taking the time to read your ESM, you'll save time, money, and stave off a few gray hairs, too.

Note: Each event is different and comes with its own set of rules; you need to **review your ESM every time** you exhibit!



From the moment someone lays eyes on your display, you've got 3 seconds to convince them that you're worthy of their time. "Great, but what does that have to do with my art?," you ask. Your graphics will be one of the major focal points of your exhibit, and a good first impression is everything. Nail your artwork, and you'll move folks out of the aisles and into your booth.

Ideally, your graphics should feature just three things:

- Company branding
- A strong tagline
- An image that depicts your message

One of our favorite analogies is that your exhibit is a billboard, and event attendees are drivers. If, by just glancing at your booth, someone is persuaded that you might be able to help him, then you've done your job.

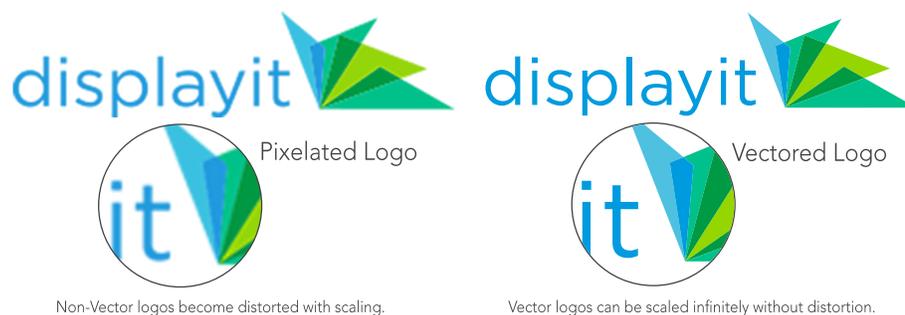
Once you've picked out the right elements to tell your story, don't slow down production of your graphics with poor image quality. A file that's at least 100 DPI (dots per inch) at full size is a good baseline; check with your designer or exhibit provider if you need additional guidance.

Before we move on, we also want to clear up confusion that surrounds two artwork terms that are frequently thrown around: raster and vector.

- Raster images are composed of pixels, and when you zoom in, you start seeing the tiny squares that make up the image. Raster graphics are typically created in a photo editing program like Adobe Photoshop, and they have file extensions such as .jpg, .png, .tif, .psd, .gif, and .bmp.
- Vector images use shapes to create an image. Vector graphics are usually created in a program like Adobe Illustrator and have file extensions like .ai, .eps, and sometimes .pdf.

Raster images are best when you want lots of color detail (think photographs), but they become blurry when they're enlarged too much. We recommend having your logo and any fonts you want to use in vector format; that way, they **can be infinitely enlarged without sacrificing image quality**.

See below for a comparison of a rasterized and a vectorized logo.



Now that we've covered Art 101, let's shed some light on the subject of shipping!

For fledgling exhibitors, figuring out how to get their materials to their final destinations can be a nightmare come true! We can't stress one thing enough: **know your deadlines!** This can make all the difference in your shipping options (and stress levels!). Keep reading to begin cracking some of the trade show shipping code.

Advance Warehouse: Your show materials are shipped to an off-site storage facility (typically 30 days before the event begins), where they're held until a show contractor transports them to your event.

Pros: Substantial savings on shipping costs, priority unloading status on the show floor, less potential for weather- or traffic-related delays

Cons: More risk for loss/damage during transfers, slightly higher material handling fees, storage facility not necessarily secure

Direct-to-Show: Your show materials are shipped directly to the site where your show will take place. Items must be delivered on a certain date, within a very specific time frame.

Pros: More time to prepare your materials, slightly lower material handling charges

Cons: Incredibly expensive, no control over when your items will be delivered to your booth space - which can wind up costing you significant amounts of precious setup time (and even more money, especially if you have to pay a setup or delivery crew overtime)

So, what should you do? Most trade show industry veterans are fans of advance warehouse, due to the risks involved with direct-to-show shipping.

You could combine both shipping options, sending some of your materials (like your display, flooring, and signage) to the advance warehouse and the rest (like your demo products and promotional items) direct-to-show.

Our advice? If all of your materials are portable enough, **ship the items directly to your hotel**, eliminating your warehousing and drayage charges altogether. Many hotels have a business center, and even if they charge delivery fees for your packages, you're still ahead in the long run.

If all else fails (and your situation permits), you can have your materials delivered to a local UPS or FedEx hub, where you can pick them up and take them directly to your event.



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GREAT PRE-SHOW MARKETING = IMPROVED TRAFFIC QUALITY

The majority of trade show attendees decide which exhibitors they'll see way before they even enter the building. How do you secure your spot on their "must-visit" lists? It's all about targeted pre-show marketing, baby!

The most successful exhibitors use a double-pronged approach to their pre-show campaigns, targeting registered attendees and tapping into their existing customer base for opportunities, too. Should you decide to use that same approach (and you're going to, right?), do yourself a favor and **don't send a "one-size-fits-all"** piece to everyone.

First, spend some time deciding what you want to accomplish at your show (ex: generate new sales revenue, position yourself as a market leader, recruit distribution partners, etc.). If your event's show management team offers a pre-show registration list, get a copy, vet the attendees, and decide which ones should receive your attention. Do the same with your customer base, and invite those whom you feel would be a good fit at your event.

Once you've whittled your lists down and have decided who you'll target, it's time to craft your pre-show message. This is where a lot of exhibitors slip up: they don't consider things from their audience's point-of-view. **You need to offer people a clear, compelling reason to visit you;** otherwise, they won't bother. **Tell your clientele what's in it for them;** which problem of theirs that you - and only you - can solve.

Now that you've come up with a winning strategy, how are you going to reach your target audience? You won't find everyone in one place, so your best bet is to leverage multiple marketing channels - social media, phone calls, e-mails, postcards, swag, your website, a show-specific microsite, trade publications, and even invitations personally delivered to your clients from their account reps.

Done well, pre-show marketing can have a huge positive effect on the quality of your booth traffic. Don't forget this often-overlooked step, and you'll be on your way to a successful show.



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RENTALS = MORE FLEXIBILITY

Got your sights set on that big exhibit, but can't come up with the cash to buy it? Doing back-to-back shows in cities that are thousands of miles apart? Perhaps you're simply commitment-shy? If so, consider a rental.

The number-one reason that many people choose to rent is due to cost: a rental exhibit is about one-third to one-half the expense of buying a comparable display - some pretty serious savings! Another bonus of renting is that you're forgoing some significant costs of ownership, including storage, shipping, and maintenance fees.

Other reasons why people prefer renting a display include the fact that it's more eco-friendly, and they can easily switch up the size of their booth from show to show.

So, when should you buy, and when should you rent? Here are a few situations where renting may make more sense:

- You're a first-time exhibitor
- You're new to a particular market
- Your company's in a transition period (rebranding, merger/restructuring)
- You exhibit infrequently (2-3 times per year)
- You have a lengthy process for capital funding

On the flip side, here's where buying an exhibit may make more sense:

- You plan to exhibit more than 3 times a year
- You want a completely customized look
- You want more control over the details - availability, exhibit specs, design, etc.
- You want to recoup some of your costs by selling your display

<input type="checkbox"/>	PLAN A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PLAN B
<input type="checkbox"/>	PLAN C

Now that you've seen some pros and cons, you'll be more equipped to decide what makes the most financial and practical sense for your situation.

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PROCRASTINATION COMES WITH A STEEP PRICE TAG.

As author Alyce Cornyn-Selby once said, "Procrastination is, hands down, our favorite form of self-sabotage." And when it comes to trade shows, those words couldn't be more true.

It's easy to wait until the eleventh hour - especially if managing trade shows isn't your normal "day job" - but if too many tasks wind up at the bottom of your priorities list, you're shooting yourself in the foot.

Here are just a few of the premium prices that you can expect to pay at the last minute:

- Rush charges for your exhibit, graphic design, and booth giveaways
- Expedited shipping fees
- Overtime to I&D (installation and dismantle) teams and/or freight drivers, especially if your materials arrive after-hours or on a weekend
- 20-30% more on show services - flooring, lead retrieval systems, Wi-Fi access, etc.
- More for hotel and airfare (especially when group rates are long gone)



As you can see, these costs add up quite quickly, and they can amount to thousands of dollars. You're way better off spending that money where it counts (on a well-researched, customer-focused marketing campaign).

Devote your time to the important stuff well in advance of your event, and a good post-show outcome will take care of itself.

7 THE “BEST IN SHOW” FOLLOW UP WITH THEIR LEADS.

Your trade show’s over, and thanks to your careful planning and impeccable strategy, you’ve racked up tons of promising leads. Time to congratulate yourself on a job well done, right? Eh... not quite. Half of the important work (your event) is behind you, but the other half (follow-up with those shiny new leads) is just beginning.

It’s shocking how many exhibitors devote time, money, and effort to capturing leads, then never DO anything with them! Yes, networking is important, but if you’re not going to follow up with your leads, why are you exhibiting in the first place?! **While you can’t control when a prospect will buy**, you CAN control your efforts to **remain top-of-mind when they are ready**.

First, organize and qualify your leads (this can be done at your show), then rank them from “hot” to “cold.” Reach out to your hottest prospects within a couple of business days, then work your way through the rest of your list. Again, use multiple marketing channels for further engagement - phone calls, e-mails, direct mail, and in-person appointments.

Thank your leads for visiting, then get into specifics: recap highlights from your conversations at the show, tell them when you’re going to honor any promises that you made, and **outline the value** that you will deliver to them. Tailor calls to action to where people are in their respective sales funnels (ex: offer a helpful article to someone who’s still gathering information, offer a product demo to someone who’s closer to buying).

If you have a team of people who are reaching out to your leads, make sure that everyone is held accountable for follow-up.



LET’S WRAP THINGS UP!

Trade shows demand a big investment of your time and your money, but the potential payoffs are even bigger. Think of these tips as ways you can make the most of your investment and capitalize on your opportunities. We wish you the best of luck at your next event.

Now go get ‘em, tiger!

We hope that you found this information helpful! If you’re still stuck, we’re always happy to help; call us at (800) 207.0311, or e-mail us at info@displayit.com.