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Trade Shows and Sales Engineers: Best Personal Practices

The Trade Show Tango

\$1,000ⁱ – One Thousand Dollars! That is the average cost to your company of sending you to staff a tradeshow booth. **Per Hour**. On the premise that if you are going to play, you may as well play to win – how can you maximize the ROI of attending for both your own benefit and for your employer? Because you both need to get something positive out of the experience!

We're going to look at the three A's – Your **Attitude**, your **Adaptability** and your **Actions**. How to portray a positive attitude, how to adapt to the changing circumstances and demands of the show, and which actions should you take during and after the show?

The First A – Attitude

1. **Be Approachable**. Since the whole purpose of the show is to get qualified people to come into your booth, you need to make it easy for them. That means you need to be open, available and approachable. Broken down even further, that means smiling, not talking to other staff members, not being on the phone, not updating Facebook or Twitter and not being engrossed in your laptop. Instead you are actively scanning the area for potential customers.
2. **Be On Message**. The booth and your pitch should have a focus. The typical approach of “*stop me if you see something you like*” won't get you and your company anywhere. Pick a product, service or solution and focus your key messages behind it. Showing ten different products in your booth may make you look busy, but it will leave your customers very confused.
3. **Be Brief**. Now figure out how to get that message across in 30 seconds and how to show or demonstrate it in 3-4 minutes. For the most part, your job is not to make the sale at the trade show; it is just to generate enough interest and curiosity so that the prospect is willing to have another conversation.



The Second A - Adaptability

4. **Work The Lines.** Trade shows aren't just about people coming to see you in the booth, you are also expected to get out and work the room. I've often found that some of the best contacts are made in the lines for the breakfast buffet or the bathroom. Take every chance to introduce yourself to the people around you. Just wash your hands first.
5. **Work The Network.** Use the trade show as an opportunity to grow your personal network. Spend some time around the competition, not just to check out their pitch, but also to exchange business cards with your fellow sales engineers. Introduce yourself to as many speakers and panel members as you can and find some reason to follow-up with them on either a personal or business issue.
6. **Work The Customer.** Within 30 seconds you should be able to categorize the prospect as an A – Ready, B – Interested or C – Not Qualified/Not Interested. This can save you a lot of time and frustration. Once you greet the prospect with a friendly *"Hi, I'm John, what do you think of show?"* or *"what brings you into our booth?"* you can go into rapid qualification mode. *"Tell me about your situation"* can lead to 5-10 minutes of boredom, especially if the prospect has no real idea what you do. In that situation try a *"would you see any use for a solution that <.....>"*
7. **Work the Stage.** Not all trade-show work is one-on-one booth duty, sometimes you may have a larger audience or stage to work with. Rule #1 is to get out and work the crowd, asking questions and almost doing a little improv. Although you may think being an outstanding trade show presenter may doom you to repeat performances at other shows once marketing gets your name, it can be a great career booster and a way to be noticed outside of your company. Watching someone present in a trade show booth is like a mini-interview; I've hired several SE's based on that kind of introduction.



The Final A – Actions

8. **Take Action On Complaints.** Over the past years there has been a marked increase in the rudeness of trade show attendees. Some people will come into your booth to complain about a service, a product or even more likely some issue with your technical support. Be professional, take notes and contact information and then inform the customer that you will let support know about the conversation – don't commit to fixing the issue unless you know you can. Should the customer continue to press or become more upset – pass them onto the senior person in the booth.
9. **Take Action With Leads.** Once leads have been collected, business and electronic cards swiped, don't just assume that marketing has their act together. If there are some really good "A+" leads make a copy of them (with full knowledge of marketing) and pass them directly to sales. This will often take 2-3 weeks out of the callback process and ensure a hot lead stays hot.

10. **Take Action With Your Customers.** If you know one of your larger/strategic customers is going to be in attendance then set a specific time to meet with them. If appropriate introduce them to others within your company and act as their part-time guide. If you use Social Media like Twitter for business purposes then make sure your followers know where you will be and which booth to visit.



11. **Take Action With Your Career.** Apply the same urgency to your career/networking contacts. Follow-up with an email, phone call or LinkedIn invite within 48 hours. Should this be the first time you've worked with corporate or field marketing you should reinforce those relationships too. The day will come when you need friends outside of sales, or even a few dozen golf balls!

12. **Take Action With Marketing.** Instead of suffering in silence, provide feedback to marketing about what worked well, what didn't and what changes should be made for the next show. Don't be a passive bystander.

Summary

Don't view trade show booth duty as a punishment; instead view it as an opportunity to sharpen your sales and networking skills. Experiment with different "pitches" to see which ones have the greatest impact. Work the floor and the conference to build up your network of business contacts – and then follow-up. Smile, enjoy the day(s) and improve your personal ROI.

"It is not your customer's job to remember you. It is your obligation and responsibility to make sure they don't have the chance to forget you"

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information about this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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ⁱ Calculated based on an average SE equivalent quota of \$2,000,000 divided by a 2,000 hour work year. This assumes if you were not at the show you would be helping to sell something. Your numbers will vary!