



## Query, Qualify, Capture: The Pathway to Creating Sales-Qualified Leads at Events

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**Q:** At tradeshows & events, I want my reps to spend the majority of their time talking to qualified leads. What can they do?

**A:** They need to ask targeted questions and use proven qualifying tactics.

Qualifying attendees at tradeshows has often been compared to speed dating.

It's all about the initial contact and connection. But let's dig a little deeper by reviewing some specific questions you can use to accomplish this often challenging task.

First, a brief review. At trade shows, where time is money, it pays to be discriminating. Company and visitor must decide, as quickly as possible, if there's a fit between the two. During each moment of the interaction, impersonal, bottom-line decisions are being made ... by both parties. "Qualifying" visitors efficiently, then, is a benefit to each.

**Contact.** It may seem painfully obvious to make the point that every encounter should begin with a smile and "hello!" However, we've seen far too many staffers open their conversation with, "May I help you?" This opening, apart from being a closed question that limits the response, often sounds cool and unwelcoming. After you start with a pleasant "hello," start the qualifying process by asking *open-ended* questions, such as ...

- "What brought you to the show?"
- "What caught your eye in your booth?"
- "How are you familiar with our company/products?"
- "What challenges are you looking to solve that brought you to our booth?"

The response to any of these questions could elicit rich qualifying information. Some attendees, particularly no-nonsense "Driver" types, come to the show floor prepared--with little to no prompting--to rattle off concise summaries of what they're looking for:

Qualifying prospects is like speed dating.

**Staffer:** What challenges are you looking to solve that brought you to our booth?

**Prospect:** I run Generitech's purchasing division, and we're looking for custom secure enclosures for electronic instrumentation, for a summer install. Our current enclosures rattle and the integrity of some of the seals are compromised.

Wow. If the staffer was paying attention, he or she just got a Motherlode of qualifying information right out of the gate. (It happens!) Other visitors, however, may not be as forthcoming. You'll need to ask them targeted questions to find out if they and your company are the right match.

**Good Answer, good answer.** Here are examples of solid, open-ended questions that can elicit useful answers--answers that contain core qualifying criteria, e.g. needs, purchasing authority, budget, and timeframe.

#### Needs.

- "What solutions are you currently evaluating?"
- "What challenges are you currently facing?"
- "How is your company positioned to address (industry-specific changes)?"

#### Budget.

- "Are you currently budgeted for this project?"
- "What kind of budget are you working with?"

#### Timeframe.

- "When are you looking to implement this project?"
- "When do you expect to make a decision on this?"

The more skillfully and quickly you qualify an attendee, the more effective and efficient the transaction will be. This will result in more, and higher quality, leads.

**Clarifying.** Another important aspect of qualifying is *clarifying*. When a visitor's description of their needs is vague, don't make assumptions. Ask questions to determine exactly what they mean:

- "Could you be more specific about how the product needs to be *versatile*?"
- "What are you defining as a *timely* rollout?"
- "You say that product *compliance* is key. Can you tell me more about your requirements?"

Clarifying not only reduces misunderstandings, it demonstrates your careful listening and lets prospective customers know they matter.

When a prospect is being vague, don't make assumptions.

**Conclusion.** If you've determined that your visitor is a prospect, be sure you've captured their pertinent data in your lead system. Ask if you can schedule an appointment with them to discuss next steps, and then, of course, be sure to follow up.