



How to unleash the HIDDEN POWER of your tradeshow exhibit.

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Q: I've made a sizeable investment in my tradeshow exhibit, but my results are still lackluster. What am I missing?

A: The first place to look is within your own organization, and consider REAL Booth Staff Training.

Imagine this scene: a tradeshow booth with stunning graphics, sleek kiosks, dramatic lighting, and a top brand splashed across dazzling signage. It's the biggest and hottest-looking booth at the show. Yet, curiously, there are no staffers. Instead, a brochure rack stands at the aisle with a note reading

"Please Take One."

Without question, a well-designed exhibit is critical for attracting visitors. But once visitors have stepped across that carpet line, the only thing that matters is their relationship with the staffer. It is at that point that the staffer becomes the most important ingredient in the success of a tradeshow exhibit. Staffers have more influence over prospective buyers than all of the show materials combined, in many cases more than even the brand itself.

If there is a single understanding, therefore, that staffers should not fail to grasp, it is the tremendous power they have to determine the outcome of a show. They don't just "make a difference." *They are the show.*

The statistics bear this out. CEIR reports that 80% of the way an exhibit is remembered is based on staffer behavior. Exhibitor magazine found that 85% of tradeshow results—namely, the number and quality of leads—are tied to the experience attendees have with booth staff. How they interact with prospects and customers will do more to influence buyer decisions than any other factor.

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The Experience. That power to control the visitor experience works both ways, of course. Staffers make or break a show. CEIR reports that 98% of the time an exhibit is rated “poor,” it’s due to staffer behavior.

With so much power clearly in the hands of the staff, it would be easy to presume that most companies make it a priority to invest in training their show staff, to help them maximize their effectiveness and therefore get the greatest return on the tradeshow investment.

But the reality is quite different. Tradeshow Staff Training has been declining significantly in the past 10 years. A 2012 CEIR study showed that only 26% of exhibitors conduct training for all or most events, and more than 50 percent rarely train or never hold exhibit-staff training sessions.

The consequences are considerable. A company that doesn’t train its staff is not only missing major business-building opportunities but is missing the entire point of the tradeshow. And that “miss” comes at quite a cost. In this article we will explore the many benefits to, and guidelines for, implementing an effective training program for staffers, in whose hands the success of the show depends.

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The #1 Misconception. “Ineffective booth behavior” summons scenes of blatant rudeness, such as a staffer who interrupts a conversation with a prospect to take a chatty personal phone call, causing the prospect to march away in a huff. Or a staffer who yawns and checks his watch while the head of purchasing for a multinational corporation explains her business needs. Though these and other over-the-top-awful scenes do occur, they don’t reflect the most common ways that staffers are ineffective. Most staffer performance fails are symptomatic of a much larger, frequently overlooked, and ultimately more damaging problem ...

... they don’t understand their role at the show.

Staffers may be prepped on their booth duties, briefed on housekeeping, and given a few examples of qualifying questions to toss around. But they’re not given a clear picture of their importance to the show and the business-critical activities they must fulfill in order to make the entire investment pay off.

Left to their own thinking, most staffers share a common misperception. Their mistaken belief is that they are in the booth to provide information related to their job title and that their function is to wait for visitors whose problems fall within their specialty to approach them, or be brought to them, and to then answer their questions. From this perspective, product specialists are hanging around in case a prospect wants details on tats; marketing managers are biding their time until a little spin is called for; and IT personnel are in sleep mode until there are technical questions.

What staffers must be brought to understand, however, and quickly, is that their job specialties may not even be relevant during the show. Regardless of the titles on their business cards, everyone in the booth has the same function: to develop new business. They are there to prospect, to open new opportunities and relationships.

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Effective Staff Training programs lay out solid, actionable requirements for a successful, purpose driven exhibit. They also provide staffers with an attitudinal framework and tangible tools for working efficiently and productively to generate the desired results.

Pre-show Meeting vs. Staff Training. The difference between a preshow meeting and Staff Training is stark.

The preshow meeting covers a wide range of important items, such as staffer introductions and scheduling, tradeshow goals, promotional campaign and strategies, lead-capture systems, and housekeeping-related items. The meeting may also touch on basics of booth etiquette, reminding staffers to look approachable and to refrain from eating or drinking in the booth. From there the meeting typically moves to the booth itself for an orientation.

While these components are essential for preparing staff, they are purely decorative unless they are fortified by a deeper dive into the mindset and mechanics of driving new business. A training module targeted to this objective should therefore be integrated within the preshow meeting or scheduled apart from it.

An on-target program design will enable staffers to:

- Understand the show goals and their role in relation to these goals
- Understand their verbal and nonverbal impact on prospects and customers and therefore on the success of the show
- Provide effective qualifying strategies and work as a team to generate quality leads
- Ensure consistency with a unified marketing message that can easily be delivered in interactions with prospects
- Support and maintain the company's image with appropriate behavior, including superior hospitality skills
- Speak about benefits rather than features
- Respond to obstacles to the show objectives with practical, proven solutions

Naturally, any substantive exploration of these objectives takes time. According to CEIR and Exhibitor, 52% of exhibit managers who provide staff training reported lead increases of 20 percent or more. And 68 percent of exhibit managers assert that a properly trained booth staff turns a higher percentage of booth visitors into qualified leads.

Conclusion. The verdict is in: staff training makes good business sense, with benefits for all stakeholders. For a deeper dive on the hallmarks of successful Staff Training, check out our White Paper [Tradeshow Staff Training: How to Create a Lead-Generation Machine.](#)