

What to do before the show?

A little time and thought planning now will pay big dividends when your Exhibition comes round.

1. Agree your objectives

Do you want to generate new sales leads? Meet new agents? Launch a new product? Wave the flag? Entertain existing customers? If you tighten your goals, the better the chances you have of achieving them.

Each Exhibition is incredibly versatile but you need to focus on your most important goals. Establishing specific, measurable goals is probably the single most important thing you can do before the show.

2. Plan your exhibit to achieve those objectives

Your stand design and activities should reflect what you hope to achieve. If you have a readymade stand, think about how you can tailor it to this specific audience. The number of personnel manning the stand should also be goal driven.

Do you need a technical expert to explain engineering details?
Top managers to meet key buyers?

Let your goals be the guide

3. Make the most of pre-show PR and advertising

The most successful exhibitors are the ones that take the trouble to contact their prospects and customers before the show – by email, by direct mail and by advertising in the Show Catalogue and Show Daily, and in key journals.

Send your press releases to the journals listed in the Exhibitor Handbook. Start spreading the news; stress the benefits. Photos help in getting an Editor to print your release.

Mail your own database lists and include a copy of the Exhibitions invitation form. Tell people what you'll be showing and why they should take the time to come and visit you again stress the benefits

4. Don't forget sponsorship opportunities

Sponsorship can be an extremely cost-effective way to be the talk of any exhibition. Most organizers have standard and off-the-shelf packages can be tailored to suit your company's budget and you should know that many of them are always pleased to brainstorm new ideas with you.

5. Train your stand personnel

The first rule of Exhibitions is 'The people make the difference'. Make sure that all of your staff are very well briefed and trained for the job.

Selling at Exhibitions is different from selling in a one-to-one sales call. Your stand staff needs to understand the goals of the stand and each member's role in achieving them

6. Use the web

The Exhibition website is viewed by thousands every week so ensure that you send us your web link to promote your presence at the show. We will provide a free web link directly to your company website

7. Show Previews and Invitations

We will send you Show Previews and invitations by mail. Send these to your HOT customers with a letter.

8. Spread the word

The Show Preview and Newsletters will be posted on our website and we can send you a .PDF copy. Email the floor plan to your buyers – we can personalize it so that they know where to find you!

9. Web links / Auto Signatures

Link your website to the Exhibition website. Have you thought about having an auto-signature that says "We are exhibiting at Y so come and visit us on stand X."

What to do at the Show

1. Brief your stand personnel every day

Your stand personnel make the difference between a good event and a great event. A well-trained highly motivated team does more than any other factor to differentiate you from the other stands and make an impact on your market. Daily briefings are a must. Remind everyone of your goals, your key messages and the role of each team member. Report on your progress towards your goals. Make adjustments if necessary. Announce the winner of your lead-generating competition. Most importantly keep the energy up and the attitudes positive.

2. Spend the optimum time with visitors

The key to sales at RO&G is to find the right people and spend the right amount of time with them – not too much and not too little. Again the optimum time per visitor will depend on your goals. Make sure you've planned a system that matches your needs.

Four steps to generating maximum business at an exhibition: -

ATTRACT – stop people in their tracks, use colour, movement, sound, bold graphics and benefit statements

REJECT – politely filter out the wrong people. Ask a few questions and if they are not prospects, move on

EXPLAIN – get straight to the benefits, run a short demonstration. Put your best case forward

APPOINTMENT – once they have agreed to meet, job well done. Get their details for follow up regardless

3. Speak fluent body language

We've all seen them.... the crossed arms and frowns brigade; the newspaper readers, the quick lunch eaters with their backs to the aisle, the staff who are so busy chatting with each other they ignore the people on their stand.

Try this... divide the total cost of your participation in the exhibition by the number of minutes it is open. Then remind yourself and your staff how much every minute is worth. Smiles, eye contact, open questions...it may be common sense but it's not so common in practice!

4. Focus on key targets

Chances are, your key prospects are a subset of the total audience at the show. Decide on your key target list and brief your team to focus on them. Set your goals accordingly.

5. Classify all sales leads

Use a classification system to make sure the hottest leads get attention first. One system used grades every lead as follows:

A - large order, ready to buy

B - small order, ready to buy OR large order longer time frame.

C - small order, longer time frame

D - send literature or add name to database

E - 'other' eg press, salesmen

6. Earn media coverage

Invite key journals to visit your stand/booth – or visit theirs. Keep a good supply of bright well presented literature at the Show Press Office (too many exhibitors let this source go untapped). Work with Spearhead to steer the right journalists your way. Make sure your story is ready when they arrive.

7. Keep it all business

Lots of comfy furniture encourages people to drop in and stay on your stand. Do you really want that? Current customers might expect to monopolize your time. Unless they are your main reason for attending, try to set aside specific times for customers, ideally in a hospitality area on or off the stand.

Networking and social contacts are part of the appeal of an exhibition, but you'll want to keep it under control.

8. Reserve your place for the next event!!

If you've met or exceeded your expectations now is the time to lock in a prime location at the next event. Visit the show sales office on site, reserve your space now!

What to do after the Show?

The visitors have all gone home. The stands are being taken down. Now is the time to follow through all of the new opportunities you've generated.

Here's where some companies squander the benefits they have worked so hard to achieve while others capitalize on them and turn them into profits.

1. De-brief the team

When you get back to the office, sit down with the stand/booth staff and key managers. Do an honest assessment of what worked and what did not. Elicit suggestions for improving performance at future events. Your staff's insights are a valuable asset, especially whilst their impressions are still fresh.

2. Measure your results

Remember your specific, measurable goals? Now is the time to measure your success against them. If you exceeded your goals, try to determine why, so you can replicate that success at the next show. If you fell short, figure out what you could do better.

3. Track the leads

Don't just evaluate your leads immediately after the event. Many companies do written lead tracking reports three, six and even nine months after a major exhibition to track the new contacts right through to the bottom line. Only then can you truly determine the value of the exhibition for your company.

4. Follow up all contacts

Every visitor to your stand should receive a timely follow up. The degree of follow up will depend on the classification of the contact, ranging from a simple thank you letter to a sales visit, phone call or information pack.

To your prospects, the days and weeks following the exhibition make it clear who most wants their business and who may not be ready to handle it.

5. Send a mailing to all show visitors

You may not be able to meet visitors, but you can contact them. The exhibition team might be able to provide you with the visitor list broken down by sector for a small fee. A quick *"sorry we missed you but did you know"* may be cost effective.

6. Follow through on all press releases

Call the Editors you sent press releases or who visited you on your stand/booth. Ask if there's any more information they might need. Tell them of your success at the show. A timely phone call now could mean a solid mention in a post-show review read by thousands.