

Developing an Effective Pre-Show Marketing Strategy

Creating a Pre-Show Marketing Plan

1. Set an objective
2. Determine a budget
3. Create a profile of your 'Perfect Prospect'
4. Gather your qualified visitor lists
5. Determine the type of campaign you will utilize
6. Select the delivery vehicle

Set an Objective

As in any strategic plan, you need to have some sense of your end goal prior to entering into the plan. This number will be a reflection of your company's size, its market share, length of time in the industry, the quality of your data base, the ability and experience of your sales people and many other factors.

This is not an exact science. If you are creating your first pre-show plan, then you'll have to take a stab at some numbers. The key here is that, in the beginning, you start with some objectives that you feel are attainable, and, in the end you will have quantified data that will show your actual results. You keep building on this information from show to show.

It is amazing how quickly you will be able to predict the results. Of course, the results will be a reflection of your execution.

The pre-show campaign often has two target categories to contend with. One is an "awareness" component, where the objective is to raise the awareness levels of many of the attendees of the show to the fact that your company is in the show. This component can be rather difficult to quantify, but undoubtedly will have a positive spin-off effect.

Another category is the 'Top Prospect' component. This is the prospect that you can target and quantify when they show up.

Developing a Budget

Take a look at the resources available and what strategies would fit your company's needs and come up with a budget. This number can be tweaked as you go and based upon the results you will have a better idea what was effective and what was not.

Determining Your Perfect Prospect

Creating a profile of your "Perfect Prospect" is one of the most important exercises you can do. It will assist you in several ways:

1. **Qualifying** 'drop in' booth traffic
2. **Focusing** your pre-show marketing efforts
3. **Selecting** the proper shows for your organization
4. **Evaluating** your performance

Here are some of the characteristics you should be using in your development of your 'Perfect Prospect' criteria.

- What type of companies are you targeting?
- What size of company can you service best?
- What job descriptions are you targeting within those companies?
- Does it matter where the company is located?
- What other factors may effect this decision?

As you begin to see the differences in your prospects, you may decide to begin to categorize them into A, B and C categories. No matter how you do this, in the end, everyone needs to have a clear vision of exactly who they are looking for. In the case of pre-show marketing, any dollars spent will be lost if you have targeted the wrong prospect.

Gather Your Qualified Prospect Lists

Once you have your Perfect Prospect profile, you can begin to search for this person from within a variety of sources. Build your prospect list from these sources.

1. Company client list(s)
2. Salespeople's individual prospect lists
3. Company's marketing database

Pre-registration visitor list from the show or conference you are attending

Post show attendee list from the show or conference you attended

All these sources should be searched for prospects that fit the criteria set in your Perfect Prospect profile. Ultimately it is your decision about the final pre-show marketing list. Be it large or small, there is going to be a cost associated with delivering your message to each person on that list. The better the list, the more effective the results will be.

Delivering Your Message

There are common elements that need to be a part of all pre-show messages, regardless of how they are delivered. These are:

The name, dates & open hours of the show
Your companies name and relevant information
Your booth number

There are also some other rules you need to be aware of:

Deliver your information to targeted prospects only, do not invite them to come and buy something. Ask them to come to evaluate or give you feedback on certain elements of your products. At this point in the relationship, most prospects are more likely to come to help you than they are to come and buy from you.

When they do come to help, reward them for their time and effort with a gift.

Telemarketing

Use your in-house telemarketer (this could be one of your marketing or sales staff that has a great phone presence) or outsource the project. Develop a script and a compelling voice mail message because in today's world it's hard to get anyone 'live' on the phone.

Direct Mail

Send a letter or post card to a targeted audience.

Email

Can be very cost effective, but with developing Spam and privacy issues it is becoming harder to utilize. This tool can be very effective with existing clients or others that have given you permission to send. Remember to always give them an opportunity to 'opt out' of your list.

Your Web Site

Be sure you put your show activity on your web site. You may also wish to offer a 'Show Special' that prospects can receive if they bring a coupon or other certificate that has been downloaded and printed from your website.

Fax

Make it a 'one-pager' offering a 'Show Special' and again, give 'opt out' opportunity.

Advertising in Trade Publications or Exhibitor Guides

Advertising in Trade Publications or Exhibitor Guides can be effective, and often best if used in conjunction with other strategies in an "awareness" campaign.

Brochures, Flyers & Coupons

Brochures, flyers and coupons can be effective in an "awareness" campaign if included with client communications such as newsletters, invoices, etc.

Conclusions

Whatever Pre-show strategies you employ, you need to track and quantify the results. However complex or simple your strategies.