

ExhibiTips™

TEN COMMON MISTAKES EXHIBITORS MAKES

"To err is human." ROBERT FROST

We all make mistakes. However, if we are aware of the pitfalls that can occur, there is a better chance we can avoid errors -- which, more often than not, can be costly. To follow are ten of the most common mistakes exhibitors make pre-show, at-show and post-show:

Pre-show

1. ***Failing to set exhibiting goals.*** What's the essence of the entire tradeshow experience? The goals, the purpose for exhibiting. Knowing what you want to accomplish at a show will help plan every other aspect -- your theme, the booth layout and display, graphics, product displays, premiums, literature, etc. Exhibiting goals should complement your corporate marketing objectives and help in accomplishing them. (*See ExhibiTips "Establishing Tradeshow Goals & Objectives"*)
2. ***Forgetting to read the exhibitor manual.*** The exhibitor manual is your complete reference guide to every aspect of the show and is your key to saving money. Admittedly, some show management make these easier to read than others. Everything you need to know about the show you are participating in *should* be contained in the manual - show schedules, contractor information, registration, service order forms, electrical service, floor plans and exhibit specifications, shipping and freight services, housing information, advertising and promotion. Remember that the floor price for show services is normally 10-20% higher than the prices available so signing up early will always give you a significant savings.
3. ***Leaving graphics to the last minute.*** Rush, alteration and overtime charges will add significantly to your bottom line. Planning your graphics in plenty of time, i.e. six to eight weeks before show time can avoid many blunders that occur under time pressures and will be less stressful for everyone concerned.
4. ***Neglecting booth staff preparation.*** Enormous time, energy and money are put into organizing show participation -- display, graphics, literature, premiums, etc. Unfortunately, booth staff -- the very people chosen to represent the entire image of the organization -- are often just told to show up and left to fend for themselves. The booth staff are your ambassadors and should be briefed beforehand: *why you are exhibiting; what you are exhibiting and your expectations of their performance.* Exhibit staff training is essential for a unified and professional image. (*See ExhibiTips "Boothmanship I & II"*)

At-Show

5. ***Ignoring visitors' needs.*** Staff members often feel compelled to give the visitor as much information as possible, yet they fail to ask about real needs and interest in the product or service. They lack questioning skills and often miss important qualifying information. Pre-show preparation and training is the key.
6. ***Handing out literature and premiums indiscriminately.*** Staff members who are unsure of what to do in the booth environment or who feel uncomfortable talking to strangers end up handing out literature or giveaway items just to keep occupied. Literature acts as a barrier to conversation -- chances are, it will be discarded at the first opportunity. It is vital that people chosen to represent the organization enjoy interacting with strangers and know what is expected of them in the booth environment.
7. ***Being unfamiliar with demonstrations.*** Many times staffers show up for duty only to discover they are totally unfamiliar with booth demonstrations. Communicate with your team members before the show -- ensure that demonstrators know what is being presented, are familiar with the equipment, and know how to conduct the assigned demonstrations.
8. ***Overcrowding the booth with company representatives.*** Companies often send several representatives to major industry shows to gather competitive and general/specific industry information. These people feel compelled to gather at the company booth, not only outnumbering visitors, but also monopolizing staffer time and restricting visitor interaction. Have strict rules regarding employees visiting the show, and insist staffers not scheduled for booth duty stay away until their assigned time. Company executives are often the worst offenders -- assign specific tasks to avoid them fumbling around the booth.

Post-Show

9. ***Ignoring lead follow-up.*** Show leads often take second place to other management activities that occur after being out of the office for several days. The longer leads are left unattended, the colder and more mediocre they become. Prior to the show, establish how leads will be handled, set timelines for follow-up, and make sales representatives accountable for leads given to them. (See "Lead Management" ExhibiTips)
10. ***Overlooking show evaluation.*** The more you know and understand about your performance at shows, the more improvement and fine-tuning can take place for future shows. No two shows are alike; each has its own idiosyncrasies and obstacles. There is always room for improvement. Invest the time with your staff immediately after each show to evaluate your performance -- it pays enormous dividends. (See ExhibiTips "Show Evaluation")