

ExhibiTips™

VISITING A TRADESHOW

Exhibitors often have to reverse roles and find themselves on the other side of the aisle playing tradeshow attendee. According to a recent Trade Show Bureau study, 39% of attendees spend less than eight hours visiting a show. As with exhibiting, planning and preparation are essential if you want to maximize your time on the trade show floor. The following 30 points will help simplify the process next time you find yourself as a visitor:

Before the Show:

1. Know what you want to achieve by visiting the show. If the company is sending you, understand what your boss wants you to achieve.
2. Develop a list of exhibitors you want to visit and then organize your list into two parts: "must see" and "want to see" companies.
3. Decide how much time you want to spend at the show and then at each booth. Allow extra time for browsing, distractions and waiting in lines.
4. Find out who else from your company is going to the show and develop a plan to maximize your visit, especially at large shows.
5. Know what information you need from exhibitor. Research different vendors to find out how they differ. Then, plan intelligent questions to ask them.
6. Design a lead gathering form to research for specific products/services to make accurate comparisons.
7. Make appointments with exhibitors with whom you want to meet.
8. Get map of where exhibitors located and prioritize your route.
9. Take plenty of business cards. This will help you avoid filling out forms.
10. Pack comfortable shoes and clothing to wear on the show floor. Walking shows is extremely tiring. Try insoles for extra comfort. Remember to leave room for things to bring back.
11. Take a light and comfortable "carry-all" for accumulated materials. Plastic bags are often uncomfortable as they cut into your hands.
12. Make travel and hotel reservations early to maximize on discounted rates.

13. Stay at a hotel close to the convention site to save on traveling and to give you a place to rest, sort through information you've gathered, and refocus your energy.
14. Plan the seminars/workshops you want to attend. Split sessions with your colleagues to maximize your company's participation.
15. Pre-register for the event and arrive 30 minutes before opening to avoid standing in long lines.

At the Show:

16. Revise your plan at the show. The show directory and schedule often changes several times before a show.
17. Collect information that is of interest to you or that might interest others in your company. Request literature and samples be mailed instead of having to carry them with you.
18. Obtain a map of the city and know how to get to the venue.
19. Tell exhibitors you are on a tight time schedule to avoid casual chatter and get straight to business.
20. Look for networking opportunities. Converse with industry leaders. Get invited to exhibitors' hospitality suites/receptions. At workshops, introduce yourself to people around you. Hand out and collect business cards. Hook up with new contacts at mealtimes.
21. Skip overly crowded booths and plan to come back at day's end when traffic is slower.
22. Check coats and bags so you don't have to drag them around with you.
23. Carry a pad and pen to jot down important notes, or have small tape recorder for note taking.
24. Take a break after a few hours to refresh and get some fresh air. Air in convention halls is dry, stale and draining. Drink water regularly instead of pop or beer to avoid dehydration.
25. Write a trip report as you go along and summarize your notes every evening.
26. Be prepared to push for answers to questions exhibitors are not prepared to answer.
27. Avoid conversations with vendors whose products don't interest you.
28. Leave the show about 30 minutes before closing to avoid long lines for buses and cabs.

After the Show:

29. Plan how you are going to implement the information gathered.
30. Be prepared to follow-up after the show for literature and samples you requested.