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THE 5 STEPS TO HIGH YIELD TRADE SHOW LEAD FOLLOW-UP AND QUALIFICATION

By

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Part I Review

Last month we published Part I of ***The Current State of Exhibitor Lead Follow-up*** that reviewed two key topics:

- Why organizers should concern themselves with the success of exhibitor lead generation results.
- The statistics that documented how exhibitors are currently performing against this objective.

Frankly, if exhibitors don't succeed in generating and qualifying leads, they most likely won't return to the show, since 60-80% of the reason they spend money to exhibit is the generation of high quality leads (CEIR data).

We all know this! So why aren't organizers taking a more proactive role in helping exhibitors generate and qualify leads? Some of the reason for this is the assumption that exhibitors know how to do this. Well, some do and some don't. **Here are two cold hard facts for organizers**:

- The smaller the exhibitor, the higher the decay rate from year to year. This is particularly true for the 10x10 booth sized exhibitors.
- The smaller the exhibitor usually correlates to less knowledge on how to generate and qualify leads.

The message is clear – **organizers should take a proactive role in educating and/or assisting exhibitors to generate and qualify leads** – it only makes sense.

Therefore, what follows is information on two important steps for lead generation and qualification specific to trade shows.

- 5 Pre-show steps to take to insure best results
- 4 Trade show lead follow-up processes and best practices

The subject of lead generation, qualification, nurturing and conversion is a much larger topic for B2B companies, and a great deal of information and content is publically available. In fact, many companies specialize in providing marketing services for the lead process. In spite of this, we encourage you to pass along this information to your exhibitors, and if you would like us to help in this effort, please contact us.

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FIVE PRE-SHOW STEPS TO TAKE TO INSURE BEST RESULTS

Prior to the show much of the time and attention is paid to the booth display and logistics. Frequently, **not enough effort is put into ensuring the right attendees show up at the booth**. This is an important aspect in the quality vs. quantity balance of booth visitors. Simply put, the more qualified the attendees the better the lead generation results. Here are 5 pre-show marketing steps to consider along with preparing the booth and planning logistics.

1. **Set specific attendee show objectives**.
   Yes, I know every marketing activity starts off by stating the obvious – set objectives. But, for trade shows, these objectives might be a bit different due to the unique nature of this marketing activity. Common trade show objectives are:
   - Generate X number of leads – a specific number helps focus everybody.
   - Meet with Y number of customers – a customer list is often generated from the sales staff, as they should know which of their customers are coming to the show.
     - This is a very efficient sales activity compared to individual field calls. It's also a great opportunity to include senior executives from customers and/or your company as well – a difficult meeting to arrange otherwise.
     - Sometimes orders are taken from customers and/or a specific customer issue needs to be addressed and these should be identified as well.
   - Introduce the Y new product/service and generate X number of leads for this new product/service (might be in addition to the overall lead generation objectives).
   - Meet with the industry press to obtain coverage.
   - Obtain competitive intelligence.

2. **Data description and/or profile of the best targets likely to be at the show**.
   So who would be the type of company that fits the profile of the desired target audience? Not only is this profile helpful in attracting the right attendee to the booth, but also serves to help screen and prioritize booth visitors for lead generation and follow-up.

   This profile frequently boils down to what kind of company/industry does the individual work in? Our advice is to concentrate on other profiling or qualifying factors such as title level, functional area, ability to make or influence a buying decision and product or service interest etc.

   Other unique show criteria may be very important and should be identified. An example would be for shows that sell to retailers where the number of stores is an important data element. For this show example, identifying this type of criteria would serve as a unique segment for prioritization on follow-up (more on this later).

3. **Use the profile for pre-show marketing campaigns.**
   If the show allows their pre-registration list to be used for marketing, determine if it can be sorted by industry type or key show verticals. If so, then send a mailing and/or email to these individuals inviting them to your booth. Remember the relevancy of message and offer is important to interest attendees who are also receiving other pre-show communications. Developing special messaging to each targeted profiled industry will improve qualified attendance to their booth.

   If the show is not able to break down the list by industry type, still send emails and/or mailings out, but make the case or outline the reasons for individuals who work in the profiled industries to stop by the booth – another use of relevancy.

   In either case, **use the relevant message and offer to attract the right attendees** to your booth. If you're shooting for only a profiled attendee then avoid the splashy promotions and giveaways, as you're really looking for the quality and not quantity of the attendee. These promotions usually draw greater booth traffic, but with lower qualification for the exhibitor's product or service.

4. **Staff orientation and buy-in.**
   We're not talking about sales training, but rather insuring the individuals manning the booth are keyed into the lead generation profile and screening questions. While this may seem like an obvious step, all too often they are not fully informed about this program and information, and therefore don't make it a priority.

   In fact, it's a good idea to develop some opening questions for them to use when an attendee enters the booth. Sometimes a contest helps, but be careful to reward results and not just activities. Remember, **quality over quantity is the name of the game.**

5. **Customize the lead capture forms and tools.**
   This is another pre-show step that is often over-looked. Depending on how you plan to segment the attendees, set up your forms accordingly – both electronic and paper – to capture the desired information. **Make it quick and easy**, as at many shows, booth traffic hits peaks, and you don't want to lose potential leads during high traffic times.

   In addition, match any fields on the lead capture form with those fields on your master marketing and/or customer database. Eventually, this information will need to be uploaded to their sales database or CRM system so the fields should align.

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FOUR TRADE SHOW LEAD FOLLOW-UP PROCESSES AND BEST PRACTICES

The show is over, and now the important activity begins – capitalizing on those potential leads that visited the booth and engaged with a sales person. Let's assume that most, if not all, provided the needed profile information established before the show. In addition, let's assume that an existing lead qualification process exists.

If not, there are many books and white papers that detail how to best qualify, nurture and convert leads. This white paper is about best practices in trade show lead follow-up so that you can utilize your existing lead qualification process. There are four basic principles to use that will **optimize trade show lead follow-up systems**. They are:

1. Prioritization

A survey of exhibitors found that 59% of firms do not prioritize leads before following up. This is a big mistake, for two reasons:

- Prioritization leads to segmentation that fuels relevancy of the message and offer **translating into higher conversion.** [More about this follows.]

- Prioritization also reduces the number of leads for follow-up, thus allowing a more concentrated focus that helps the efficient expenditure of resources devoted to the best opportunities thus **saving money**.

Higher conversion and saving money – two unbeatable reasons to first prioritize the booth visitors before initiating the follow-up system. So how do you approach prioritization?

- First of all, we're talking about leads – not customers, students, competitors or any others that may have visited the booth, and are not classified as potential leads. Take those out of the compiled visitor list and deal with them accordingly.

- Secondly, if sales people were in the booth and engaged in a conversation with a potential customer in their territory and promised to follow-up personally, allow them to do so. Not only will those sales people want to take the lead personally, but the potential customer is expecting a call from that sales person. Record it as a potential lead and track it for show metrics and measurement.

The rest of the booth visitors are those for follow-up, and depending on what information you gathered on the profile, it should now be used to prioritize them for follow-up. The logic of prioritization may also vary depending on your objectives and marketplace.

2. Speed

To borrow a well-known quote from Top Gun – "*I feel the need for speed"*. In this case, it's the need for lead follow-up speed. There are two reasons for speedy follow-up:

- **It increases the prospects interest and response rate**, while the prospect might remember your booth/product/service, it is also likely that they visited a number of booths. As we all have experienced, these visits melt into a blur. The faster you follow-up the more you embed in their memory who you are and why they stopped by your booth.

- Speedy follow-up also **begins to build the trust** in your firm's creditability as a reliable supplier since the perception of a quick follow-up is one of a coordinated and responsive firm. If they have also visited competitors, this will begin to separate you from competition as well as they likely will be slower than you.

Don't wait until your return from the show to set-up the system and resources for the initial follow-up, as that will impede a speedy follow-up. In other words, be ready to act. Here are two industry best practices to consider:

- While at the show, load each day's visitors into a CRM or MRM software and **send an email that night** thanking them for stopping by your booth. Offer a reason for them to respond to the email such as a white paper, report of other valuable information. Those responding will most likely be your most interested leads.

- **No more than 24 hour**s after the show has ended launch the first follow-up communication following the prioritization step. Clearly this will be either an email and/or phone call. The most successful follow-up systems send an email predicting a subsequent phone call. Statistics vary, but this combination of speed and email/phone sequence will garner a 10-30% connection with these attendees. A high connection rate by any standards.

Speed kills – the competition!

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3. Relevance:

While speed helps, **what really breaks through the clutter is the relevancy of the message and offer**. In addition, to the blur of all the other booths visited, they now are faced with the inevitable buildup of messages and things to do back at the office. To fight through this clutter and engage them, the more relevant you are the higher the likelihood to be successful obtaining the needed conversations for lead qualification.

Relevancy can be drawn from a number of areas, and depending on what information and data you gathered on the lead capture form, the most effective relevancy points are:

- Name and date of trade show
- Person they talked to and date of conversation
- Their industry and how it relates to your product or service
- Other data you included on the lead capture form, such as number of retail stores
- Promised literature or logical next steps

Remember, **specifics sell – generalities bore**! All of this is intended to break through the clutter and engage the individual – the first step in setting up qualification and conversion.

Industry best practices are to use more than one point of relevancy in the follow-up communication. **The more relevant the message and offer the higher the engagement and response rates, and a combination of facts will increase the impact.**

4. Persistence

There are some scary statistics today as how many emails, mailings and calls are needed to connect with individuals. One study documented that it took 8-12 calls to just talk to an individual. Another one documented that 80% of sales are made only after the 5th contact. No matter what the number, the message is clear – **persistence is needed to follow-up on trade show leads for qualification and conversion to sale**.

One of the biggest mistakes within the lead generation/qualification process is **abandoning contacting the prospect only after a few attempts**. This is another reason prioritization is important since you want to spend time and money on the most likely leads.

One method to improve upon the number of calls/contacts needed is to use the strategy of multi-media/multi-touch. From a media viewpoint there are four that are targetable:

- Email
- Mail
- Phone
- Social – LinkedIn

By combining two, three or four of these media in a sequential contact plan, the likelihood of breaking through the clutter and engaging the individual are substantially improved. One of the best combinations is email-phone-email. Of course, the revenue and margin of the product/service being sold needs to be calculated and justify the expense of this approach.

Measurement and metrics

Now for that same old pesky question – "So what did we get for all that money we spent at the XYZ show?" Since the conversion to sale of the leads generated at the show is the major revenue result, it is critical to record and track the lead-to-sale process and results. For complex product/service sales, this may take 12-18 months or more before a lead is converted. In some cases, the sales cycle will even be longer. To dive into this subject, download the white paper, "***Are Trade Shows Worth It?"*** by visiting the Direct Hit Marketing website www.DirectHitMarketing.com .

Summary

So now what are you going to do? Hopefully there are a few ideas, recommendations and best practices that make sense and apply to your trade show lead system. Possibly trying to redo all your marketing plans and processes is too much to bite off. If so, pick one of the pre-show steps and one follow-up process to implement. The obvious goal is to improve results of trade show participation. Generating leads is the main contributor to results and the more attention to what happens after the show will certainly improve these results.

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John has partnered with Direct Hit Marketing and is responsible for adding new trade show clients and thought leadership. John is also Co-Founder and Partner of B2BMarketing.com. His background includes experience in both sales and marketing. On the sales side, John was a field salesman, national sales manager and executive in charge of both sales and marketing for three major B2B firms. On the marketing side, he was president of a B2B direct marketing agency for 10 years, was National Campaign Manager at IBM, Sr. VP of B2B at Rapp Collins Worldwide and President of Protocol B2B. John is also the author of ***The Fundamentals of Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing***, published by McGraw-Hill. John's next book co-authored with Steve Juedes, President of DHM is titled ***Data-Driven Trade Show Marketing & Sales for Organizers and Exhibitors*** is due for publication in late 2017. He can be reached at johnc@directhitmarketing.com or by phone at 602-402-6588.