



With BTME almost upon us Bob Rendle, from Textron's Marketing Department, looks at how a major turf maintenance equipment manufacturer prepares for this prestigious event.

AND THEN, AS IF BY

It's a cold and frosty morning in mid January. You're standing in the middle of an almost deserted exhibition hall in Harrogate waiting for the stand contractors to arrive as the remnants of the last exhibition are finally cleared away. Yes, it's BTME time once again! That time when all the things planned for during the past months have to come together in less than two days for a show that will last just three days.

So why do manufacturers, like Textron, exhibit at shows and exhibitions and just what is involved in the planning and organisation of a stand? You don't need to be a rocket scientist to answer the first part of the question. Where else can you reach so many customers and potential customers at one time, launch new products, meet the press and media, cement existing relationships and generate new business?

Many of your dealers will also be among the visitors, so it is a great opportunity to get them together to discuss issues and, as Textron will

be doing, recognise their efforts over the past year.

Shows are also a great place to meet and greet old friends, some of whom you may not have seen since, well Saltext, all of 15 weeks ago! It's all good fun except for the stand organiser, for him or her it's a challenge.

So where do you start? Booking the stand space is always a good idea so, as soon as the booking form comes in, call a meeting - this is likely to be the first of many - to determine exactly what you require. You can usually book stand space in two ways. The first option is a "shell scheme", the cost of which includes walls around the stand, carpeting and lighting. All you have to do is move your products in, put pictures up, spread out your literature and away you go.

The other option is "open space", an area of bare floor on which to build the stand, quite literally, from the floor up.

Size and number of products along with your budget will determine the area you apply for. The position of your stand in the exhibition is also important so get into talks with the organisers and get the best for your company. Just as importantly decide who is going to the show and get hotel rooms booked, as accommodation can be very hard to come by during show week. If you can delegate this job to someone who will be on the show stand, they will then take a very personal interest in getting it right! (Managers' PAs and senior secretaries are usually very good at this, as they tend to know everyone involved).

If you have opted for an open space stand there's usually time for a breather after the application has gone in and before you have to start looking at the detail. However, don't get complacent and always read the exhibitors' manual

thoroughly. It will be full of important information including a list of deadlines that have to be adhered to. Then, at no less than three months before the show (longer if you've a really big stand), call another meeting and get everyone involved; sales, marketing, service, parts and manufacturing. Decide on your exhibits (making sure that the factory can supply them on time); look at any failings in previous stand designs and get input from everybody so that there are no nasty surprises later on.

Armed with all this information you can then set about planning the stand layout. It's not uncommon for the Sales Department to want everything bar the kitchen sink incorporated on a stand the size of a postage stamp, so draw up plan views of the products, cut them out if necessary and on a sheet of graph paper, draw the stand area to the same scale. You can then spend a couple of hours moving your little scale drawings around to see if everything will fit. Don't forget to allow a space for storage (coats, briefcases, literature) and perhaps a small office. Even with modern computer software packages available, this tried and trusted method is almost infallible.

Now that you have got to this stage, it's time to call in a stand designer

Below: Special functions, such as the Dealer of the Year Awards, can be organised as part of the Show



Above: Planning the stand layout in detail ensures that all products will fit

MAGIC

and exhibition contractor. Your stand can be simple or complex depending on the budget available, so get a maximum of three companies to look at the job to ensure that you get value for money. Stand building is an expensive business and a detailed brief including a copy of your product layout, any requirements for video or computer terminals and the budget available is essential.

While waiting for the designs to come back, start thinking about all the other things that will be required. Just about every trade magazine will carry a show preview and will be asking for press releases early in December and the publishing deadlines will have been brought forward due to the Christmas and New Year holiday. It is particularly important to get these in if you are launching new products. You'll also need press packs at the show and its best to get these professionally written and produced. New products mean new literature. Have you got enough stock of existing leaflets? What about photographs you'll need both for the press releases, stand and literature. All these things take time and there will be other things on going, so time will soon pass. Keep a check on any jobs that you have delegated. Particularly hotel accommodation!

We mentioned dealers earlier and it's not uncommon for a manufacturer to hold an evening function for them during the show. This means that demand for function rooms could be high, so get your booking in early. Things to think about here are getting invitations out, replies in, a menu chosen and perhaps a speaker or cabaret booked. You'll need to establish a programme for the evening as there are sure to be speeches and the MD will want to know precisely what's expected of him. The organisation of an event such as this is a job in itself and once again help from the managers' PAs and senior secretarial staff will prove invaluable.

You've now got the stand designs and quotations in so have another meeting and make your choice of preferred supplier. Now is there anything you've forgotten? Back to the exhibitors manual and that all-important check list. Whoops! The catalogue entry was supposed to be in 10 days ago and the deadline for ordering telephones is tomorrow. And that's how it goes right up to the show. Changes to accommo-

modation requirements are always necessary, so be prepared. (Why do overseas visitors always think that hotels have executive suites waiting for their booking the day before a show opens?) Don't forget the sales enquiry forms and what about name badges for the staff?

It's now time for the show build up and back to where we started. The contractors are in and you are just waiting (with a team of willing helpers) for your transport to arrive with all the products. Everybody is trying to get into the exhibition hall at the same time so be patient. As long as you have not forgotten anything it should all work like clockwork. It needs to, as it's really too late now to make any last minute changes. It may take a day, it may take a week to build the stand, but at the end of it you should feel a great sense of satisfaction.

Now you take on a new role from Stand Organiser to Stand Manager while the Show is open. It's an important one as accidents can happen and things can go wrong. Make sure that you know where the important services are in the Hall, organisers office, first aid, electricians etc. Make sure that someone on your team has a small tool kit so that you can quickly deal with small emergencies, because they will happen. Get though the next few days and then all you have to do is tear it all down. Breakdown is always achieved in a fraction of the time it takes to build.

So what has been achieved during the show? Well, hopefully, we've done what we set out to do. We've met many of our existing customers, making sure that we have met their expectations over the previous year and ironing out any minor problems that might have arisen. We've launched new products and gained valuable feedback on these and our existing product range. Potential new customers have come on stand and those sales enquiry forms have been analysed and followed up. The media, especially the trade press, have had the opportunity for one-to-one conversations with our senior people and we've even spoken with our competitors. And finally, we've met with our distributors, discussed various issues and, at the Dealer of the Year Awards, recognised their contribution to the success of the organisation.

It's been a huge team effort and hopefully it's all gone to plan and that's the secret. Plan, revise and plan again. And that's it until the next show.

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