



The Total Exhibition Experience

With BTME & ClubHouse on the Horizon it's worth taking a look at how to get the most out of this buying and selling opportunity. Pauline Thompson takes a look from both perspectives, the exhibitors who are selling and the visitors who are buying.

THE EXHIBITOR

Exhibitions should, if done well, include many different aspects of sales and marketing. It's a culmination of PR, advertising, promotion, presentation, selling, and interpersonal communication skills. It can be difficult to put all of these aspects of exhibiting together and make them work. However, having a clear objective about what you are trying to achieve, and knowing what your customers want from you when they visit your stand is a good place to start.

An exhibitor needs to make sure he or she gets a return on the investment. Along with the cost of the stand rental there are stand design costs, construction, show services and transportation. As well as the obvious exhibiting costs, an astute exhibitor will also have the added cost of pre-show and on-site advertising, telemarketing, direct mailings, training and of course post-show follow-up.

Exhibitors work very hard and spend a lot of time, effort and money in choosing, buying and planning their stand space in order to attract prospective and current customers. The main reasons for deciding to exhibit are to take orders; launch new products; to convert prospective customers into new accounts; to wave the flag and say "here we are"; to check out the competition and to entertain important clients.

It is important to remember that customers buy from people, not stands. It doesn't matter how good the stand design, if the interaction between people is less than professional or the post-show follow-up is inefficient, it may just be a missed opportunity, or it could harm a reputation and credibility.

THE VISITOR

In the same way that an exhibitor needs to be clear about his objectives, the visitor must be clear in his own mind about what he is trying to achieve in order to get the most value from his time at the exhibition. BTME & ClubHouse lasts for three days and comes round once a year. Having recognised the perfect opportunity to compare a wide range of existing and potential suppliers the visitor must maximise his time in order to gain the benefits on offer.

There is a lot to do whether it's finding alternative or additional suppliers, selecting products, placing orders, or investigating a new opportunity. All this plus networking and gathering market intelligence will keep the visitor very busy. Planning is the key to a successful visit, otherwise the people may not be available and time could run out. If more than one project is to be achieved it can be beneficial to concentrate on one project at a time and spread appointments over two or three days.

It is vital to make the best use of time and take into account travelling time, registration, obtaining a catalogue and finding a way through the halls, half a day can disappear before any business has been done. Serious discussions at the end of the day may be difficult as, not surprisingly, both exhibitor and visitor have had a long day. However, while the exhibition is open, there will always be a sales person available.

Visitors can easily become overloaded with catalogues, price lists and brochures. Make use of the carrier bags given out at the show, and, by travelling light, the visitor can collect business cards, and make notes to accompany them. The amount of information gathered during the course of a full day can be astronomical. It is always a good idea to summarise the key points at the end of each day in order to reap the benefits of the exhibition.

Sales people have an enthusiasm for their products and services that enables them to talk at great lengths about why the customer should do business with their company. A useful skill is being able to close a conversation when it has become unproductive without being rude, or causing offence.

Networking opportunities which take place in the hotels and bars between show days can be invaluable. Many stories filter back about how a good time was had by all. However, a fine balance must be achieved in order for the following day not to become a total write-off.

BTME & ClubHouse is a major event at the start of every season, with careful planning, exhibitors and visitors will be enabled to measure how successful their attendance has been.

Pauline Thompson is the BTME & ClubHouse Exhibition organiser and can be contacted at BIGGA HOUSE Tel: 01347 833800