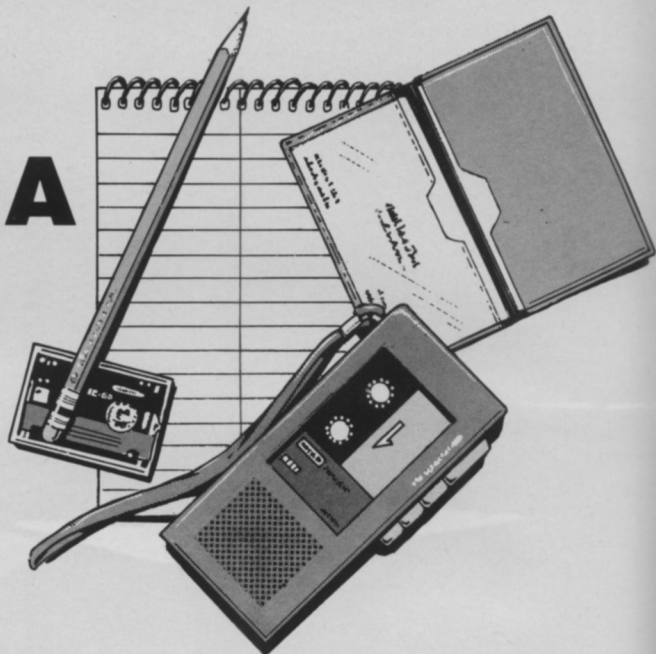


GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A TRADE SHOW



Trade shows have evolved from an excuse to party into essential business gatherings. By carefully planning your shows, you'll get more out of them.

by Rudd McGary, Ph.D.

The trade show season—October through March—is upon the green industry. And in order to get the most out of the trade show experience, it's important to remember to take steps before, during, and after each show.

The day is gone when a trade show was simply an excuse to socialize. With today's increased competition, government regulations and consumer "chemophobia," you need the information available at trade shows if you're to continue your personal growth in the industry.

Break down your show responsibilities into two parts: preparing for the trip and following through at the convention site.

Preparation

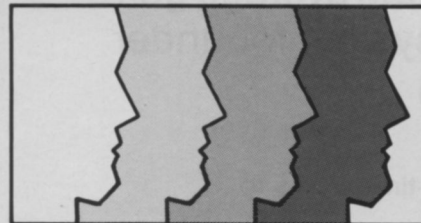
Usually you'll receive the trade show program soon after mailing your registration fee. Take time to read the program thoroughly, or you'll end up wasting a great deal of time at the show. Send for a show brochure even if you plan to register on site.

The program lists names of the vendors and time and location of the educational programs and social activities. Look for educational topics and vendors that interest you. If you aren't sure what a topic entails, call the association offices for an explanation before committing your time and energy to attending.

Outline a plan that will allow you to conveniently visit all the vendors you wish to see. This is a great opportunity to gather information on their wares, particularly if they're showing

new products. It's a good idea to bring with you a list of questions for the vendor so your visit doesn't turn into simply a social meeting. (It's not bad to have social meetings, but if that's all you do at a show it's not a good way to use your time.)

MANAGEMENT



IN BUSINESS

Always have a notebook with you. Write down questions and answers; that way you're sure to get all the information you need and you'll have it for future reference.

Trade shows are a great place to make business contacts, which is why you should always carry plenty of business cards. Even if you seldom use business cards in the course of your daily business, they are very handy at a show—particularly a national show. If you want a vendor to send you additional information or want to make sure another attendee knows how to reach you, a business card is invaluable.

At the show

Get your show credentials as soon as you arrive. The programs and a listing of all the functions will usually be issued with your credentials.

Next, make out a schedule of the events you want to attend and/or vendors you want to see. Keep in mind that you're likely to make last minute changes and adjust your schedule accordingly.

Divide the show days between attending the educational sessions and visiting vendors on the trade show floor.

Your notebook will come in handy at the educational sessions. Most speakers don't mind if you record their speech on a cassette, but it's a good idea to ask first. A quick thought about tape recording: people often make tapes of sessions and then never listen to them again, particularly if there are multiple sessions in one day. When the show is over and you're back in your office, look over your notes, listen to your tapes and summarize in writing what you learned. This will give you a permanent record you can use throughout the year.

Also, take notes while taping. This will protect you in case the recorder fails and give you a permanent record on paper that you can supplement what you have on tape.

When listening to the educational sessions make sure you consider the information as it relates to your company. In some instances, specific information might not pertain to your company. But for the most part you should be able to use the information in some form or another. If you can't, you're wasting time by sitting in on the session.

Ask questions

If you don't understand what is being said or the presentation is unclear, ask questions. If there isn't enough time

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for the speaker to answer your questions or if you don't want to interrupt, make a note of your questions and ask them after the session.

Unless the speaker's topic is how to read minds, he or she won't be able to answer all your questions in advance. Usually it's best to ask specific questions after the session so that you don't take time away from the speaker. Corner the speaker later if necessary. If you don't leave the room with the information you were hoping for, it's because you didn't ask enough questions.

As with the educational sessions, planning your tour of the trade show floor is helpful. Circle the booth locations of the those vendors you want to see. Don't go at them helter-skelter.

Plan your visits around the educational sessions. In some cases the show is designed so that educational sessions are at different times than the trade show, though some shows schedule them concurrently. Knowing booth locations and the hours you can visit them will allow you to make better use of your time.

As you go through the show, you will find that your information falls into several categories. From the sessions, you will have technical, product, regulatory and business information. It makes some sense to have your note-taking arranged so that you can record information within each of these categories.

Informal meetings are also excellent opportunities to obtain information. There is no need to "pump" people for ideas during social occasions, but you should have some idea of what you intend to learn, even at these informal meetings. Often the information you pick up here is as valuable as that from the trade show or educational sessions.

If you attend the show with a co-worker, it's important to decide beforehand which of you has the responsibility to find out certain information. That way you won't waste time by looking for the same things.

Plan to plan

Remember this simple rhyme: *Plan before you go; then plan again at the show.* By doing this you'll increase the likelihood of seeing something or someone that can be helpful to you or your company. If you don't plan ahead, you'll miss the chance to take full advantage of the benefits of attending a trade show.

At the end of a show make a note of the things you enjoyed and the things you're going to avoid next time. This will help you make the next show even better than the last one! **LM**

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