



The Most Overlooked Key to Exhibiting Success

By Jefferson Davis, *Competitive Edge*

Guess what percentage of marketing professionals with college degrees in the United States received exhibition marketing as part of their university curriculum? 2% 7% 13% 24%

If you guessed 2%, you are right. As a recognized exhibition expert, I am often asked “*What is the single most important key to making exhibitions deliver real results for our company?*” People expect me to say things like “get a better stand location”, “build a bigger, flashier display”, “do a better job promoting your stand”, “demonstrate your products better”, “capture better leads”, etc.

All of these things can help. But, when I tell them the single most important key to making exhibitions deliver meaningful and measurable results is to update and expand their company’s exhibiting knowledge base, they look surprised. They tell me “*we know how to exhibit, we’ve been doing it for years.*” I then ask them to tell me about the results their exhibition program is delivering, and far too few exhibitors can speak of any specific results. They all seem to know what they are spending, but too few know what they are receiving.

The question of how to make exhibitions deliver results is a poignant question because it appears that many companies’ exhibition programs fail to deliver measurable and meaningful results. I believe strongly that the lack of formal exhibiting knowledge is one of the main reasons. Consider these shocking exhibition industry statistics:

- Only 24% of exhibitors set measurable objectives for exhibitions.
- Less than 20% of exhibitors do any form of targeted pre-exhibition marketing.
- 84% of stand workers never received training on how to work an exhibition.
- 76% of salespeople view exhibition leads as “cold” calls.
- 87% of exhibition leads captured are never effectively followed up on.
- Only 35% of exhibitors have any organized form of post-exhibition measurement.

These statistics point to a major problem. U.S. marketing departments spend 41% of their annual marketing budget on exhibitions. Sales departments are asked to work in the stand, often against their will or desire. Both departments spend significant financial and human capital, and both with very little formal education or training on how to best do so. And it usually shows in their results.

Exhibitions have changed in complexity over the last several years. The body of knowledge on how to make exhibitions productive and profitable has exploded. And far too few exhibitors are keeping up with the changes and seeking out the latest thinking and best exhibiting practices. Many companies are operating on an exhibiting model that is 10 years old and no longer works.

So where do you look for the changes and latest and best exhibiting practices? While there are many good resources, the show organizer is a great place to start. Please make sure you and the key people in your marketing and sales departments visit the exhibition website and look for exhibitor educational resources. And most importantly, please use what makes sense for your situation. By doing so, you can assure that exhibiting knowledge will no longer be a gap in your company.

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