Measuring and Evaluating Results

Introduction

Measuring and evaluating results will provide you and your associates with the vital information you need for making key strategic and tactical decisions prior to, at and after the trade shows, conventions and events in which you are involved. Measurement will enable you to determine how successful you were (or weren't) at an event, and why. A well designed and implemented measurement and evaluation program will ultimately lead you and your company to continued improvement, effectiveness and success.

This guide has three sections. The first section of this guide addresses goal setting, the cornerstone of a successful measurement program. In the second section, we'll look at three methodologies for measurement that will help you analyze your results and improve your company's performance. We'll discuss: 1) observation and feedback, the simplest and easiest way to measure your company's performance; 2) Return on Investment (ROI), a methodology by which you compare the costs of a show with the revenue generated to determine the value of the show from a financial perspective; and 3) Return on Objectives (ROO), a way to determine the total value of a show including non-financial performance elements. In the third and final section of the guide, we'll review the various tools that you can used to measure and analyze your performance.

Goal Setting

While all three methodologies for measurement (observation and feedback, ROI and ROO) have much in common, the most important common element is that each starts with the establishment of goals. Once you have clearly defined (quantified) your goals, you can measure success by comparing your results with your specific goals. Unfortunately, most exhibitors don't establish goals for an event. Without goals though, it is virtually impossible to measure and evaluate your company's performance at (or after) a trade show, convention or event. When you define your goals, they should be:

Specific – Define specifically what you want to accomplish, quantifying your goals wherever possible. For example, a goal stated as "increase awareness of our brand (company) and our new products" is not well defined (nor measurable). On the other hand "Our goal is to make 25% of our potential audience (not the entire show audience, but those people who fit your specific demographic profile) aware of the new 3000 series" is a goal that is both well defined and measurable.

Timebound – Define time frames for evaluation. A statement like "We want to do a really good job this year in terms of post-show follow-up" represents good intentions, but isn't specific and doesn't define by when the task should be completed. "We will follow up on all existing customers who stopped by the booth and all 'A' leads within five days after the show" defines the time frame associated with the task.

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Measurable – The methodology for what you will measure and how you will measure it should be determined as part of the goal setting exercise. The how part of an ROI or ROO measurement will be discussed in the final part of this guide.

The Deloitte and Touche study for the Center for Exhibition Industry Research quantified the percentage of exhibitors who find each of the following types of objectives very important to trade show exhibiting. Companies had many other objectives for exhibiting, but these are the objectives that most closely align with overall corporate marketing objectives.

63%	Promote Company Capabilities / Awareness
51%	Introduce New Products
46%	Sales Leads from New Prospects
36%	Sales Leads from Present Customers
31%	Enter New Markets
21%	Generate Immediate Sales Orders
16%	Public Relations

Clearly defined goals will guide the many decisions you will need to make before, at and after a trade show or event, and ultimately measure and evaluate your company's effectiveness and success. If you accomplished your goals, chances are that you used the appropriate strategies, plans and booth staff. If you did not accomplish your goals, you'll need to adjust your strategies, plans, location, or booth staff. You also might use the data to decide that the show was just not the right fit for your company.

Show and Event Goals May Include:

- generate leads
- customer meetings
- book follow-up appointments
- close sales
- demo products
- recruit personnel
- advance the buying process
- support your industry
- press coverage
- branding
- improve name recognition
- create awareness
- test-market products
- distribute samples
- identify trends in the industry
- support channels
- develop international contacts
- collect mailing list names
- enhance relationships with current clients
- develop competitive insight
- support strategic partners

Observation and Feedback

The simplest and most cost-effective way to measure and evaluate your results is through observation and feedback. Keep track of what worked and what didn't work prior to, at and after the show. Then talk to some of the other people involved in making your participation in a show or event a success. Talk to your vendors and solicit their feedback. Talk to your booth workers, your management team and your booth visitors, both new prospects and existing customers. Talk to the show manager, the general contractor and anyone else who worked with you prior to, at or after the event. Their observations and feedback can be invaluable. Among the questions you might ask are:

What was the most valuable part of the show? Why?
What was the least valuable part of the show? Why?
Were pre-show promotions effective? Why?
Was the location good? Why?
Were there enough (or too many) people in the booth? Why?
Was the size of the booth appropriate? Why?
Was the literature satisfactory? Why?
Were giveaways valuable? Why?
Were the right products on display? Why?
Did the signage convey the right message?
What should we do again? Why?
What didn't work? Why?
How could we make it better?

In addition to asking these questions, you can often obtain additional information from the measurement and evaluation work conducted by the association or show manager. Many show managers (and exhibitors) hire professional companies to audit and evaluate their show. Check with the show manager and find out what they are doing, what results you are entitled to as an exhibitor, and what additional information can be purchased.

Return On Investment (ROI)

Return on Investment (ROI) is a term often used by business professionals to quantify the financial return on their investment in a variety of things: capital equipment, land, buildings, etc. In the trade show industry, return on investment compares the costs associated with being in a show or staging an event with the actual revenue generated as a result.

There are many different ways to calculate the return on a trade show or event. For many years now, marketing professionals have tried to determine the best way for exhibitors to calculate ROI. Each methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses. Some programs are complex and expensive to implement, while others are easier and less expensive to put into action. In this section of our guide, we'll make suggestions on how you and your associates might calculate your company's trade show or event return on investment.
For simplicity sake, we will first look at the return generated from leads taken at a show. We'll discuss how to develop and implement a closed-loop lead management process, since almost all ROI methodologies track leads and revenue generated from leads converted to sales. Then, we'll look at a few other sales variables that factor into an ROI calculation.

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Measure ROI on Leads Converted to Sales

Measuring the return on investment from leads converted to sales requires careful planning and execution prior to, at and especially after a show. It also requires that the sales and marketing departments of your company work closely together to plan for a show, execute on every prospect or customer interaction on the show floor and follow through after the event's completion. Working together ensures will enable you to maximize the potential return on a show. The role of marketing is to create sales opportunities; the role of sales is to pursue those opportunities. When both groups work together to accomplish mutual goals trade shows yield excellent returns, results and revenue. Unless both groups work together, results are jeopardized, and post-show ROI measurement is very difficult to calculate. Lead follow up and tracking must be supported by high level sales executives and infield sales managers. No matter how good the leads might be, they have no value unless salespeople pursue the opportunities created at a show. It's almost impossible to succeed without their support and commitment to provide you and your associates with updated information on when the leads were contacted, which were converted into customers, and what revenue was generated. The following nine step process will help you and your sales department design and implement a successful closed-loop lead management system:

Step 1: Quantify Your Goal

To quantify your goal, calculate how many hours each person staffing your booth will work and multiply this number by the number of leads each will probably generate. A generic rule of thumb suggests that each person will generate three or four qualified leads each hour (less for capital equipment and complex sales, more for commodity sales or where the buying cycle is relatively short). If you have worked the meeting or show before, check your previous results, compare them with the number you just calculated, and adjust accordingly. Remember, your goal for leads should be specific, time bound and measurable.

Step 2: Create a Lead Form

A business card with notes scribbled on the back is not a lead form. Meet with and discuss the lead form with the salespeople who will get the leads after the event. What is their definition of a qualified lead? What would they like to know about new prospects? Most importantly, what would motivate them to follow up? Their input before the show create the right lead form and will help you get their support after the show. Take a look at the sample lead form on the next page.

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Sample Lead Form

Name: ______________________________ Company Name: ______________________________

Title: ______________________________ Address: ______________________________

Phone: ______________________________ City, State, Zip: ______________________________

E-mail: ______________________________ Website: ______________________________

Current Situation

Situation: ____

Problems: ____

Implications: ____

Needs: ____

Qualifying Information

Role in buying process: ____

Size of opportunity: ____

Timing of decision: ____

Budget: ____

Competition: ____

Area(s) of Interest

Products: Services:

Post Show Activities

❑ Would like a phone call ❑ Send Literature: ________________, then call

❑ Will visit our Web location ❑ Send Literature for file: ____________________

Lead taken by: Date: Show: ❑ A ❑ B ❑ C

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Step 3: Pre-Show Promotion
Use pre-show promotions to attract pre-qualified prospects to your booth (your potential audience – the specific demographic profile that you want in your booth). Ask your salespeople to provide you with a list of existing customers and targeted prospects. If they give you the names and some of these customers and prospects attend the meeting or show, there are two benefits. First, it will create sales opportunities and second, it will improve the attitudes of your salespeople who personally derive greater value from the time they have invested in the booth. Another way to generate a list of people who represent your target audience for the show is to use your corporate database(s), or to purchase a list from a show manager or association. Another list might be obtained from the publishers of trade journals in your industry. Some exhibitors will "partner" with their strategic suppliers or other exhibitors to develop a list and do a promotion. Whatever list you use, your best results will come if you only contact those prospects that are pre-qualified for the products and services you sell. Once you have your list and have determined your key message(s), it's time to select the most appropriate pre-show promotion. Types of pre-show promotions include:

Invitations – Send a personalized invitation or letter which conveys your marketing message and motivates the prospect to visit your booth — i.e., new product announcement, meet with a senior manager in your company, etc.

Hospitality Suite – If your company is hosting a hospitality function, send invitations to pre-qualified prospects and customers. This invitation should invite them to your booth to pick up a pass for the hospitality suite. If you just send them a pass for the hospitality suite, they might miss your booth.

Advertisements – Advertise in newspapers, trade magazines, newsletters, the meeting's exhibitor directory, or other industry related publications. Make sure that all the ads you run during the two months prior to the meeting have a tag line which mentions the meeting's name and your booth location and/or number.

Incentives – Incentives can include discounts, better terms and conditions for show orders, or other offers that will motivate pre-qualified prospects to stop at your booth.

Contests/Gifts – Some exhibitors will use a contest or gift to motivate prospects and customers to stop by the booth.

Pre-show promotions work. They will motivate pre-qualified prospects and your existing customers to visit your booth. Determine your target audience, key message and the best lists from which to work. The more you promote your company, the greater the return on your trade show efforts and investments.

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Step 4: Train Your Booth Staff
Prior to the show, teach your booth staff how to use the lead form. Make sure they are comfortable with the qualifying questions, how to record the required information and process the lead form after it's been completed. Role play to ensure that your staff is comfortable with the process. Also, make sure they know how to set the appropriate expectations for how your company will follow up after the event is over.

Step 5: Measure and Motivate
Reward the people who are putting the most energy and effort into your success at a trade show. A complimentary letter to the staffer's manager or a small financial reward can be very motivational. Create a contest that everyone can win by reaching graduated productivity levels. Competition for a single prize, such as one awarded to the person with the most leads, can create friction in the booth and detract from the team spirit. Link your incentive to your show goals to generate maximum results.

Step 6: Collect All Leads
Collect all the leads as they are generated. If people keep some leads and turn in others, you won't be able to follow up consistently, nor calculate the true return on your investment. Explain to your staff how the leads will be processed, what each prospect can expect after the event, and how and when you will distribute the leads after the event's completion.

Step 7: Follow-Up
Distribute the leads immediately after the event. The faster you distribute the leads, the more motivated your staff will be to follow up. The follow-up activity should be consistent with your prospects' expectations. If you promised to send literature, send it. If you promised to call for an appointment, call. You will leave a lasting impression if you do meet your prospects' expectations. Don't just distribute the leads after a show. Set expectations on when you want feedback on the leads, and what that feedback should be. This is where you really need the support of sales management. If you don't get feedback on leads contacted, leads converted to sales and the resulting revenue, you won't be able to calculate the return on the show.

Step 8: Track Results
Track the results of your follow-up efforts in specific time increments (e.g., one month, three months, six months, one year). The time frame should be determined by "buying cycles." A buying cycle is the amount of time it takes from initial contact with the prospect to when he or she makes a decision. The buying cycle for commodities, for example, is often measured in weeks or months, while the buying cycle for major capital equipment is often eighteen months to two years. Tracking results will enable you to determine how many leads were converted to customers, and the revenue generated as a result.

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Step 9: Calculate Return

Return on investment based on leads collected and converted into customers comes from two sources: 1) new customers; and 2) incremental business from existing customers. After one buying cycle, track actual revenue from leads converted to new customers. Then, project how much business you will generate with these new customers during the course of the year after the show. Next, calculate incremental business from existing customers that can be attributed to the show. Sometimes, companies also include a projection of how many additional customers will develop from the leads taken at the show (just because they didn't buy in the first six months after the show doesn't mean that they won't buy during the next six months). Add together actual and projected revenue from new customers with incremental business from existing customers. Compare this revenue amount with your costs for the show to calculate the return on your investment from leads.

Measure ROI on Other Sales Objectives

Many schools of thought exist regarding ROI and ROO. Some suggest that ROI includes only leads converted to sales. Others include the following four components because they represent a measurable reduction in the cost of sales and should therefore be included in an ROI calculation. We present them here as part of the ROI calculation. You and your associates might include them here or in your ROO calculation. Prior to a show or event, discuss this with your associates, internal customers and manager to determine what's best for your company.

Management Meetings

What does it cost your company to put one of your executives together with an executive from a pre-qualified prospect or customer's organization? At a show, an executive can meet with several customers in a day – several more than if they were making infield sales calls. Executive's time with customers can be calculated; the savings in both actual and opportunity costs can calculated and factored into a show's ROI.

Accelerate the Buying Process

Several steps occur in the buying and selling process. Each has a related cost of sales. A well orchestrated customer meeting at a show or event can move the customer through several stages of the buying process, saving time and money for both buyer and seller. This cost saving also enhance a show's ROI.

Demonstrate Products

It is often very expensive to demonstrate a product. At a show, the product can be demonstrated to many prospects and customers at the same time. Many companies will prearrange appointments with pre-qualified prospects and existing customers to demonstrate equipment or other products that cannot be easily or cost-effectively demonstrated in the field. The savings associated with these demonstrations can be added to the return on investment calculations for a given show.

Sample Products

Product sampling can be very expensive. Trade shows and events often bring an industry together, making sampling a cost-effective alternative when compared to other sampling programs. Factor the savings in your costs into your ROI.
Measuring the ROI on a show or event means that you compare your costs with revenue generated (and dollars saved from the other cost of sales factors discussed above). You can base your ROI on leads generated and the resulting sales, or you can factor in the dollars saved on these other sales objectives as well.

Return On Objectives

As we mentioned before, some objectives factor into a Return on Investment calculation while others factor into Return on Objectives. ROI looks at incremental revenues (and reduced costs of sales). ROO looks the other marketing and sales objectives that are important, but do not result in immediate or near-term sales opportunities. Objectives that fall into this category usually include image (awareness of your brand and perception of the brand) and press and media coverage. Calculating a show's ROO is often done with the help of a professional consultant or measurement firm because of the complexity involved in gathering and processing the information required for these calculations.

Image

Most image goals are set in terms of reaching the target (potential) audience with the key message. Your company's image is what your marketplace perceives it to be. The more favorable the image, the more likely people will do business with you. Prospects and customers form perceptions first about your people, then about your company and lastly about your products and services. A well designed and executed measurement program will enable you to measure your target audiences' pre- and post-show perceptions about your people, company and products. Companies don't buy from companies. People in those companies buy from people in other companies. In other words, people buy from people. That's why your booth staff is so important as they engage your best customers and prospects on the show floor. If your people don't get through to your target audience, you won't have much of a chance to brand your company nor your products and services.

There are two primary ways that companies measure booth worker performance, and the impact on marketplace perceptions. The first method involves interviewing booth visitors as they leave the booth or convention hall, after the show is over (more on this in a few pages),

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or with a with a self administered survey tool in the booth. The second method involves a "mystery shopper" or "blind shopper" who enters the booth posing as a prospect. The shopper engages a booth worker, has a conversation, leaves the booth and rates each booth workers' performance. Regardless of how its measured, the performance of your booth workers will affect your company's image, and both your ROI and ROO.

Your image is also dependent upon what your target audience thinks (and knows) about your company, and your products and services. The more accurately your target audience can define your current capabilities, the greater the probability they will buy from you. Some companies measure perceptions before and after a show to determine its impact on market-place perceptions. Other companies survey their target audience at predetermined intervals after a show to determine how well their target audience retained their key messages.

Media Coverage

Trade shows, conventions and events bring an industry together. Not just vendors and customers, but the whole industry including business press, trade press, analysts and consultants. To take advantage of this opportunity it's important to have a well defined strategy and organized plan of action, a set of specific goals, the right personnel, the right message(s), and a performance management plan in place to assure the most favorable results possible.

Media goals are quantifiable and similar in structure to sales goals. Media goals include: 1) the number of interviews scheduled and held; 2) number of analyst and consultants appointments scheduled and held; 3) number of key messages communicated; 4) lines of press after a show number; and 5) share of coverage.

Selecting Measurement Tools

No one type of measurement tool is suited to measuring all types of objectives. There are many methodologies used to capture and analyze information. The right measurement tools need to be used to provide you with the most reliable data possible. The following tools are among the ones used to calculate ROI and ROO.

Count Leads

We had to address one form of measurement that is all too often the only form of measurement and evaluation: counting leads. The simplest yet least accurate way to evaluate performance is to simply count the number of leads obtained at a trade show. The advantage is simplicity. Simplicity is, in fact, the only advantage. The disadvantages are many. Counting leads doesn't include an analysis of, among other things: 1) the quality of the leads; 2) the number of leads taken vs. number of booth visitors; 3) the potential number of leads that could be taken at the show (potential audience vs. total audience); 4)

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the percent of the potential audience that visited your booth; 5) the percent of our potential audience that stopped by the booth and agreed to post-show follow up; and 6) how much would it have cost to generate this lead via advertising, prospecting, etc.? Another disadvantage is that simply counting leads provides no information on what worked and what didn't, or what changes should be made for future shows. Just counting leads will give you a sense of how you did, but is not at all an accurate measurement of a show's performance.

Analyzing the leads will give you some indication of how well you did with your target audience. You can anayze, for example, the success of new-product introductions (number / quality of leads for new products). Another example might be measuring your effectiveness in entering new markets (number/quality of leads in the new markets). Lead analysis may also give you an indication of future sales potential by qualifying visitor buying power and intentions as part of the lead-qualification process.

In-Booth Visitor Surveys

These types of surveys are best conducted by personal interview as visitors exit the exhibit. They are often used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific aspects of the exhibit (demos, theaters, booth staff, etc.). As it relates to objectives though, they are particularly effective in measuring message recall and retention (both unaided and aided recall). This assumes that visitors have had no prior exposure to messages. If so, a pre- and post-show survey methodology is required (discussed later). Awareness for new-product introductions can also be measured using in-booth surveys.

Post-Show Attendee Surveys

These surveys are the cornerstone of an effective measurement program. They provide a comprehensive profile of the show audience (for show selection, level of investment, and planning decisions) and they measure the performance of specific aspects of the exhibit compared to competitors (to improve performance). Similar to in-booth surveys, they can be used to measure specific messaging and new-product introduction objectives. They can also identify through a thorough analysis of audience and visitor profiles the effectiveness of the show and your exhibit in reaching new markets.

Pre- and Post-Attendee Surveys

A pre-and post-show survey technique is required to measure message, image, brand and/or awareness objectives if attendees have had the potential for being exposed to your messages, products or company prior to the show. The pre-show survey conducted prior to the show establishes a benchmark level of awareness before exposure to your exhibit, and the post-show survey measures the success of your exhibit and related activities in changing awareness, image and/or recall of the message.

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Sales Conversion Surveys

These surveys measure the dollar volume of sales resulting from leads generated by an exhibit. They're usually conducted approximately two to nine months following the show depending upon the length of the buying cycles of your products and services. They also measure purchases from competitors, the degree of influence the exhibit had on the purchases and the level of follow-up received from salespeople or representatives.

Lead Tracking Systems

The ideal and most cost-effective method for measuring sales resulting from leads is developing the closed loop lead-management system we discussed earlier. Sales-conversion surveys are an alternative for companies that cannot institute a lead-tracking system due to lack of management support, channel of distribution structure (i.e., sell exclusively through dealers or distributors), inability to get field sales to report back, etc. Both the sales-conversion survey and lead tracking system are bottom-line (ROI) oriented measurement tools. That is, they measure sales objectives, but give little explanation for results. For example, if sales are poor, is the reason the show, the exhibit, the follow-up or a combination of all factors? A comprehensive post-show attendee survey will generally provide the reasons related to the show and/or exhibit performance.

Press Coverage Analysis

Obtaining press coverage is an objective for a relatively small number of exhibitors by comparison to most other objectives. To measure PR effectively requires follow up to determine the amount of coverage that's obtained in trade and business publications as a result of exhibiting in the show, the tone of the coverage (positive, negative, neutral) and the content of the coverage (were key messages or new products mentioned?).

Conclusion

As we said at the outset, developing and implementing a measurement and evaluation program will ultimately lead you and your company to continued improvement, effectiveness and success. Measurement and evaluation can provide you and your associates with the vital information you need for making key strategic and tactical decisions. Measurement and evaluation can also enable you to determine how successful you were (or weren't) and why.

Developing and implementing a measurement and evaluation program takes careful planning and time. Build your program slowly, one step at a time, with the help of the vendors who support you and the people with whom you work every day. Talk to other exhibitors and see what they've done in the past and are doing now. We hope that you'll use some of the information we've provided to help you get started, or to take the next step with the program you already have in place.