

Best Practices for Facilitating a Pre-Show Strategic Briefing

by Keith Reznick

85% of an exhibitor's success is determined by the people staffing the exhibit. Unfortunately, many exhibits are staffed with well-meaning people who are experts in their area of specialization but often lack the training and/or experience required to engage attendees and conduct conversations of mutual interest and value. Many are particularly uncomfortable with:

- ◆ Engaging and greeting attendees;
- ◆ Probing to identify / qualify sales opportunities; and
- ◆ Capturing attendee information.

To increase your exhibit staff's skills and effectiveness in these areas, allocate time during your pre-show strategic briefing to discuss (and if possible practice):

- ◆ Engaging attendees with open-ended questions:
 - ◆ "I see you're with (company). What does your company do?"
 - ◆ "What sort of work do you do at (company name)?"
 - ◆ "How can we make your visit to our company of value to you?"
- ◆ Identify / qualify sales opportunities with open-ended questions:
 - ◆ "What do you hope to accomplish this year?"
 - ◆ "What are your biggest challenges moving forward?"
 - ◆ "In addition to yourself, who else will be involved in making this decision? Are they here at the show?"
- ◆ The importance – for both your company and attendees – of capturing accurate attendee information and setting the stage for the most appropriate post-show follow-up:
 - ◆ Attendees interested in your product or service often want and expect that your company will contact them after the show to continue the conversation started at the show.
 - ◆ Reviewing the information the attendee provided assures accuracy and makes it easier for the person following up to know what the attendee is interested in.

Respect and Leverage Experience

Respect and leverage your more experienced exhibit workers' expertise. Defer to them to suggest best practices and answer questions. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Even when you do know, draw the answer out of pre-show meeting participants to: 1) keep them involved; and 2) help people get to know each other (it will make it easier for them to work as a team during the show).

Facilitation Suggestions:

- ◆ Establish your role as the leader, but have fun doing so.
- ◆ Create short small group exercises to enable people get to know each other.
- ◆ Don't explain the Do's and Don'ts (they might think you're talking down to them). Instead, ask your exhibit staff to assume the role of a mentor coaching someone at their first show. Give them a list of Do's and Don'ts ask which ones they'd convey are the most important.
- ◆ Be upbeat, enthusiastic and motivational – it's contagious.

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