

# The Tradeshow Essential Guide

## MAXIMIZING YOUR ROI:

HOW TO JUSTIFY YOUR tradeshow SPEND



A GUIDE FOR MARKETERS OF HOME & BUILDING PRODUCTS

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# INTRODUCTION

## Are tradeshows worth the investment?

It depends who you ask. Industry associations and the organizations running the shows will tell you they are alive and well, and attendees consistently see value. Manufacturers will say nothing is going on, the shows are slow, no one is there anymore, and it's a waste of effort.

Why such a gap in perception? It comes down to what the benchmark is. When manufacturers see a dead show, they are comparing current attendance to the boom years of the late 1990s and early 2000s when housing and construction were booming and the halls of Vegas were packed with eager tradesmen.

Conversely, when organizers declare their latest show a triumph, they are comparing it to the dark years of 2009 and 2010, when the industry went to ground like frightened rabbits.

The truth, as ever, lies somewhere in the middle. We may never see anything like the boom years again, but there has been significant recovery. And while fewer people are walking the floor, those who have spent the money and time to be there are serious about doing business. It's no longer just a Vegas boondoggle.

When the industry was booming, tradeshow practices didn't matter – all you had to do was show up with a decent booth. Everyone was selling as much as they could manufacture. Now, in leaner times, tradeshow participation gets the blame when it's really tradeshow practices that are at fault.

tradeshows will be a losing proposition for those who continue to do what they've always done, with no goals or strategy. But embracing the combination of proper goal setting, pre-show prep and post-show evaluation will give you an advantage at any show you choose to attend.

# PRE-SHOW PLANNING

## Choosing which shows to attend

The first element of pre-show planning is determining which shows to attend in a given year. Not every show will be worth the investment, and it's important to focus on the ones that will have the most value to your business.

Avoid exhibiting at new shows in their first year. For these – and any show that is new to your company – walk the show for the first year to get a sense of the audience and decide if it is worth exhibiting the next year. If it is your first year at a show, be sure to ask for a discount on your booth space. Show organizers are anxious to get new blood and will generally agree.

Look for opportunities to present seminars or offer CEUs. tradeshow that are annexed to larger conventions (like AIA, for example) can struggle to get the attention of busy professionals focused on keeping their credentials up to date. Offering a CEU course gives them something more than a sales pitch in return for their time. Shows that allow you to present give more chances to connect with your audience and are a better investment.

Do your homework on any show you are considering. In addition to checking out the show's site for specs on the audience size and demographics, search for reviews of last year's show. Industry bloggers in the architect and design community are a great resource for unvarnished opinions.

When you do plan to exhibit at a show, reserve your space as soon as possible to get a prime booth space. You don't want to get stuck with the location leftovers assigned to last-minute bookings.

# PRE-SHOW PLANNING

## POP QUIZ!

### WHY ARE YOU ATTENDING the tradeshow?

**If your answer is “to sell my product,” think again.**

No one is buying at a tradeshow. They are kicking tires. Window-shopping. Seeing what’s new in their world. Especially in the home and building products industry, where the road to specification is long and there are multiple audiences and influencers to consider.

Setting goals will enable you to evaluate show performance. If you don’t define success up front, how will you know whether you achieved it?



**Avoid vague goals** like “increasing sales,” “generating leads” or “world peace.” Be clear and measurable – X new leads, Y data updates. Get a next step and a reason to follow up with a lead. That is the purpose of attending tradeshows – filling the top of that funnel with solid, qualified leads.

**- Allison Schiding, Creative Strategist SBA**

# PRE-SHOW PLANNING

## 5 keys to designing an effective tradeshow booth

### 1 | Remember the Audience

One size doesn't fit all: your booth needs to appeal to the demographic of the specific show. The attendees at a facility managers tradeshow will have very different standards for booth design than AIA or NeoCon.

Above all, remember the tradeshow Zombie: attendees are overwhelmed and overstimulated. They are surrounded by more information than they can possibly process, so they stagger through the show with a thousand-yard stare.

### 2 | The 5-Second Window

You have 5 seconds to attract the attention of attendees walking by your booth. In this time, you should communicate 3 pieces of information:

- Who you are
- What you sell
- Why they need it

### 3 | Design for a Crowd

It's easy to make a booth that looks good empty, but what will it look like when it is full of people?

- Place messaging high enough that it can be seen even in a busy booth
- Eliminate clutter – in design, in messaging, and in staffing



# PRE-SHOW PLANNING



## 4 | Skip the Seating

- Chairs tempt staff to sit down and look inattentive
- Comfy chairs attract loungers: existing customers who hang out at your booth and distract staff from the job of gathering qualified leads

## 5 | Show, Don't Tell

- Nobody is going to stand around reading your booth
- A demo is worth a thousand graphic panels: if you can show your product in action, go for it. But don't force it if it doesn't make sense
- Remember – the job of the graphics is to get attention and spark interest. Conveying information is the booth staff's job.

# PRE-SHOW PLANNING

## Planning beyond the booth

The booth isn't everything. Recent figures show that out of the average 400 booths at a tradeshow, the typical attendee visits 21. That means your booth has about a 5% chance of being visited by any given attendee.

Furthermore, 75% of their stops are determined before they even set foot on the show floor. So unless you want to rely on being one of the 5 booths out of 400 that are spontaneously visited by an attendee, pre-show promotion is critical to a successful show.

There are many opportunities for promotion through the show organizers themselves, from ad placements in programs, email lists or banner ads on the show website. You should also promote your show attendance and booth location in your planned advertising schedule, social media accounts and through PR.

Planning for a show is an individual task as well as a departmental one.

Start by reaching out to your connections and letting them know you'll be there. Find out who is attending from your list of prospects, customers, media contacts and industry partners.

Determine what new information and updates you need based on the goals set for the show. What do you intend to learn from new contacts? How about existing prospects?

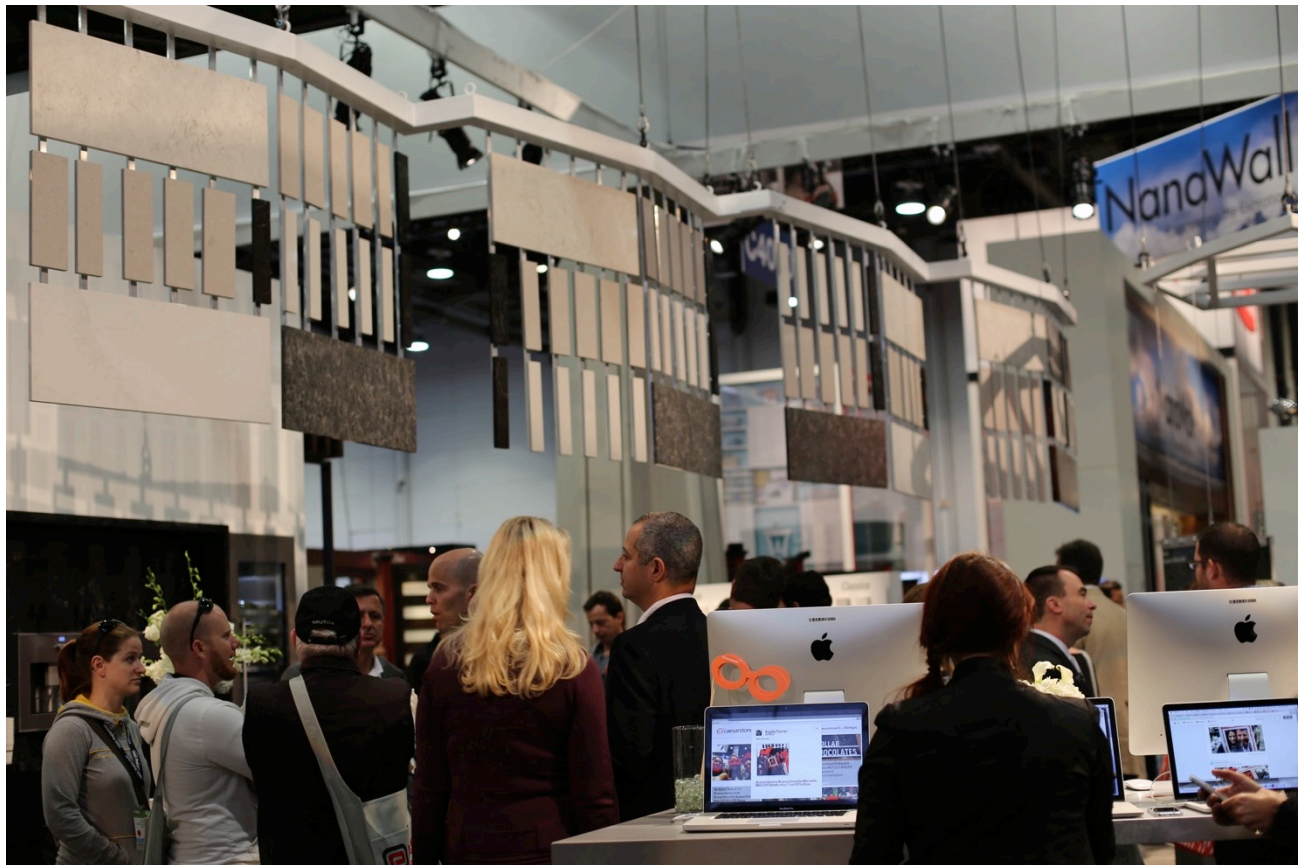


# PRE-SHOW PLANNING

Get the training you need to present effectively. If you are part of a large company, that means understanding the value proposition for every product or division that's part of the booth. You should be able to speak intelligently to any visitor about any aspect of your company.

Once you have the information, make it your own. Practice presenting. As goofy and old-fashioned as it sounds, try role-playing with colleagues. Record it and give each other feedback. The more you practice, the more natural your presentation will be.

Plan your strategy for walking the show floor as well. Make a list of booths to visit to gather information and inspiration: competitors, strategic partners, thought leaders in the industry. Also determine which seminars and networking events to attend so you have good conversation starters with which to engage visitors to your booth.



# AT THE SHOW



## I'm at the show. Now what?

There are a lot of parties involved in the decisions made before the show. Upper management may decide which shows to attend. A specific department may design the booth. But when it comes down to the show, you – the individual manning the booth – are the face of your company.

Surveys indicate that about 85% of the impression a visitor takes away from any tradeshow booth is determined by the booth staff. Not the graphics. Not the demos. Not the bags, pens, stress balls or other tchotchkes. The staff.

Every employee scheduled to staff that booth has a choice. You can stand around for eight hours a day, three days straight, and feel like you've wasted your time. Or you can have valuable interactions with real prospects that become real leads and real sales.

You can be a tradeshow zero or a tradeshow hero. The choice is yours. Either way, you have to put in the time. Why not put in the effort to be a success?

# AT THE SHOW

## The top 5 tradeshow mistakes

You've invested tens of thousands of dollars in your tradeshow presence: the space, the booth, the swag. The flights, hotels and meals. The only thing standing between you and a successful show is this rogue's gallery of villains that stalk every tradeshow.

**Don't make the top 5 tradeshow mistakes: avoid these villains at all costs.**



### 1 | The Salesmaniac

- Is recognized by the irresistible urge to hawk, shill, peddle and push product at all cost.
- The spirit of the Salesmaniac often overtakes show planners and staff. To defeat him, focus on information and arm yourself with questions.
- He is powerless to take over when you are listening rather than talking.



### 2 | The WingIt

- Harmless as it appears, the blind flying WingIt is the most destructive of all tradeshow super-villains.
- The best defense against the WingIt is pre-show goal setting and training.
- It thrives on overconfidence and ego, but can't withstand conscientious planning.

# AT THE SHOW



## 3 | The Mad Scanner

- A terrifying case of technology gone bad, the Mad Scanner has replaced the Fish Bowl of business cards in the pantheon of tradeshow criminals.
- It indiscriminately attacks every badge in sight, maniacally equating a scan with a lead.
- The only way to neutralize the Mad Scanner is with notes, details and qualification.



## 4 | The Booth of a Thousand Panels

- This hideous beast eats money and spells death to ROI. The Booth of a Thousand Panels often works with a sidekick, the Towering Table of Flyers.
- Disoriented show attendees flee in terror from the wall-to-wall copy and stacks of product literature.
- The only way to beat this monster is with relentless dedication to a focused message — and a big red pen.



## 5 | The Daily Grinder

- Once, not so long ago, the Daily Grinder only stalked booth staffers after they returned from the show, thwarting their lead follow-up.
- Now, with the diabolical help of iPhone and Android, this menace can attack anytime, distracting staff from the job at hand.
- Shut down the Daily Grinder by delegating duties to staff back at the office and wielding your mobile's OFF button with deadly precision.



# AT THE SHOW

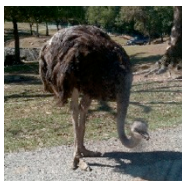
## It's a jungle out there

### Which animals are in your tradeshow booth?

Whether your tradeshow booth is a 1600 square foot palace or a simple 10 x 10 with a tabletop display, **85% of a booth visitor's impression of your company is determined by the interaction they have with booth staff.**

In the wild, wild world of the tradeshow, we all have a tendency to revert to our animal natures. The question is – which animals do you want in your booth?

### Which animal are you?



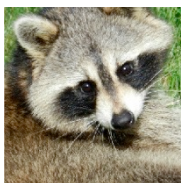
**The Ostrich** is so scared of engaging anyone, he'd put his head under the carpet if he could.



**The Fish** believe there's safety in numbers. They stand all bunched together, creating a barrier to your booth.



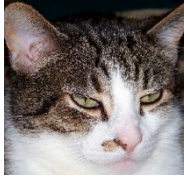
**The Kangaroo** pockets all the leads for herself.



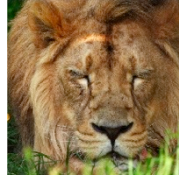
**The Raccoon** parties all night long — and looks like it the next morning.



# AT THE SHOW



**The Cat** thinks tradeshow are a total waste of time and lets everyone know it.



**The Lion** looks great — dressed to the nines, not a hair out of place — but lets others do all the hunting.



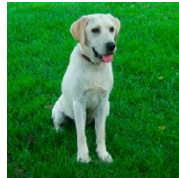
**The Mule** has been doing this for 20 years and is too stubborn to try a new approach.



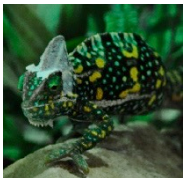
**The Wolf** is great at hunting new business, but is a little too aggressive.



**The Goat** is content to chew on a bad lead all day long.



**The Dog** is always smiling, friendly and approachable.



**The Chameleon** is able to adapt from being a good salesperson to the unique tradeshow environment.



**The Squirrel** knows time is limited and uses the tradeshow opportunity wisely, collecting leads like nuts for winter.

# AT THE SHOW

## From zero to hero

Every staffer can be a tradeshow hero with  
These simple do's and don'ts

### DO's

- DO qualify visitors: know whether someone is worth presenting to and what they should know
- DO smile and be engaged
- DO listen 80%, talk 20%
- DO assign people to times and tasks in the booth
- DO attend seminars so you have something to talk about with visitors that makes you look knowledgeable and interesting
- DO go to cocktail parties and social events to catch up with customers, but remember it is business
- DO introduce someone you know to others in your company
- DO create reasons to follow up with visitors

### DON'Ts

- DON'T try to sell
- DON'T hide behind tables
- DON'T hand out literature in order to avoid talking
- DON'T signal disinterest by any of the following:
  - eating
  - talking on a cell phone
  - texting
  - chatting with other booth staff
  - folding your arms
  - turning your back on the aisle
  - looking bored
- DON'T sit down
- DON'T spend more than 10 minutes with anyone
- DON'T overcrowd the booth with staff
- DON'T badmouth competitors

# AT THE SHOW

## The 10-minute technique

On the list of don'ts, we cautioned against spending more than 10 minutes with any booth visitor. The 10-minute technique breaks this down to an easy four-step process that you can use with new prospects that visit your booth.



- Step 1: Engage (30 seconds)**
- Step 2: Qualify (2 minutes)**
- Step 3: Present (5 to 6 minutes)**
- Step 4: Close (1 minute)**

### Engage (30 seconds)

Just like your booth design, you have a personal 5-second window to attract the attention of attendees passing by your booth. This means body language is incredibly important. Stand out from behind the table or counter, smile so you look friendly and approachable. You don't need to assault passers-by, but you should be ready to engage those who make eye contact and show some interest.

The best way to do this is to prepare and practice open-ended questions. Avoid the dreaded "Can I help you?" or "Are you enjoying the show?" Not only are they yes-or-no questions, they show no imagination. Every person walking the floor has heard them a hundred times that day. Being interesting is key to engaging.

### Qualify (2 minutes)

Not everyone who walks into your booth is your target audience, and you don't want to waste time and energy on those who aren't prospects. For those who are prospects, you need to know what and how to present to them.

Once you've made the introductions, find out what issues they are facing and how you can help them. Some good questions to ask them (or yourself) include:

- What's going on at your firm? Any upcoming projects?
- What solutions have you looked at?
- What is the biggest challenge you face?
- Is the project funded?
- What selection process is in place?
- Who is calling the shots?
- Can our firm deliver the results?
- If they aren't the decision maker, find out who is.

# AT THE SHOW

## **A note on disengaging**

- It's equally important to know how to gracefully disengage from unqualified prospects or other visitors you find at your booth.
- For browsers with no specific needs at the time, scan their badge and offer to send them literature.
- For current customers who want to hang out and chat where they feel comfortable, offer to get together with them outside of show hours or when your booth shift is done.
- For competitors, politely tell them you have to go sell – just to confuse them.
- For vendors who are selling their services from the floor, give them your card and ask them to follow up with you after the show.
- Do the same with job seekers.
- If traffic is slow, you can spend a couple minutes with browsers, customers, vendors and so on. Just let them know that if someone else approaches, you will need to give them your attention. Just make sure to keep your eyes open for opportunities to engage new visitors.

## **Present (5 to 6 minutes)**

The secret to presenting well at a tradeshow is to use the information you learned while you were initially qualifying a prospect to then target your presentation to their specific concerns. This means that you won't end up presenting everything to everyone, and that every presentation will be different.

The last thing you want to do is memorize a canned speech. However, you should know the most common questions and objections your audience has and be prepared to address them.

Keep your presentation conversational by asking questions and be aware of their body language as much as their words. If they keep breaking eye contact, start shifting their weight from foot to foot or otherwise signal they are losing interest, wrap it up. No one wants to be held hostage.

And remember – presenting is not the same as selling. Your goal is to get information and decide on a next step.

# AT THE SHOW

## **Close (1 minute)**

When it's time to wrap it up, tell your visitor the next step you'll take, whether that is sending them some specific information or sharing their name with the rep in their region.

A next step is a win.

Thank them and smile. It may seem obvious, but you'd be shocked at the number of booth staff who never smile.

Don't forget to scan their badge before they leave. When you scan, take the time to complete the lead. Add notes. Be specific. And make sure the next step is clearly noted.

## **What about existing prospects?**

For prospects already in your system, we suggest the 5-minute technique.

**Step 1: Engage (30 seconds)**

**Step 2: Update Information (2 to 3 minutes)**

**Step 3: Close (1 minute)**

Once you learn they are already a prospect, use the opportunity to update their information. Have there been any changes in personnel at their firm or their own position? Check on the status of existing projects and find out about any upcoming projects. Then close with a next step.

## **What about existing prospects?**

For prospects already in your system, we suggest the 5-minute technique.



# POST-SHOW

## Evaluation & follow-up tips

In a few short days, it's all over and done with. You've packed up your bags and your booth and returned to your regularly scheduled life.

Odds are you are exhausted. You miss your family. You've mistreated yourself physically, with too much to eat and drink and not nearly enough sleep. And you worry you've fallen hopelessly behind at the office.

But you're not done yet. Like a big league batter or an expert golfer, success is all in the follow through. And there are two important jobs to complete.

### **Job #1: Post-show evaluation**

Everyone from your company who attended the show should complete an evaluation form. And be honest. Include the good, the bad and the ugly.

- Top 5 things that went well
- Top 5 things to improve on
- What did individuals do well?
- What can individuals work on for the next show?
- Did you meet your goals for the show?
- How many new leads were captured?
- How many updates were made to existing contacts' data?
- Should you attend next year?
- What notes do you have or changes should you make next year?

### **Job #2: Follow-up**

Remember all those next steps you confirmed and noted when you scanned all those badges? They aren't a win until you follow through with them in an organized and appropriate way.

Following up is more than just passing names on to the local sales reps. It requires focus, attention and integration with your lead management system. Because until the information is there, it isn't a real lead. And after all – bringing home real leads is what tradeshow attendance is all about.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU MADE IT THROUGH TRADESHOW ESSENTIALS



Let us know the next time you are in Las Vegas (or Chicago, Boston, Orlando, LA, New York...).

We would love to buy you a drink and hear your own tradeshow successes, failures, and everything in between. In the meantime, let's talk about how we can help.

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