

# How to Effectively Use Trade Shows as a Complement to Market Strategy

BY TOMMY GARNETT

If there is any common challenge that reps cite as they continue to enter the post-Covid sales and marketing environment, it's that it has become ever more difficult to reach prospects and customers. Long-tenured reps recall the days of being able to reach prospects via their cold calls when existing customers would readily be available in their offices. Today, however, buying decision makers no longer populate offices as they did prior to the pandemic. While many of them continue to work at home, others that do come into the office have been able to avoid contact with the outside world by hiding behind voice or email. Any doubt that this is the norm can be put to rest by comments from participants in the many MANAchats where participants bemoan the fact that they aren't able to get in front of their customers like they used to be able to.

Trade shows can offer a representative/principal an effective marketing strategy if used correctly and if a few simple steps are followed to ensure success.

Prior to Covid, manufacturing trade shows were a useful forum for manufacturers to engage with new prospects in an untapped region to develop new relationships and seek applications that align with capabilities. During Covid, with all the accompanying challenges, companies began cutting back on travel, and



trade shows experienced a serious dip in attendance and overall effectiveness.

Recently, we have seen a resurgence, and representatives and principals alike are signing up to regain the once-effective method of face-to-face engagement. There are many different types of shows depending on the industries you service so if you search, you're likely to find ones that are applicable to your industry and customer base.

Many are regional and allow the manufacturer to travel into the rep's territory in support of strategic growth. Typically, the manufacturer registers, supplies a booth, pays the attendance fee and informs the representative they intend to display. For the rep's contribution, they agree to meet the manufacturer at the location site and work the booth for the 1-2 days of the show.

This time spent together can be invaluable on many fronts. It allows the rep a chance to get to know the plant personnel better, gain product training, learn from the technical experts in their respective manufacturing space and engage with customers.

During the show, prospective customers will visit the booth and examine the many samples/processes displayed. These conversations spur either current application discussions or ideas for future collaboration. Many times, requests for quotations can be developed on the spot.

A typical two-day show can easily generate 100 plus contacts/leads made, and there really is no other forum where a manufacturer or rep, for that matter, can meet and talk with this many contacts in a very limited amount of time. The true value of the show lies in an effective follow-up campaign. These can come in many forms such as email, phone, or face-to-face.

Since the manufacturer has made a significant investment into the rep's territory, it is imperative that the rep keep the manufacturer informed of relevant dialogue on any leads. Once quotations can be established, the normal cadence and rhythm between the rep and manufacturer kicks in. Maintaining a database in your CRM of all contacts made for future reference ensures there will be ongoing dialogue.

If done correctly, these investments made by both the rep and the manufacturer can be a very rewarding experience. A sense of joint participation as well as creating a vested interest by both parties builds teamwork.



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