



A Trade Show Exhibit's Kaleidoscope of Impressions

As attendees walk the aisles of a major trade show, their senses experience the entire good-humored environment — until they happen to notice a particular exhibit of interest. Then their focus narrows and their demeanor becomes a bit more serious.

Research over the years has indicated that most trade show attendees are interested in learning what new products or services might be found in the various exhibits on the trade show floor. Of foremost interest are any products or services that might directly influence their ability to improve their personal or organization's future effectiveness.

When that key suspect approaches an exhibit and transforms into a prospect, the exhibit becomes a Kaleidoscope of Impressions encompassing virtually every characteristic of the exhibitor's business. The longer the observation continues, the more these impressions are absorbed, contemplated, and remembered.

Once the prospect enters an exhibit and begins a dialog with a person on booth duty, an entirely new and more complicated personal Kaleidoscope of Impressions begins to develop. And throughout this entire experience, the prospect is creating additional images of the exhibitor in his/her mind and forming multiple impressions.

Ideally a logical continuity courses through the exhibit properties, products presented, and the people representing the company. The complete picture should promote a progression of images that presents the prospect with positive elements of a business that can be depended on before, during, and after a sale.

The exhibit portion of the trade show kaleidoscope of visuals is the first image presented on the show floor and should convey pertinent information that can be seen and understood from the aisle. It should communicate the exhibitor's name, products presented, any popular logo artwork or current advertising campaign, and key marketing visuals that might help in capturing a prospect's attention and immediate recognition of a company's brand.

There are many important aspects of the trade show exhibit materials used that need to be considered during the design phase of any exhibit. The effective utilization of the following items, for instance, can add to an exhibit's ability to communicate, function, and create an innovative environment for conducting business. These important aspects of design can be used

in supporting a professional image of corporate quality and dependability and in setting the stage for booth personnel to perform at a high level of effectiveness:

- Accent lighting
- Background music
- Bold photography
- Color-coordinated custom floor coverings
- Concealed storage
- Corporate colors
- Custom furniture
- Customer service desk
- Effective product presentations
- Extraordinary graphics
- Literature distribution center
- Live product demonstrations
- Materials and textures
- Moving signage
- Private conference rooms
- Sales lead processing center
- Presentation theater

Of course, great care must be taken in deciding how large or small an exhibit needs to be based on how many prospects an exhibitor expects to meet and qualify during a trade show. This is first accomplished by confirming the number of hours the show is open and then ensuring that the exhibit is large enough for the appropriate number of booth personnel to provide quality exchange of information with prospects.

A prospect who enters a booth from the neutral territory of the aisle expects a logical progression of information that conforms to his/her desire to learn more about the exhibitor's products and services.

In addition to being attracted to displayed products and being able to read various product details, features, and benefits up close, it should only be a matter of seconds before the prospect is officially welcomed. Booth staffers should be experts who are ready, willing, and able to ask questions and provide accurate answers while uncovering the prospect's needs, requirements, and opinions.

At this point, another crucial Kaleidoscope of Impressions begins to form in the prospect's mind. It centers on his/her reaction to the booth representatives:

- Ability to make eye contact
- Appearance
- Behavior
- Character
- Confidence

- Culture
- Empathy
- Experience
- Listening skills
- Mannerisms
- Personality
- Product knowledge
- Professionalism
- Speech
- Trustworthiness
- Understanding

While the prospect and booth person communicate, the prospect is forming impressions that relate directly to his/her decision-making principles, which we all use in determining value. We also begin developing thoughts as to whether or not we might do business with this type of person who represents this corporation's culture.

Whatever is discussed during the exchange, all details and facts provided by the exhibitor must be substantiated, true, and if at all possible supported by a member of executive management or senior technical staff who can then guarantee the prospect of the company's commitment to dependability, quality, and reliability.

The product presentation Kaleidoscope of Impressions includes visual appreciation of the product's design, ease of use, performance capabilities, quality of construction, and how value is supported by the product's benefits and features. An effective product presentation with live demonstration establishes in the prospect's mind a direct anticipation of potentially owning and utilizing the product in the future.

The image of top management will also add an important dimension in the mind of the prospect because he/she will view executive management as a cornerstone of the corporation's commitment to living up to what's being presented, sold, and serviced. A personal commitment from the top brass goes a long way in making the right impressions and securing beneficial, long-lasting customer relations.

When the attendee leaves the exhibitor's booth after this kind of well-coordinated experience, he/she should be in a better position to either make a buying decision or share with colleagues this new knowledge, all of which should result in a solid purchasing recommendation.

The remaining important tasks required to complete the trade show exhibit's Kaleidoscope of Impressions is to get the requested literature, quotes, and support documentation — with a cover letter — out to qualified prospects within one week of the show. It's also important to build a trade show prospect database of sales leads for a planned telephone follow-up.

One of the most dynamic aspects of trade show exhibiting, and one that is often the most challenging for an exhibitor to fully comprehend and prepare for, is that as soon as a prospect walks out of your exhibit, he/she has the ability to walk right into your competitor's booth and

form a completely different Kaleidoscope of Impressions. Hopefully those impressions aren't nearly as effective or as convincing as yours.

Conclusion

Attendees create a total Kaleidoscope of Impressions in their minds while they walk the aisles of a trade show. Your exhibit presents your company, complete with its products, people, culture, philosophies, commitment, history, and future from the first day it was incorporated to tomorrow when it opens for another day of business.

The tremendous dynamics created on the trade show floor exist because competition in most cases is only a few feet away, the show lasts only a few days, and because prospects are calling on sales, technical support, managers, and executives. Since you seldom get a second chance to make a good first impression, an effectively executed trade show can dramatically shorten sales times and increase selling effectiveness like no other discipline in today's marketing mix.

As a result, every trade show exhibitor should be encouraged to explore all opportunities in the quest to create a successful and complete Kaleidoscope of Impressions that positively influences and earns the business from prospects and customers alike.

Peter LoCascio, President of Trade Show Consultants, has successfully developed strategic and tactical sales and marketing programs for trade show exhibitors to add value to products and services while creating a finely tuned culture of service, customer support, and effective sales management. Many of the policies and procedures created to make the most of trade show exhibiting are imprinted on an exhibitor's service culture and continue to be employed long after the close of the trade show.

Peter LoCascio

Trade Show Consultants

www.tradeshowconsultants.com