

## How to Create the Best Conference Exhibit

Part 2 of 2

By [Sharon Berman](#)

You've done your research, provided your credit card number, and now you're committed to your first experience exhibiting at a conference or trade show. What's next? One of the first things you'll need is camera-ready artwork of your logo and a brief description of what your firm does for the print/online conference program. Because the descriptions are short, people tend to give them short shrift and are then surprised when they don't like what they see in print or on the conference website. Take the time to succinctly describe your firm in a compelling manner.

Regardless of whether your clients, prospects or referral sources plan to attend the show, take advantage of the opportunity to make them aware of your presence. At the same time, provide them with actionable information. While a simple note announcing your exhibitor status at a certain conference is better than nothing, your impact will be stronger if you send a letter or email related to the topic of the conference. For instance, if you plan to exhibit at a franchise show, you can send a list of "Top 10 Things to Evaluate when Buying a Franchise" with a P.S. that announces your exhibit at the upcoming franchise conference. Conclude your letter with an offer to set aside time to talk to them at the show, or if they aren't attending, to provide further information in person or by phone.

Make sure to post an announcement or press release on your website about your show participation. You can also announce your exhibit in a sidebar to your regular newsletter or email blast. A blurb on the same page as your other news is adequate, but to give it more energy consider posting it as a press release even if you don't plan on sending it to the media. You can also distribute it via your blog or social media channels.

If your exhibitor's fee includes access to contact information for pre-registered attendees, send a short, informative letter or email to the most promising scheduled attendees. Provide useful material and an invitation to meet you in person or to visit your booth. If current clients, prospects



and trusted referral sources are on the attendee list, consider setting up private appointments in advance to meet or dine with them during the show.

### Exhibits Done Right

When you first embark on developing your booth, it may seem like a daunting task, but fortunately, it needs to be done only once. Invest the time and money to do it right the first time so your effort and expense will be minimized with future exhibits.

Your booth need not be an elaborate affair. Start with something clean and simple, and build from there. Today, with the availability of portable booth components, banners and stands, you can have a beautiful background without breaking the bank. Even one banner stand is a good start and can dress up a booth. The beauty of a well-designed exhibit is its modularity; you can use the components individually or in various combinations at different shows. Components are also lightweight and come with convenient carrying cases. In order to protect your materials during transport, make sure to spring for hardcover cases.

Resist the temptation to fill your banners with a lot of copy. If you walk around an exhibit hall, you'll find that it's the banners or with one attractive image that grab your attention, not those that are cluttered and unreadable from a distance. If you have one banner that lists your

areas of expertise, for example, consider a coordinating banner with just an eye-catching graphic.

When it comes to table-top handouts, focus on displaying and distributing material that is informative rather than promotional. Article reprints are ideal for this purpose. If you have published relevant pieces, consider using reprints as handouts. If published material isn't available, develop your own article under a firm masthead that coordinates with your look and logo. Brief articles such as "10 Things You Need to Know About Retirement Planning," "10 Steps to Protect Your Trademark" or "10 Tips for Negotiating a Lease" provide actionable, memorable information for visitors and can be pitched as articles down the road. Invest in some acrylic brochure racks to add some dimension to your table. Materials that are laid out flat are less likely to attract visitors. Depending on the services you're selling, you may want to include digital media in your display, such as a laptop demonstrating your firm's expertise or playing a loop of media clips.

What would your booth be without giveaways a.k.a. "advertising premiums"—or swag? Pens, notepads and key chains can be procured inexpensively in quantity and are always popular articles. If you work with an advertising premium house, your consultant can give you some good ideas for innovative items based on your budget.

Don't forget to put out colorful candy or other fun food items which are individually wrapped. It's amazing how those can draw people to your booth.

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## How to Create the Best Conference Exhibit Part 2 *(continued)*

### Marketing at the Show

One of the most serious errors professional services firms make when exhibiting at shows is that of staffing the booth without giving any thought to training. Work with your team members to determine who will represent the firm in the booth. Meet with those individuals in advance and clearly explain why the firm is exhibiting at that particular venue and what messages they should be communicating. Create a "talking points" memo so that booth staffers can practice what to say. Also provide a list of "triggers" they should listen for among visitors that could present opportunities to discuss your services.

Remind staffers to be open, to smile, and to be friendly, but not to accost visitors or passers-by. They should offer your brochures and other giveaways while engaging visitors in conversation. Booth staff should also ask visitors for business cards, record pertinent information on the back of the card, and flag cards that merit immediate follow-up. Ask your booth staff to keep their eyes and ears open for trends and new challenges people are discussing. This type of floor "buzz" is valuable in helping you spot evolving trends and patterns.

Develop and disseminate a written schedule of work shifts so there is no confusion as to who is "on" at what time so that the booth is never left unattended. Even one day can be exhausting and seem interminable for an individual left alone in a booth. Make sure everyone has key contact information, such as cell phone numbers for each staffer and the names of the hotel representatives they may need to contact to resolve any issues such as material not arriving. While traffic flows by the booth, staffers should avoid chatting with their colleagues or people in adjacent booths, talking on cell phones, reading the newspaper, eating or engaging in other activities that could deter people from approaching the booth.

### Increasing Show Visibility via Media

Members of industry and trade media attend related shows and conferences. If you can obtain the names of media contacts from the show organizers, let these journalists know that you and your firm's professionals will be exhibiting (or speaking) and would be glad to be a resource for background or on-the-record commentary on selected industry issues. Ideally, pitch the reporters several story ideas such as new industry trends only known to insiders. Arrange for your professionals to introduce themselves to these media contacts in order to position themselves as resources in the future.

### The Show Is Over, but Your Work Is Not Done

Designate someone to be in charge of packing up and getting your booth components and materials back to your firm. Ensure that the individual has the proper paperwork and knows the show coordinator who will facilitate check-out and transportation.

While memories are still fresh, debrief with everyone who attended or staffed the booth. In fact, this debrief time should be calendared before you leave for the show. Ideas and material gleaned from this exercise can make for an interesting post-show article or at least spawn an idea about positioning your firm in the marketplace.

Many exhibitors lose a significant portion of the lead generation potential from exhibiting simply because they fail to follow up with booth visitors after the show. Determine which leads warrant follow-up and assign responsibility for getting it done ASAP. Make sure all of the leads—prospective clients and referral sources—are entered into your firm database so that you can stay in front of them with regular communication.

Even if you elected not to send out a pre-conference letter or email, do not skip the opportunity to issue a post-conference communi-

cation. A post-conference missive—a report from the show—is particularly effective if you gleaned important new information. It also gives you another chance to remind your market of your serious involvement with the industry. If you posted an announcement or press release on your website before the show, you can extend its shelf-life by changing it to past tense and leaving it up on your website for a while after the show.

If you identified a new trend or heard something exciting or different at the show, pitch an article idea about it right away to an industry publication or website that accepts bylined articles. If the media outlet does not accept articles and does its own reporting, there's no better way to solidify or build a relationship with a journalist than to bring them a new story idea. Ideally they will quote you as the expert or accept a piece from you as an opinion item.

Finally, also remember to use your social media tools to leverage your conference participation. Tweeting during the conference, writing blog posts, and adding photos to your company's Facebook or LinkedIn pages can help you get more mileage from your investment.

### Forget Me Not

As in all marketing, long-term and consistent follow-up is important for success. Many of the contacts you make require long-term nurturing before they turn into clients or referral sources. If you maintain top-of-mind awareness with promising prospects through patient, systematic follow-up, your investment will eventually pay off many times over. ■

This article was originally published in *Rain Today*.

For more information on law firm and attorney marketing, contact Berbay Corp:

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