

If You're Not Doing These Things, You're Wasting Your Event Budget

There's no question live events have the power to engage. But it takes a lot more than showing up in a pretty booth, dressed to sell, flashing a welcoming smile to make an event an ROI success. There are many moving parts to coordinate to encourage visits to your booth/presentation:

- When and how to reach out before the event
- What to do during the event to differentiate your presence from others, attract attendees and make their visit memorable
- When and how to keep reaching out to *keep* visitors on the path toward a purchase

It boils down to content marketing for generating brand awareness before, during and after the event. And it requires exceptional creativity and disciplined timing to engage targeted attendees, expand messaging and cultivate prospects.

"After the event" poses a challenge to marketing/sales organizations with a snapshot approach that limits momentum. They need to shift to a year-round initiative that leverages content created for the show and after, including video/video excerpts, slide presentations, blog posts, podcasts of speaking events, webinars, infographics, articles, newsletters, etc.. Sending a monthly email with links to relevant curated content will help maintain mindshare.

Here's an abbreviated to-do list to help you make the most of your trade show investment:

Prior to the Event

Determine measurable goals for the event: number of booth visitors, number/category of leads generated, number of prospect appointments, number of media interviews secured, etc.

Identify news announcements to be made at the event (new product, product enhancement, etc.).

- Secure media attendee list from event planner.

- Reach out to relevant reporters/editors who would be interested in interviews with executives about company news, strategies, state of the industry, etc.
- Confirm meetings two days in advance of show.

Classify prospects into three priority groups and determine engagement tactics for each.

Conduct a personal call with or email pertinent prospects/leads:

- Trade Shows: Ask if they are attending (the trade show and your speaking engagement) and if they'd like to set up a demo (or meeting) while they are there.
- Webinars: Invite them to join the webinar and send a link to register.
- Meetings: Confirm two days in advance of show.

Write a blog post that can be shared prior to the event. The blog post topic should pertain to your upcoming speaking engagement, booth presence or webinar, with a link driving readers to register for the event.

- Submit your blog post to the publication associated with the trade show for inclusion in upcoming content to promote the conference.
- Send an e-blast to targeted prospects with a link to your blog and a link to register; research email lists that can be purchased from the host organization.

In the events section of your website, list more details about your speaking engagement (title, co-presenters, registration link, conference website, etc.) or booth presence.

Create social media posts using event hashtag, promoting your speaking engagement and/or booth and driving to registration link; conduct paid social media activities.

During the Event

Many attendees bring multiple devices to an event: a phone, a tablet and a laptop — an advantage for staying in touch with your audience but an obstacle for keeping their attention.

Create social media posts for use during the event:

- Use the event hashtag.

- Engage with influencers at the event.
- Livestream your event.
- Develop articles specifically for targeted publication issues distributed at the trade show.
- Take and share photos at the show to share on social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram); tag any individuals who appear in the photos so their networks will see the pictures.
- Offer special challenges and contests like a selfie-challenge where attendees have to find a specific speaker or landmark.
- Incorporate a game/sporting activity in your booth with prizes for the top performances (invite prospects before the show, of course).

Include company/product-specific messages in each presentation, including:

- Social media handles.
- Information in key publications that can be found online.

Use event management software that enables you to capture data from attendees, manage event-related resources and activities, and track the results of your event marketing efforts.

Create a “ticket” that is on each chair before your speaking engagement; attendees can redeem their tickets at your booth for a useful branded item (prize, discount on services, etc.).

After the Event

Conduct a personal call or email with pertinent leads:

- For trade shows, ask if they’d like to set up a demo.
- For webinars, invite them to schedule a demo; send the link to archived webinar.

Continue sending valuable content to further the conversation and curate leads through the marketing funnel — including video/video excerpts, slide presentations, blog posts, podcasts of speaking events, webinars, infographics, articles, newsletters, etc.

A significant portion of your event marketing spend will just cover the basics of "showing up": logistics, travel and direct costs of the trade show exhibit space. It's how you spend the *rest* of your budget that really determines the impact of your efforts. Develop and execute a detailed plan for promotion activities before, during and after the event — along with a plan for measuring results — in order to really get the most out of your event marketing budget.

Source: If You're Not Doing These Things, You're Wasting Your Event Budget, Karen Winner, SCHWEGMAN Communications