

It is not advisable for trade show managers to cut back on services, but there are ways to trim the fat and still provide the benefits that attendees expect from a show. One place to look at is the roster of programs, said Jason McGraw, Senior Vice President of Expositions at InfoComm International.

"We are looking at some old programs that we may retire to make room for some new opportunities that will add more value and further innovation to our events," he said. "We will spend where it continues to make sense, but we will be practical with our resources."

Special events – such as demonstrations on the show floor – are among the programs that the organization is evaluating whether to eliminate based on the value that they offer attendees.

### KEEPING CLOSE TO HOME

Another area that trade show managers can explore as a strategy to get through a rough economy is to add regional shows to an organization's roster. When adding a training event, for example, an organization can expand its audience by creating a presence in a new location while opening the show's experience up to new attendees. "In a lot of ways, this extends our reach down into lower management and rank-and-file employees who don't get an opportunity to travel to the main events," McGraw said.

This approach can also create a cross marketing opportunity for an organization's main trade show. For instance, offering a one-day course at a regional show can act as a teaser for a three-day course at the main event. Also, continuing education programs can be a huge selling point for a trade show's audience because, especially in a soft economy, attendees are looking to sharpen their skills to remain competitive in their fields.

And for trade shows, the best way to remain competitive is to diversify their offerings. If it's appropriate for the industry that's being served, having numerous income streams from regional – or even international – events in addition to the main show will make an organization less susceptible to the effects of an economic downturn.

### TO MARKET, TO MARKET

It is all too easy to take money away from a trade show's marketing budget but in a recession, decreasing those dollars is a huge mistake. Instead trade show managers should reallocate marketing dollars to different kinds of media. Reaching an audience through broadcast faxing, telemarketing, and social networking can yield a high return on investment and are a lot less costly than the more traditional avenues of direct mail and print advertising. Also, adding more content to a show's Web site – like video clips from previous events – is a cost effective way to get interest in the show.

If possible, it is advisable to actually increase the amount spent on marketing during bad economic times.

"If you can afford it, do not abandon or cut too heavily into your marketing efforts – that should be the last resort," said Brown. "You should be looking to see if you can actually grow that budget and become more aggressive because there's going to be a lot of people jumping into the bunker and if you can hold the line and stand out more, you could come out with a nice advantage in the long run."

### COMMITMENT FROM EXHIBITORS

In the short run, both Brown and McGraw say their shows' exhibitors have so far stayed on board and are not looking to downsize their participation. But even if a show hasn't started to lose exhibitors, it is important to keep them happy by addressing their financial concerns and offering them support and services as needed to make a continued presence at the show as economical as possible.

Beneath all of the facts and figures, a realistic – yet optimistic – response to the economy can go a long way. Trade show organizers should keep abreast of what's happening in the economy, but not allow themselves to become stifled by it.

"People like a winner. If you are gloom and doom and you keep talking about negative things, your attendees and exhibitors will pick up on that," said McGraw. "As a show manager, you have got to show leadership and be upbeat and positive about the virtues and benefits of your event." 