

Something Old, Something New: How Your Show Can Benefit from Both Old School and Modern Marketing

By Kenya McCullum

While the advent of new media has opened up options for how to market your trade show, it's important not to forget the old school basics that have also proven successful. No matter what kind of marketing you plan to do, first and foremost you must understand your audience and tailor your campaign specifically to each demographic you want to reach. Although calling an event "the greatest show on earth" may have worked for P.T. Barnum, this one size fits all message is not suitable for your trade show. Also, another common mistake that organizers make is to advertise the city of the show, rather than the benefits of the show itself.

"If you're trying to tell me to spend a bunch of money to be an exhibitor, I want to know who is going to show up that I might sell something to," said Sherman Wade of CI Marketing Communications. "I don't care where you're having the show—it could be in the parking lot of Wal-Mart as long as you convince me somebody's going to show up and be interested in what I'm selling."

Something Old

Now that e-mail has become such a prevalent part of getting that interest, many trade show organizers have forgotten the strength of its snail mail predecessor, making direct mail campaigns practically a dinosaur. However, nowadays with all the spam out there being filtered, there is no guarantee that your e-mail will even reach your target audience, so a good old fashioned snail mail campaign can boost the chance of your message being heard.

"It's funny how we used to refer to direct mail as junk mail, but you get far fewer pieces of mail across your desk than you get e-mails," said Kevin Miller, President and Founder of the Frost Miller Group. "So, really now it's become easier to reach people through direct mail—and even through faxes and phone calls. Some of the things we think of as very old school type of marketing approaches are really a lot more reliable and effective than e-mail can be, just because there is so much junk e-mail that's sent out."

But getting your message out once isn't enough. In order to capture your audience's attention—and keep that attention—you must get in touch with prospects several times by snail mail and through cold calling.

"If you're doing a marketing campaign with a postcard and you want to stay top of mind, you need to be in front of those prospects, even if it's a simple 20 second call that just introduces yourself," said Traffic Builders Director of Sales and Marketing, Bob Cacciola. "You can't create a relationship with just postcards."

Something New

Taking advantage of the Internet is an effective supplement to the more traditional forms of marketing. Creating a Web site for your show gives your prospective exhibitors the information they need on their own terms. Also, taking advantage of the current blogging craze will help to further connect you with your audience.

In addition, you can supplement all of your marketing efforts throughout the year by sending an e-mail close to the date of your show.

“Using e-mail is usually only good when you’re creating urgency closer to the time of the event,” said Miller. “You’re not relying on it as a primary means of attendance, but as a supplement—and usually as a way to get attendance closer to a show.”

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