

LEVERAGING YOUR EXHIBITION SPONSORSHIPS

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Sponsorships have evolved as a critical component in any exhibit manager's arsenal of marketing tools. Sponsorship programs are now part art - part science, combining several marketing disciplines and activities to make a sustained impact with the intended audience.

The CEIR reports that booth efficiency increases by a whopping 104% when sponsorship is included in the exhibit plan (PE2.1). Are companies listening? Definitely. Further research shows that sponsorship investments can range anywhere from 15% - 25% of an increasingly important and accountable component. With this increase in accountability comes increased pressure to demonstrate a positive return-on-investment.

How Shows View Sponsorships:

Sponsorships can range from comprehensive branding programs and speaking opportunities in front of a targeted audience to show floor traffic-building and year-round marketing programs.

Exhibition sponsorships deliver a wide range of benefits to achieve specific marketing objectives including:

1. Introducing a new company name;
2. Conducting a product launch;
3. Positioning the company as an expert in a certain field;
4. Competitor differentiation;
5. Building exhibit traffic;
6. Developing a leads database;
7. Networking with senior buying influencers;
8. Positioning the company as a high-level industry supporter.

From a show's perspective, when an exhibitor buys into a sponsorship program on top of their exhibit space they open the doors to a whole new world of collaboration. When a company includes sponsorship in their exhibit plans, they send a clear message that they are a serious supplier that wants to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Like any other commodity in the marketplace, when someone buys into the premium product, they get access to benefits not normally available to the masses.

Determining Value for the Sponsorship:

One of the biggest challenges is determining the value of the various sponsorship offerings. More than almost any other type of event sponsorship, exhibitions attach a tangible value based on the quality of the audience. In an exhibition environment, considerable time and resources are spent attracting a qualified buying audience, exhibitors should expect to pay a premium for the level of access to the audience they are entitled to through their sponsorship.

1. **The most important planning aspect is determining what you want to achieve from your trade show sponsorship.**

With the myriad of sponsorship options generally available at an exhibition, the only way to effectively narrow down your choices is to have a clear focus on your objectives. For example: If you want to enhance your company as subject matter experts, consider sponsorships that include a speaking opportunity, or negotiate a speaking opportunity as part of your sponsorship. If you want you introduce a new company name or product, consider creating an "Event Sponsor" package that includes a multitude of mass branding vehicles (e.g. ads, banners, e-mail broadcasts, etc.) or specific items such as show bags or lanyards that are placed in the hands of all attendees. If you want to promote an event-related workshop, consider sponsorships that allow you to communicate pre-show messages to potential attendees through pre-show registration; If you want to generate booth traffic, consider sponsorships that place an offer (e.g. coupon) in the hands of all attendees

2. **Transform your show representative into a "solutions provider":**

Your show representative (or sponsorship manager) will have a thorough knowledge of the opportunities that are available through the event. One of the most effective methods to help you choose the right sponsorship is to engage the organizer in helping you find a solution to your marketing challenge, By sharing your marketing objectives with the organizer and asking them for their advice and recommendations, you are not only tapping into their expertise, but also effectively engaging them to help solve your problem". It is important to remember that show organizers want you to be successful because it's good for to long-term health of the event.

3. **Compare the cost of the sponsorship to that of other vehicles to reach the same audience:**

Once you've identified the appropriate sponsorship vehicle, it is important to assess the value and resulting return-on-investment to ensure that it's money well spent. The key question to ask is "how much would this cost to do on my own?" For example, if through a sponsorship you were able to distribute 10,000 pieces of literature, you would compare the cost of the sponsorship against the cost of:

1. Envelopes;
2. Cost of obtaining an up-to-date database;
3. Mailing house fees;
4. Postage

When assessing the value of the sponsorship, it is also important to assess intangible values such as timing factors, prestige of the event, competitive factors, etc. The bottom line is that if you could do it cheaper on your own and the event has no real associative value, you may be better of doing it on your own.

4. **Tie sponsorships to the show floor:**

For many exhibitors, this is sometimes the hardest to achieve because effective integration takes time, creativity and a disciplined approach. There are several advantages to integration, the most important ones being that it reinforces your message with the attendee (multiple impressions), makes it easier for them to find you

on the show floor and helps them remember you after the event. Basic approaches to integration include ensuring consistency in printed materials and signage. More complex approaches include tailoring your booth activities to tie into your show message. An example of this is, if you were an event management firm introducing a slogan "We add spice to your corporate events," you might consider a sponsorship that includes distributing a coupon for attendees to redeem at your booth for a bottle of cooking spices. The important aspect to remember is that exhibit/sponsorship packages are ideal opportunities to display some creativity. You've made the investment and now is the time to make it pay off by ensuring that you stand out from the rest of the crowd.

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