The 17-Point Exhibitor Follow-Up Checklist

Discover the best practices for trade show lead follow-up.

If you have prepared well in advance and executed your plan during the show, then many of your sales leads will result in sales, or better yet, in decade-plus customers.

Learn what to do with all of the leads you collected at your show to realize a substantial return on your investment. Learn how to prepare, execute and follow-up. Don't let qualified leads languish.

If you are a trade show organizer help exhibitors help themselves with regard to the basics. When the your exhibitors evaluate the results from your trade show, will the decision be not to exhibit next time because “not enough business resulted”?

And if you are an exhibitor**, manage your leads as though they are worth money, because they are.**

1) Do Some Pre-Show Marketing

You’re making a significant investment. Let potential visitors know where your booth will be located and what products will be displayed. Effective methods: email, postcards, mentions on your website, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and all customer communications.

Send a press release about your participation at the show. Google “Free Press Release Distribution” to post your release. Include the show name and your company name in the title; this will get your release found.

2) Prior to the Show: Set Goals

Attendees invest time and money in order to learn about products that will help them become more effective and efficient. Exhibitors invest time and money to…what? To “show the flag”? Some claim that is their only goal, but the vast majority of exhibitors participate in order to generate leads. Simply showing up is not going to assure that you will meet your goals. Yes, you have to do a good job at the show. But few tradeshow attendees place orders on the spot. Most make their buying decisions in the days, weeks and months following a tradeshow. Do you want to leave your prospects buying decisions to chance? Effective follow-up is required if you are going to meet ambitious goals.

3) Reavalute Your Lead Collection Method

The ability to follow-up on tradeshow leads is dictated by the manner in which the leads are collected. If your "system" is to ask for a business card on the back of which you make a few notations, you will have a lot of key entry to do and you will have to work on assumptions for which there may be no foundation. You will have to ask for or do without key qualifiers, such as:

1. *Type of business*
2. *Product Interest*
3. *Annual sales*
4. *Number of employees*
5. *Level of decision-making authority of the badge holder*
6. *Purpose for attending the show*

4) Tips For Using Electronic Lead Management

If you will employ an electronic lead management system at your tradeshow, acquaint yourself with its features prior to the show. Some of these features could prove very helpful to you in your follow-up phase. For example, if your organization is promoting multiple products or services at a tradeshow, wouldn't it be useful if you could break down your leads by product or service? Perhaps you would like to pass on leads to sales representatives based on assigned geographical territories; in that case, an automated breakdown by postal ZIP code would expedite matters. The ability to download your leads to your contact management or customer relationship management database is particularly useful.

5) Use the Qualifiers

One important benefit of electronic lead management is its ability to attach qualifiers to each of your leads. Some systems contain a limited number of fixed qualifiers, such as "hot lead," "send salesman," 'send literature" etc. Not everyone at a trade show is a prospect. Don't focus on lead counts, focus on lead quality. Leads captured should have qualifiers and notes so you remember the interaction. Gathering critical information about each potential customer's needs will make your post-show lead follow-ups more effective.

6) Don't Waste Time at Your Booth with Tire Kickers

We have all met these "time wasters" and as a result, have missed out on connecting with customers and qualified sales opportunities. You can't control who comes to your booth. But you can control what happens when they do.

Make sure your sales staff in the booth understands that they should not approach people who are just gathering goodies. Let them take their toy and move on to waste your competitors' time. Much better to waste trinkets than to waste time.

Attendees send off plenty of signals (for instance, a low-value visitor is likely to ask "what do you do" while a high value visitor is more likely to start talking about their needs). Solid training in this will yield significant results.

7) Business cards are not good enough.

Not if you drop them, or lose them or never input the info into your CRM. Additionally, lead retrieval captures attendees full registration data – this is much more info than what is on a business card. It includes purchasing authority, buying timeline, company size as well as other useful data.

8) Weed Out the Grabbers from the Real Leads

You may have had a dozen visitors to your exhibit or thousands. Determining just who your visitors are is the first step in qualifying them. The name of the company with which they are affiliated may offer an indication of their interest. Your visitor could be a competitor.

9) Ask, Don't Tell

You need to ask questions, not tell booth visitors about your product. Who does your visitor represent? A Fortune 500 firm? An Internet hotshot? A multi-national? A firm on the rise or on the decline? A company that you can grow with, or a Goliath to your David?

Trade show attendees are there to find solutions. If they knew all the best solutions, they would not be walking the show floor. These folks are the source of new business. Why did your lead attend this event? If she was looking for products/services like those that you offer, you clearly have a prime prospect. If she was there to gain competitive intelligence, that puts her at the other end of the spectrum. Why did the lead visit your exhibit? Perhaps a current customer referred her. That makes her a particularly well-qualified prospect.

10) What are Your Customer's Biggest Problems?

Learn how to make their life easier and you have a customer. Business people do not buy products or services, they buy solutions to problems. What is the problem that your visitor hopes to solve? What can you offer as a solution?

Defining the problem that your prospect hopes to solve is not always straightforward. For example, he might say, "My problem is that our air compressor is only 15 horsepower. Our usage has grown. I need something bigger." Maybe he does. Or maybe he simply has the wrong type of compressor. A newer, more efficient model of the same capacity might serve him quite well, while reducing his energy consumption. His problem could be that he does not have a drier to dry the air that the compressor is using, resulting in excessive moisture that is causing mechanical damage. If your response is to simply send him a quote on a 25 horsepower compressor to replace his "inadequate" 15 horsepower unit, you may lose the sale to a more inquisitive salesperson.

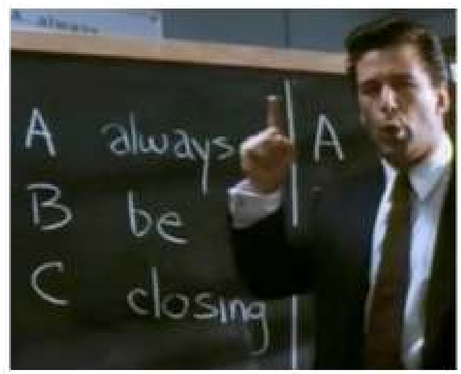
Before you can offer a solution, you have to thoroughly understand the problem. If you want a long-term customer, one that I call a "decade-plus customer," your goal has to be one of mutual satisfaction, not simply a sale. You must give the customer a real solution, one that will look as good, or even better, a year down the road.

11) How Will You Add Value?

When following up on a lead, focus on this question: What can I offer this prospect that will add value to his product or service and help differentiate it from those of his competitors? You may not have been able to sufficiently analyze his problem on the spot on the tradeshow floor. In the follow-up phase you have the opportunity to do this and to offer the value add that will begin a "decade-plus customer" relationship.

12) Ask Visitors For a Timeframe

Make it easy for your leads to take action. Present the next steps clearly to them and quickly. When will a decision be made on the product/service that you are offering? The answer plays a large part in how you prioritize your leads. To whom do you devote your energies right now, the Fortune 500 lead who plans to purchase in 18 months, or the three-year-old outfit with $2 million in sales with an immediate need?



If your company is firmly established and a leader in its field, your outlook is quite different than that of an entrepreneur in the early stages of growth. Sure, the entrepreneur would like to grab some Mr. Fortune 500's business, but, hey, 18 months out? For a start-up, that is an eternity. The lifeblood of a start-up is cash, and cash comes from sales.

For extra inspiration, watch Alec Baldwin's legendary scene in Glengarry Glen Ross (NSFW): http://vimeo.com/14305226

Below are the four steps you need to take your audience through if you want them to buy your product.

Tradeshow Exhibitors When Following Up With Leads
Remember: AIDA: Attention-Interest-Desire-Action

Attention | **Interest** | **Decision** | **Action**

1. **Attention: Do I have your attention?" Unexpected content, surprise, delight. Use humor, even shock value. Try: create a whitepaper or funny video related to your industry that prospects can identify with.**

2. **Interest: "Are you interested? I know you are!" Targeted message with identified solution to need. Promise to make life easier.**

3. **Decision: Have you made your decision?" Extra incentives: Coupon, special offer, customer's need standout amongst competitors. Demo, show proof. Try: use case studies**

4. **Action: Purchase, order, signed proposals.**

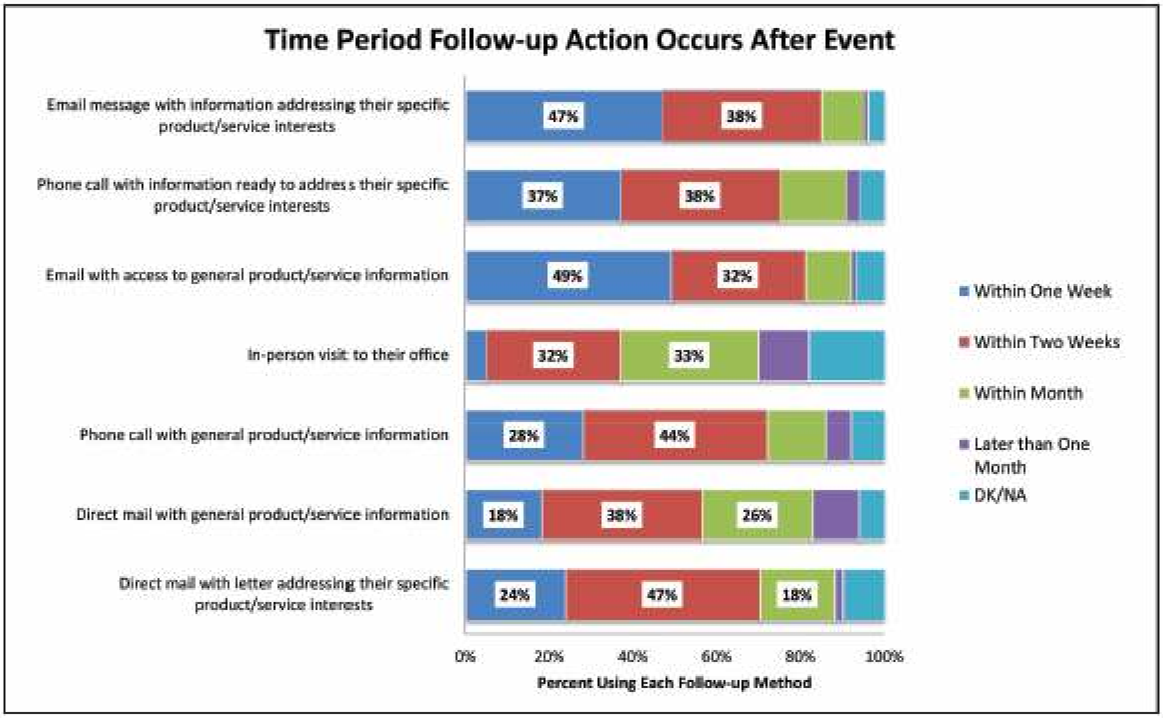
13) Follow-up Fast

You can't be "too pushy." In October 2012, the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) released a new study entitled Exhibitor Sales Lead Capture and Follow-up Practice Trends. It contained the usual stats on how poorly exhibitors follow-up with their leads, no surprise there. But what was most surprising to me was that following up within two weeks was considered "very quickly," yikes.

Here's the chart (courtesy CEIR)

Timing of Follow-up

Figure 6



Phone and email lead follow-up efforts are done very quickly, within two weeks following an event for over 70 percent of exhibitors using these methods.

14) Best Days for Follow-Up

According to the Lead Response Management's 3 year study, Thursday is the best day to contact a lead in order to qualify that lead (by 19.1% better than the worst day). 4 to 6pm is the best time to call to make contact with a lead. **It is 114% better than calling at 11 to 12am, right before lunch.** This data presents an enormous opportunity for trade show exhibitors willing to follow-up fast.

15) Your First Email Follow-Up

Email is great for follow-up because you don't get caught playing phone tag. You also have entered your prospects inbox. Now they can follow-up on you. Start with an e-mail message or brief letter thanking your prospect for having visited your exhibit.

16) What to Include in that First Email

Provide your prospect with a value add, either a solution to his problem or a means of differentiating his product or service. Close with a call for action. Since your initial point of contact was a tradeshow, you might instill a sense of urgency by offering some type of show special, some inducement for him to act now. This is the “tell him” phase. Offer this prospect a clear conversion path: an quick product overivew to remind them what you sell, then a case-study or testimnial, a demo and then fingers crossed you will get to close the deal.

In another five to seven days, tell him what you’ve told him. Send an e-mail or letter recapping the benefits your organization is prepared to deliver that will solve problems or differentiate products. Offer a compelling reason to act now.

17) Don’t Forget to Follow Up on Your First Touchpoint

Don’t expect a one shot follow-up to produce results. Too frequently an exhibitor’s follow-up, if you can call it that, consists of nothing more than a single piece of literature with a “personal” cover letter. Don’t kid yourself. That isn’t follow-up. After you send an email, call to follow up. If they have not received your info, you can quickly email it to them (possibly again) while you are one the phone. In your next email recap the benefits your organization is prepared to deliver that will solve problems or differentiate products. Offer a compelling reason to act now.

Leads are highly perishable

Do not let the qualified leads you have assembled languish. They are gold-but perishable gold. Leads grow quickly. Stephen Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, divides tasks into four categories: Urgent and important; important and not urgent; urgent and not important; not urgent and not important. Done properly, tradeshow preparation should be “important and not urgent”- it should be done well in advance of the show. Lead follow-up is both important and urgent.

Keep at it

No athlete, no matter how talented, wins every game, nor does any athletic team win ‘em all. But great players and great teams learn from their losses and come back to win another day. So, too, for the successful salesperson. The leads that do not pan out following this year’s tradeshow should not be assigned to the scrap heap. Many of the same folks will attend the same show next year and the year after. Some will move up within their company. They will become decision-makers. Others will move on, seeking more fertile pastures. While your product did not go over at their previous organization, it might be just what their new company needs. Continue to work the leads that did not result in a sale. Some (OK-maybe most) will eventually be discarded after a period of years. But others might become decade-plus customers.

Summary

As an exhibitor, you have made a substantial investment. Just add up the cost of salaries, exhibit space, your display, travel, food, lodging and entertainment and I am sure that you will agree. Preparation, execution and above all lead follow-up are the elements that will assure that you will realize a substantial return on investment.

About the Author

Lew Hoff is the president of Bartizan Connects.

Hoff is a member of the Board of the Hudson Valley Technology Development Center and is the president of the Westchester World Trade Council.

Every year tens of thousands of exhibitors and millions of show attendees interact using our hardware and software.

Bartizan devotes considerable resources to tradeshow sales leads management. Nearly half of its 39,000 square foot facility located just outside of New York City is devoted to lead retrieval. A product development staff of seven engineers works on refining current products and research and development of new ones. Bartizan's Board includes the Dean of engineering at New York Institute of Technology and former IBM executives.

To contact Lew Hoff or learn more about Bartizan and its products: Call 1-800-431-2682, Or visit the web site at http://www.bartizan.com/

BARTIZAN CONNECTS

Corporate Headquarters:

Bartizan Lead Retrieval

217 Riverdale Ave

Yonkers, NY 10705

(800) 899-2278

Fax: 914-965-774