

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Shaking Off the Booth Doldrums

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You know that old saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”? Well, after attending the Monroe Hardware show in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, I have to call bull-something on that quote. Despite what that phrase says, I’m here to tell you this old dog was pleasantly surprised to learn a thing or two about how to work a trade show. In fact, I now know what I didn’t know.

Here’s the deal: I was attending on behalf of GrowScripts. It wasn’t my first trade show for them, but it was my first Monroe event. (It’s similar to an Arett or BFG show). Not wall-to-wall floor traffic, but those attending are there to write orders.

I’d like to believe I know how to put on my “trade show face,” but I have to admit that even if I was at my best, I couldn’t hold a candle to the lady across the aisle at this show. Rochelle Warriner was representing Imperial Blades and watching her work was a thing of beauty. She enthusiastically greeted everyone that approached her booth and engaged every single person that walked down the aisle.

Pictured: Rochelle Warriner is a freelance actress who averages working 15 to 20 trade shows a year for Imperial Blades, helping them build relationships, which in turn, provides more sales opportunities.

The most interesting part? She isn’t a sales rep, nor does she work for Imperial in the traditional sense. She’s a freelance actress who averages working 15 to 20 trade shows a year for Imperial. She’s a relationship builder and order getter if ever I saw one. And I think we can all learn a thing or two from her.

As cliché as it sounds, Rochelle knew she wanted to be an actress since age 5! While her vision of “entertainment” has changed over the years, her overall goal to have opportunities performing has remained constant. Nowadays,

she actually categorizes her work at trade shows, conventions and conferences as “Corporate Entertainment.” She has about five major clients she travels to shows representing. She looks at every job as a new role and each time a client has a show, that role can change.

Rochelle has been working for Imperial Blades for three years. She said her training was originally on the show floor listening to the other sales reps and from the online research she did. From there, she had additional training at their factory in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She then took the things she heard on the show floor, included what she learned at the factory, and developed her own script, which is continually updated. She has an understanding that at any point in time Imperial has the ability to nix or add details they feel are irrelevant or important.

I’ve always been told that the “good” salespeople are ones that know how to listen and not talk. Rochelle echoes this sentiment, saying when she works with a new client, she generally listens first. She then asks if they have any taglines, short elevator pitches or anything specific they want her to get across to the potential customer right away. From there, she develops a bullet-point script and asks that the client listen while she’s speaking to the end user to provide her feedback so she can adjust details to better fit their needs.

Rochelle’s top tips for trade shows

I asked Rochelle’s what advice she’d be willing to share and she provided the following “Top Tips for Trade Shows:”

1. Take an improv acting class. She says 90% of what she does on the sales floor is improvisational. It’s practice, and practice can, and should be, fun. Improv teaches you to think on your feet and never let a “yes and ...” opportunity get by. If sales are the art of the yes, and a no can shut down a conversation quicker than anything, then an improv class is the place to embrace the yes. My takeaway: If you do employee training, adding an improv class would be an easy and profitable addition! Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

2. Have a true interest in people and/ or a true willingness to want to help them. She said she knows it sounds a little commonplace, but she finds people fascinating, which makes it easy to strike up a conversation. Conversations break down barriers and people love to feel like someone really wants to get to know them, even at a show. We all want to do business with people we like and feel connected to. My takeaway: Maybe a sales or CSR person isn’t the best one on the front line at a trade show, especially if they’re not a people person. Pick an outgoing individual to engage and pull in attendees to the booth. Leave the person home who wants to sit there like a bump on a log looking bored out of their skull, or is constantly on the phone and they aren’t doing your social media (You know who they are—we’ve all seen them).

3. Selling a product is never the goal; making the connection is. The product is secondary. She says a person might not buy from her the first time, but they won’t forget how she gushed over their beautiful engagement ring that their husband had designed by his relatives who are in the diamond industry (a true story, by the way). And she promises they WILL remember her the second time when she asks how it’s going and if they decided to bring Imperial Blades in to their store. My takeaway: It’s all about relationships.

4. Last but not least, have fun! Shows can be long and slow. But if you’re having fun, then the people walking by can’t help but have fun, too. We’re back to the connection. She says she WILL buy something from you if you have something she needs, even if she doesn’t like you or have a connection, especially if you’re the only one selling it. However, if given the option, she’ll purchase from someone she likes and have fun with every time. My takeaway: Smile and the whole world around you smiles, too. You can’t argue with making what can be a long, and sometimes boring, event fun.

Rochelle feels hiring anyone with acting/improv experience in this kind of environment is beneficial. Actors know how to take a beating and be persistent (which is helpful on those long days with a lot of no, thank yous). Additionally, any

one with acting experience has been trained to entertain and keeps the element of fun alive.

How do you find your own Rochelle?

Well, if you don't have a people-person in your organization, then Rochelle offered up two companies she's worked with whose professionalism she values—Vantage Advertising (www.models4tradeshows.com) and Skye Agency (www.skyagency.com). She notes that going through an agency can be pricey, but this is how IQ Card Fundraising found her.

Charlotte Baldwin, Operations Director for iqcardschoolfundraising.com, told me, "When looking for help to staff our stand at an exhibition, we took a leap of faith and hired someone we had never met! Luckily, our experience was positive and Rochelle provided us with exactly the support we needed, being approachable without being pushy and learning about our fundraising project for schools with enthusiasm and professionalism."

An alternative is to place an ad through Modelmayhem.com and Craigslist.com. Craigslist is how she connected with Imperial Blades. Tim Rockwell, National Sales Manager for Imperial Blades, thinks you need someone who's professional, but not uptight, knowledgeable (even though they don't sell your product every day) and charismatic, but not annoying. He said, "Rochelle has truly become part of the IB family and has endeared herself not only to our hearts, but to the customers who look forward to seeing her show after show."

Rochelle says to be aware of the different levels of corporate "modeling:"

- Brand Ambassadors, aka Promo Persons: Food sampling would fall under this category and are the lowest paid.
- Trade Show Hostesses, aka Hooks: Someone to say hello, hand out literature, scan badges.
- Spokesmodels, aka Product Specialist or Spokesperson: This is the highest paying "model" category (anywhere from \$300 - \$1,200 a day), but it also requires the most from the individual. Like Rochelle, these spokespeople give an industry a chance to highlight a product using a visually appealing, well-spoken individual, without the cost of full-time employment, overhead or internal political process.

Look, if you're exhibiting at a trade show, you're already spending a big chunk of change. Instead of thinking you can't afford a "Rochelle" at your company, maybe you need to ask yourself if you can't afford not to have someone like her in your booth. At the very least, we can create our own script and consider adding that improv class to our trade show training.

Here's to doing things differently and getting a different result instead of living the definition of insanity. Cheers to successful trade shows in 2018! **GT**

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