GROWERTALKS

Features

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Terrific Trade Show Prep & Follow-up

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Attending trade shows costs a lot of coin. Whether you pay for a booth, ship plants and fixtures out to the show, and cover hotel rooms and meals for staff or you send staff (and pay for meals and hotel rooms and transportation), at a minimum you're spending $1,000. But your outlay might be closer to $50K with a booth. Are you getting as much out of the shows as you could be?

Pre-show prep

I actually enjoy this part because it gets me revved up for the event! The two main parts of pre-show prep are the marketing asset review and run-of-show agenda. We're going to divide run-of-show planning into three focus areas: existing customers, potential customers and colleagues, and exploration for new initiatives.

Marketing asset review

That sounds dreadful. It's not! Here's a checklist of what to review and update before shows:

■ Website: Make sure it has the current year as copyright in the subfooter so it looks like you're still in business. Review your "Contact" page. Is the info still correct? Do you need to add any people? Check your online ordering and/or catalog offerings. Is the new year's catalog PDF uploaded? Are your order sheets updated? If there's pricing, is it current? Are cut-off dates updated to the new year? Finally, is it easy to see where to sign up for current availability/email newsletters?

■ Social media: Have you created and posted simple graphics with the trade show logo, your logo and your booth number on it? Or, if you don't have a booth, have you posted a graphic with some info about the days you'll be there?

■ Business cards: People still use these. Get a fresh, updated stack and leave room on one side for notes. Pack a Sharpie so it's easy to write on all cards—matte or glossy. Pack a few Sharpies and hand them out. You'll be everyone's new best friend.

■ Email marketing program: Three words—don't ignore this. Email is so powerful for growing your business immediately and over time. I've ended up with clients that met me at a trade show once and stayed on my email list for four years before they picked up the phone to schedule a meeting. Before the show, send an email with info about where you'll be and what you'll be doing at the show. Booth? Number? No booth, request a meeting, etc.

Create a landing page for new potential customers to opt in to email at the show and then create a follow up automation for the people that opted in with a three email sequence to lead them to make a purchase, update their profile with more info so you can send more targeted messages and/or orient them to all of the services you offer.

Print out a sign with a QR code that goes to this landing page to have at your booth. Print a small version on card stock to carry with you. Heck, tape it to the back of your badge so you can sign people up on the fly at the show. You can also have a tablet on hand for people to sign up.

Create a post-show email campaign for existing customers. Before the show, create the shell so all you have to do is pop in some pictures and a short recap. Remember, well begun is half done! In that email, send a few pics from the show, share anything cool and new that you saw, and highlight new for (insert year) items/programs/services. For these emails, I like to make it about the show and not say, “It was so good to see you.” Because, well, what if I didn’t see them? (I get those notes all the time and they’re a little disorienting, honestly.) If you saw an existing customer at the show and had a meaningful conversation, send a short personal email.

Run-of-show prep

Divide and conquer! One person can’t be everywhere all at once. Here’s how to organize your focus areas:

■ Existing customers:

1) Who do you want to have lunch or dinner with as a thank you for their business, to talk plans for next year, to solidify relationships? Identify, invite and, most importantly, make reservations! Restaurants around trade shows are BUSY! (Or plan an 11:30 a.m. lunch. Easier to walk in before the rush.)

2) Get a map of the show and mark the location of existing customer booths. Review CRM data and make notes on the map (consistent ordering, dropped off last two years, always late, always early).

3) Prepare and schedule social posts with customer booth numbers and encourage others to visit your customers!

■ Potential customers and colleagues: Is there anyone you’d like to bring on board as a new customer? Reach out to three to five top prospects and schedule coffee or lunch. If that’s not possible, reach out for a pre-show conversation (What’s new? Where do you need help? Focus on THEIR needs) and make sure to stop by early on a show day for some facetime.

■ New stuff: You can’t go to a trade show and miss new stuff! There are two schools of thought on this: One is look at all the new products, period. The other is to choose a focus area related to what you’re doing and identify places related to that. Whichever you want, mark it on the map!

It’s show time!

Here’s the order in which I’d cross the floor to make the most of show time. Another hint: If you’re asking people if they would like to be added to your email list while you’re out and about, write that on the back of their business card. (You don’t want to just add willy-nilly.)

1) After badge retrieval, do a run-by of all of your existing customers. You have your map! Start on one side of the floor and work your way to the other. Take selfies, take pictures and post them on social as you go (or save for a big photo dump later). Ask them about what’s new, what they need help with and take notes! Ask them if there’s anyone else you should see at the show and write their name on the back of your badge. That way you can find it. This might take you an hour or it might take six.

2) Break for any planned lunches or dinners.

3) Start on potential customers. Before trekking back across the show floor, get out your map and find the people your existing customers recommended you meet and add them. Make a note of who said to add them so you have an “in” when you get there. For serious new potentials, visit in the first hour or two of the second day, when everyone’s fresh. Take pictures and jot a few notes about what you learn.

4) Hit up the exciting and new! Save this for late afternoon (3:00-5:00 p.m.) on show days. Everyone's getting a little tired and slowing down, so there's less pressure and potentially fewer crowds in booths.

5) Attend any happy hours you've been invited to. Making reservations for 7:00 p.m. or later dinner will let everyone drop in where they need to and then reconvene for a sit-down dinner.

6) At least nightly, share photos on social media. It'll give the people you visited a happy feeling!

Post-show follow-up

This should be easy-peasy if you did your pre-show planning. Here's your post-show checklist:

■ Add new emails to your list. Tag or identify new leads from the trade show so you can track where they came from.

■ Update and send your post-show email campaign. Add a few trade show pictures and a little write-up. Be strategic—include some of your best customers and a few of those you want to snag. Show a few new items you saw and include a picture of you and/or your team. People like pictures of people!

■ Repurpose your post-show email as a blog post and social media posts. (Pssst: you can use ChatGPT to recombine your content for repurposing it.)

■ Send personal emails to schedule follow-up meetings and phone calls.

As you can tell, the real key to success is to plan well before you go and then execute your plan the best you can. Hit up existing customers first, then visit potential customers, then look at new and exciting … unless it's 3:00 p.m. Then it's time to have fun! **GT**

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