

6 EXPERT TIPS TO BEAT YOUR COMPETITION AT TRADE SHOWS



Trade shows offer an irreplaceable opportunity to promote your brand and connect with your target audience. They allow you to deliver strong and compelling messages in face-to-face interactions with your customers and generate plenty of new business growth.

Most exhibition attendees are involved in the process of purchase decision-making, so failing to promote an organization's event attendance effectively can factor to a colossal missed opportunity.

Although the value of trade shows is indisputable, most marketers still find it challenging to use them in a way that delivers proven ROI. To take advantage of events, your organization needs to do more than just exhibit.

If you want to maximize your trade show presence and investment, you must start your event management and marketing efforts long before the event itself. In order to increase your booth traffic, you must promote your attendance through various means and channels, and continuously amplify your messages to attendees. During the event, it's a good idea to create meaningful engagement opportunities or so-called experiential marketing initiatives that leave a lasting impression on visitors.

To help you succeed with event marketing, we've identified six important tactics you should consider implementing before exhibiting at your next industry event. Applying these will help you maximize the benefits you derive from participating in trade shows.

1. Create a microsite for the event

Creating a website page for an event you are exhibiting at is a great pre-show technique for bolstering brand awareness and promoting your attendance. The purpose of the microsite is to feature only event-specific content and address potential attendees that fit your target audience. Microsites are an effective way to **encourage participants to interact with your brand**.

Many companies put a form on the event microsite (as seen in the image on the following page), so interested parties can reach out. This is extremely helpful for setting meetings and identifying intent-based leads.

Here are some questions you must consider when designing your microsite:

- Who is this microsite designed for? Who are you targeting, and why?
- What type of content do these people (or rather, personas) need?
- How can you engage with your audience and ensure they visit your booth?

The insights you develop from these questions are essential for the success of your microsite because they provide a strong basis for creating a page that is relevant to your audience.

Once you've clarified your site's intentions, your next step is to design, execute, and promote the microsite.

Consider the following best practices when designing, launching, and maintaining an event microsite:

- Make it mobile-friendly to increase engagement, particularly during the event, as most attendees will be using mobile devices during that time.
- Buy a separate domain that is related to the event and use it as the homepage of your microsite; feature the URL of the microsite prominently on all advertising and promotional materials.
- Optimize all sub-pages related to the event, including those promoting your products and services.
- Include the booth's location and relevant contact information, details of who will be at the booth, and how people can schedule an appointment with your team.
- Provide customer testimonials, case studies, and other gated assets to gather contact data in exchange for premium content.
- Create a separate page on the microsite for any presentations you will be giving and/or any solutions or products you will be showcasing at the event.
- Update the microsite's content before, during, and after the event.

A well-executed microsite helps visitors understand the value of your brand and what your products or services can do to help them. It is an excellent tool for engaging with your audience before the event itself.

2. Craft creative calls-to-action to stimulate interest

Calls-to-action (CTAs) are integral to the success of any type of campaign, and event marketing is no exception. They should be present in every form of communication, including microsites, white papers, other resources, and post-event thank you emails. A well-written and strategically placed CTA can help convert site visitors to event attendees, and cold leads to prospects.

To craft effective CTAs that drive engagement and booth traffic, start by considering the wants and needs of your audience. Think about the business challenges your prospects are facing. How can your product or service help them overcome these challenges? How will their company benefit from meeting you in person?

You should use CTAs that speak directly to your audience and address their business needs or any hurdles that might prevent them from converting. The messaging you use should clearly communicate the value your audience will receive by taking the action you are proposing.

Some common CTAs you might find useful are:

- Register for our webinar
- Set up a meeting with us!
- Sign up for a free demo
- Get our event-exclusive white paper here
- Follow the #[event hashtag] for the latest news!
- Join us for our presentation
- Come see us for a free trial of our product

In your initial contact, asking prospects to schedule a meeting with your event representatives will most likely overwhelm them. Rather, use multiple CTAs to take your audience through a series of effortless commitments, with each consecutive CTA leading them further down the conversion funnel. Once you've sent them valuable information, you'll find it easier to convince them to visit your booth or schedule a meeting.

Effective CTAs should include one or more of the following elements:

- Action words
- A sense of urgency and scarcity
- Minimization of risk
- A focus on value
- An invitation inside for readers
- Curiosity
- Social proof

The design and positioning of CTAs have an influence on whether visitors pay attention to and engage with them.

3. Bid on trade show keywords

Bidding on trade show keywords is a highly-effective way to reach attendees who will be searching for information about the event. Targeting event-related keywords can drastically bolster booth traffic, help secure meetings, and generate new leads and prospects. Furthermore, depending on how the event is marketed, and whether competitors are also bidding on event-related keywords, your cost-per-action can be reasonable.

The types of keywords you should focus on when bidding are:

- Branded keywords
- Event-related keywords
- Industry keywords that are high up the funnel

Utilize these keywords so that they appear in search results before and during the event.

Google's option for bidding suggestions lets you strategically bid on keywords. The feature allows you to customize your ads so that they show up either at the top of the page, above all ads and organic search results, or simply somewhere on the first page.

Try experimenting with the positioning of your ads to reduce the cost of your bids and establish which positioning generates the most traffic and conversions.

When bidding on trade show keywords, you can optimize your ads by employing ad customizers.

They allow you to target your ad more precisely and introduce wider display options. Some types of campaigns you can build with ad customizers include:

- Ads that have a countdown timer (to pique interest and create urgency)
- Tailored ads based on the device used by visitors
- Ads for the different audiences you've identified
- Ads that are location-specific
- Different ads depending on the time of the day

Utilizing AdWords' "customer match" feature is another effective way to reach your customers on Google Search. This product allows you to reconnect with the people you've previously contacted by appealing to their intent and context. Targeting people who have already expressed interest in your brand increases the likelihood that they convert.

Finally, don't forget to add end dates to your campaigns so that your ads stop running once the event is over!

4. Promote your best social posts related to the event

Employing social media ads to further promote your event-related posts is equally critical to your event strategy, as it can increase traffic to your microsite or booth. Pick social platforms based on your audience's preferences. Using more than one platform also creates a lasting impression on your audience and increases noticeability for your brand.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the go-to network for professionals and businesses that want to connect or promote themselves. Moreover, LinkedIn is a notably important channel for B2B marketers, and most B2B marketers use the platform for lead generation.

LinkedIn provides a variety of options to promote your attendance at an event. You can promote your posts as sponsored content, which will appear in people's feeds, or you can run text ads, which appear either at the top of the homepage or in the "Ads you may be interested in" section.

InMail

Alternatively, sponsored InMail ads are an effective way to reach your prospects at scale. This email-like service allows you to directly reach your prospects using targeted email messages without the extra step of acquiring an email address. Easy to implement, this solution drives engagement by appealing to recipients in a personalized and direct manner.

LinkedIn display and dynamic ads

Moreover, if you want to reach a broader audience, consider employing LinkedIn display and dynamic ads. These ad options can help you increase brand awareness and build a community of relevant followers.

You can target specific audiences that meet your criteria by selecting recipients according to a range of segmentation standards such as company, position, and skills. These tools also allow you to measure your ads' success through campaign-reporting metrics, so you can effectively tweak ads to directly engage your audience and, in turn, grow your business' prospect-base.

Facebook

Using Facebook to boost your event-related posts gives you a wide range of possibilities. Promoting your posts with Facebook is particularly effective because of Facebook's Ad Manager. It allows you to define goals for your ads and to track how they are performing.

Facebook Ads offer various tools you can apply to reach your intended audience. The "Lookalike Audience" feature identifies targets based on the behaviors and attributes of your most engaged followers. This allows you to reach additional user segments that meet your targeting criteria.

Twitter

Twitter is another great channel for event marketing. With Twitter Ads, you directly promote your content and your brand using Twitter's Promoted Accounts feature.

When setting up an ad campaign on Twitter, you can define its objectives, which are then used by the system to determine the costs, depending on the results achieved.

Similar to Facebook, Twitter allows you to target users you have already interacted with, or to expand your filter to include accounts with similar characteristics. You can also target people who are part of your followers' networks. Such users are more inclined to take an interest in your company or even attend the event.

Remarketing ads

You should also consider remarketing ads. All three of these platforms allow you to specifically target users that have visited your website in the past. LinkedIn's "Matched Audiences" is an example of such a program. By promoting your content to an audience that's already aware of your brand, you have a greater chance of receiving attention and engagement and driving more traffic to your booth.

5. Use display advertising on contextually relevant websites

To further promote your presence at an upcoming event, you can create display banners on relevant websites. Relevant news, trade organizations or associations, and industry influencer websites are some of the best channels for effective banner placement.

All effective ads, including display ads, require similar attributes—they need to emphasize the value of the product or service you're offering. They should also include a large, easy to read text—a single, focused message—that concludes with a simple call to action, and a relevant image. Take color psychology into account when creating your banner: brighter hues lead to an increased level of energy and may be more likely to inspire action.

To capture additional leads, include promotional elements in your banner, such as a free demo or access to event-specific gated content available to your audience if they sign up or follow you on social media.

You can also create a custom email signature banner for your pre-sales, sales, and customer support teams to include in their emails. The banner should promote your attendance at the show and provide a special offer to those who share their contact information or schedule a meeting with you.

6. Create email marketing campaigns for attendees

Email is one of the best ways to promote your attendance at an event. In fact, 78% of event creators consider email marketing to be their most effective strategy. To employ email marketing effectively, you need to conduct thorough research on who will be visiting the event. Many times, conferences provide exhibitors with a list of attendees. If you receive an event attendee list, use it to identify the companies you are prospecting. Then, research the companies you haven't heard of to see if they would be a good fit for the product/service you are promoting.

Even if you receive a list, you should do additional research to find companies that might be interested in attending. Reach out to applicable companies and invite them to join the show and visit your booth. This is an effective way to start building a relationship with them, especially if you are the first to invite them.

Use your findings from the attendee list research and the additional investigation you conducted to create your own target list. Segment this list by company interests and needs, so you can produce custom email campaigns that address each buyer persona.

The most effective campaigns we have seen in the field include the following information:

- Who this email is intended for and how they will benefit from visiting the event
- Details about the event itself, as well as what your role is (especially if you are a sponsor or have previously participated at the event)
- The times of keynotes, presentations, participation panels, demos, etc
- Why attendees should visit you, who they will meet at your booth, and how you can be useful to them (include tailored value propositions for each segment or individual value propositions for leads that are of high importance)

To further convince and capture your targeted leads, you should include a compelling CTA, as well as various resources that recipients can access and download instantly. This can take the form of a white paper, a report, or a free trial opportunity for the recipients who follow the CTA in your email campaign.

Send out several email campaigns before the event to entice your audience and inform them of the benefits they will receive from visiting your booth or meeting with you at the show. After the event, send a wrap-up email, thanking visitors for stopping by the booth and asking for feedback or suggesting the next steps.

Attract visitors through event amplification

B2B marketers have an arsenal of tools and tactics they can use to build a meaningful presence at trade shows. With these six tips, you'll have an active and receptive audience before the show even starts, guaranteeing increased high-quality meetings for your sales team.

However, in some cases, marketing professionals can find themselves overwhelmed with the number of opportunities they have at their disposal. In these situations, the best approach is to find a partner who has ample experience in event marketing for B2B companies.

ALEXANDER KESLER BIO:



Alexander Kesler is a visionary B2B digital marketer with over 20 years of experience. Focusing on solutions for B2B demand generation, digital marketing, ABM, intent, and AI-driven lead generation, among others, Alexander embraces innovation and turns concepts and methodologies into products and marketing programs that drive ROI.

As Founder and CEO of INFUSEmedia, Alexander leads a global team that executes campaigns across all industries and company sizes. He leads all facets of global marketing, including go-to-market strategy, demand generation, vertical marketing, data management, field marketing, pricing, retention, analyst relations, product management, inside sales, and sales enablement.

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Let's get in touch!

Office: +1 (617) 459-4500

Email: kesler@infusemedia.com