

## **ANOTHER ROAD TO PROFITABILITY: TRADE SHOW PARTICIPTION**

By S. Robert August

Can you imagine having hundreds of prospects for you and your products in only a few hours?

Lenders, REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, builders and suppliers -- HBA members all -- have no problem justifying outdoor billboard expenses each month as they advertise their respective companies. These expenses are valuable as the imprints received by the consumer help them to be directed to a local bank, savings and loan association, real estate office, home community or retail establishment to obtain a service or product for their direct acquisition and consumption.

Each customer that walks through the door is a welcome addition to the potential economic opportunity for a salesman to ring up another sale.

In addition to the money spent on outdoor advertising, additional advertising expenditures are budgeted for direct mail, newspapers, periodicals, radio and television with the hope of generating more "traffic."

The costs involved to obtain and maintain sales for a company are important; and, it has been proven time and time again that in order to make money you have to spend money wisely!

Often, one criterion for a marketing manager to consider is the return of investment on the expense of a program relating to the anticipated qualified traffic that will be coming to an event or place of business where one will be able to convert the qualified traffic into qualified buyers!

One such outstanding marketing opportunity to create an awareness for you and your company -- and an opportunity for you to find qualified buyers for your goods, merchandise and services -- is the Trade Show sponsored by your trade association! The "traffic" certainly is qualified with the theme of the event -- your product!

When was the last time you and your associates had the phenomenal opportunity to talk “shop” with hundreds of prospects that are purposely coming to an area to learn about your business concern? Think about the cost of obtaining a booth and using it in relationship to the opportunity to do more business!

Now that you have decided you are going to sign-up for a booth, you have to consider your plan of action to maximize your interests and desires to obtain more sales:

- Consider the location of the booths available for selection in respect to the best “traffic patterns” in order to see the most people.
- Go to the booking office today and reserve a booth.
- Coordinate your intentions and plan for action with your sales and marketing team.
- Contact your advertising agency and/or public relations firm to assist you with display materials and aids that will help you better market and sell you and your company.
- If you do not have someone to help you coordinate your plan of marketing, participating staff members of the trade show have a list of members who are skilled in this particular area of expertise, call them today!
- Materials to consider are pictures, renderings, brochures, displays, audio-visual show, prospect cards. . .business cards.
- Pre-advertise your booth several weeks prior to the Trade Show at your place of business. Send flyers to all of your prospects, present buyers and past buyers advising them to visit you at your booth. And, advertise your booth in your current advertising programs to create a general awareness to the public that you and your associates will be on display with your latest products and services at the Trade Show.
- Pre-train your sales team that will be present at the booth.
- Booth sales are different from on-site sales. Use a “soft-sell” approach. Provide interest and information.
- Do not be pushy!

- Be caring and helpful.
- Always smile and be friendly!
- Remember today's lookers are tomorrow's buyers!
- Schedule sales personnel at different floor times. Always staff the booth during OPEN HOURS. You never know who your next buyer will be and when he will visit your booth!
- Give out your brochures!
- Encourage your prospects to see your display and then encourage them to visit your retail store, your new homes, etc. . . .to see the products first hand!
- You may want to ask research questions about your company and/or products. There are a number of fine research and consulting companies that are affiliated as members of our industry. If you need help or would like some assistance in finding a reputable business to support your research needs, the trade show staff has a list of members skilled in this area of marketing also.
- Ask your prospects if you are answering all of their questions clearly and informatively.
- If you do not have an answer for a specific question, tell the prospective buyer you will contact him in person, by phone, mail, or e-mail with the correct information, thereby, affording you another opportunity to follow-up and get "the order" from the customer!
- Always be helpful, courteous, patient and considerate.
- Try to get the names of everyone you talk to or who is interested in your product. Two methods to assist you in obtaining prospective buyers' names are to ask people to fill out a prospect card, or to fill out a chance form for a drawing for a free dinner, trip, television, microwave oven, new energy conserving hot water heater... one of your products.
- Follow-up with all of the prospects after the event and continue following-up with each customer until the prospects become buyers. Most people do not have an allegiance to any one REALTOR<sup>®</sup>, builder, banker or supplier. You can make the difference with your

positive and self-confident salesmanship as you convince your prospect to become a buyer.

- During the Trade Show meet the other exhibitors. They are all selling too, and, they will be easier for you to sell because they—as sellers—understand your language! You will undoubtedly make new friends, human resources, and buyers too! You will also learn about new products and services that will be important for you to have in order to make your next sale!
- Always be sincere and thank everyone you meet for sharing time with you whether you are selling or being sold. We all crave consideration and respect!
- Enjoy yourself—the experience will be valuable and profitable.

Hopefully, you will take time to merchandise yourself and your company as a displayer; and, if you can only be a spectator this year, then participate as one—learn as much as you can from the presenters and sales people at their booths. As the market continues to be good and the buyers—for all of your products and services—are plentiful, you will have to have the edge over your competition in order to get your projected market share. The best way to be prepared for the market is to have the market prepared for the goods and services that your company has to offer today. In other words the “best defense is a strong, aggressive, assertive and intelligent offense!”

Take advantage of today’s buyers at your Trade Show forever!

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