

Tips for a Successful Food and Beverage Trade Show



Food and beverage trade shows are a huge business, with hundreds of trade shows taking place and billions of dollars being spent around the world each year. So, it is important to include them in your marketing plan and ensure that you invest the necessary time, effort and resources into carefully researching, selecting, preparing and following-up for a trade show. Exhibiting at the right trade show will drive traffic, leads and profit to your business.

Trade shows can be an extremely powerful and effective marketing tool that provides an excellent platform to:

- cost-effectively gather market research and learn about industry trends,
- promote and communicate information about existing products and/or to launch new products,
- build brand awareness and differentiate yourself from competitors,
- build your network and connect with industry service providers,
- identify, qualify and develop prospect buyers, and
- generate sales.

Before attending a trade show, here are a few tips on what you should do to prepare pre-, during and post-show to ensure you get the greatest return on your investment.

Tip 1: Determine Your Trade Show Goals.

- Attending a trade show is a significant investment, so you want to make sure it is worth it to attend. To begin, you should set clear, focused and measurable trade show goals and rank them by priority to ensure that you will get the most return on your investment. Once your objectives have been determined, you can begin your search for the perfect trade show.

Tip 2: Research and Select a Trade Show.

- Identify, compile and research trade shows. Your research should include:
 - type of trade show (e.g., consumer- or industry-focused)
 - statistics from past trade shows, such as:
 - number of exhibitors and brands represented
 - who attended the trade show (e.g., number of attendees, demographics, authority level (e.g., do they influence or make purchasing decisions?; what geographical markets are they from?))
 - were attendees and exhibitors satisfied with the trade show and what percentage of attendees and exhibitors return year-over-year
 - what was the average number of leads and/or sales an exhibitor secured

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- availability of national, industry or theme pavilions that represent multiple individual exhibitors at a trade show that would help increase exposure for your business and product(s)
- availability of networking opportunities during or after trade show hours
- geographical market of the trade show
- length of the trade show
- overall cost to exhibit (e.g., booth space, equipment and accessories) and travel to the trade show
- the trade show's history and reputation

Most of this information can be easily found:

- on the trade show website
- by contacting the trade show organizer
- in news releases you can find online, or
- by speaking to past exhibitors and/or attendees.

Once your research is complete, prioritize the trade shows and make a short list. Remember to consult your marketing plan budget before committing to any trade shows.

Tip 3: Create a Trade Show Checklist.

- Create a comprehensive and detailed trade show checklist that allows you to track all of the tasks that need to be done pre-, during- and post-show. This will allow you to easily keep track of what tasks have been completed, are in progress and/or that still need to be done. Trade show check list items could include:
 - booking booth space, equipment and accessories
 - reviewing trade show rules, regulations and policies
 - purchasing liability insurance
 - registering booth staff
 - making travel and accommodations arrangements
 - shipping samples to the trade show
 - packing comfortable and professional attire

For a more inclusive list, check out our [Trade Show Check List for Food Businesses](#) Resource.

Tip 4: Create a Trade Show Marketing Plan.

- Create a marketing plan that will help you attract and connect with attendees to build brand awareness, communicate your value proposition and support achieving your trade show objectives. To do this, you must thoroughly and carefully plan all of your pre-, during- and post-show marketing activities to ensure you're taking advantage of every possible marketing opportunity. Some areas to consider:

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- at the pre-show stage include:
 - finding and securing a booth location that is highly visible and that you can set-up to be open and inviting to encourage attendees to visit your booth;
 - creating a communication calendar that identifies all the ways you plan to communicate (e.g., call, email, mail, news release, blog, interview, social media, event marketing) and how often with current and prospect customers to encourage participation in the trade show;
 - reviewing and updating, if necessary, your product packaging and labelling to meet the needs of your current and prospective customers in the market(s) you are targeting or interested in expanding;
 - determining what print and digital marketing materials (e.g., brochure, flyer, business cards, poster, banner, website, video), displayed in the local language, you will need to effectively communicate your brand's food product(s) to attendees, establish your brand's identity and have your brand stand out among your competition;
 - ensuring that you meet all food and food handling regulatory requirements of the local market to prepare and sample your food product(s);
 - identifying best practices for sampling your food product(s) and creating an appetizing presentation; and
 - identifying companies you want to meet with while attending the trade show and call on them to scheduling business-to-business meeting.

- at the during-show stage include:
 - ensuring that your booth staff are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and provide consistent messaging to attendees so that it reflects well on your business and provides attendees with positive experiences. Ensure booth staff are well-trained to approach, qualify and disengage with attendees at the trade show effectively and efficiently;
 - executing your engagement plan that includes all the marketing activities (e.g., promotions, giveaways, interactive displays, food and beverage product demos) you will host to drive attendee traffic to your booth;
 - ensuring your booth staff are well-trained on booth behavior etiquette (e.g., never ignore attendees that approach your booth, stand and talk to colleagues or neighbouring booths, knock your competition, eat or drink in the booth, leave your booth unattended or ask close-ended questions; but always invite attendees into your booth, be well-groomed, look fresh, make eye contact, have a positive attitude and body language).

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- at the post-show stage include:
 - classifying your trade show leads into three categories based on your ideal customer profile: Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 3. Then, begin executing your follow-up plan immediately. Your follow-up plan should be created in advance of the trade show and identify how you will follow-up with each of your three categories (e.g., personalized email, direct mail and notes, phone call, social media interactions, scheduling another meeting, sending product information, food samples and marketing materials) and how often. This will ensure that your follow-up plan is executed consistently and on time. It is recommended to follow-up within two weeks after the trade show or you risk losing your window of opportunity to engage your prospect buyers.

Tip 5: Measure Your Trade Show Return on Investment.

- Clearly define your trade show objectives and success metrics before the trade show (e.g., generate 20 leads, secure five sales, increase exposure for your business/products through an interview or news release that drives traffic to your social media platforms and/or website). Ensure that all success metrics can be tracked, measured and that a target measure is identified to determine your success at the trade show.

Participating in trade shows is an important part of marketing your food and beverage business and product(s), meeting face-to-face with new customers and developing strong business relationships. If prepared thoroughly, trade shows will provide your business with boundless opportunities to grow and/or expand sales in new and existing markets in the future.

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