

10½ tips that'll help you get more from an exhibition stand

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While we're admittedly not massive fans of exhibitions for a raft of reasons, we do recognise they can provide a way to get you in front of a very specific audience.

And, because you'll have picked the event because it serves a specific sector, that audience should include all 3 of the potential sources of new work open to you (your clients, your professional contacts within the sector and brand new prospective clients) so if you are going to invest in a stand here are 10½ tips that will help you get a better return from it

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1. Pick the right stand

Successful exhibitions are based on footfall; the more people that walk past your stand, the more likely it is you'll meet the right people.

When you're looking at the floor plan, identify a stand nearest one of the 3 parts of the hall that will be used most - the entrance, the refreshments or the toilet.

2. Body language is key

Nobody will walk up to your stand if your staff are sitting at the back fiddling with their phones or slouched at the side with both arms and eyebrows crossed.

Stand near the front with your hands at your sides and smile. Make eye contact when someone approaches and wish them a good morning/afternoon/evening before letting them have a look at your materials ... then start a conversation.

3. It's a conversation, not a sales pitch

And it is just a conversation; if you start trotting out what you do and why they need it as soon as they walk up, you'll lose them immediately.

4. YOU not WE

Instead of simply trying to sell your firm switch the emphasis onto them. Ask the visitor where they've come from, what they do, what they hope to get from attending the conference or exhibition.

Nice open questions will also allow you to find out what you need to know to progress the conversation. This takes us nicely onto the next tip ...

5. "That's interesting because ..."

Once the person's told you a bit about themselves and what they're looking for you can match what you do.

"That's interesting because ..." is a handy phrase I was taught very early in my own exhibition years.

Once you hear something that chimes with what you do simply reply saying "that's interesting, we did something every similar for a client recently." You can then give them a very, very short summary which will subtly underline you could offer the visitor something off value without the need to launch into any kind of uncomfortable sales pitch.

6. Respect people's time

People have an entire exhibition hall to get round or a conference programme to get back to so be respectful of their time.

Forcing them to stay longer than they want to will just annoy them.

7. Your stand is just your base

People get too fixated on staying on their stands at exhibitions. Yes, you've paid for the stand but one person can manage it, especially outside peak times.

In my experience the majority of business at shows is done between the stand holders so make sure you have time to send either yourself or a your colleagues around the hall to talk to the other exhibitors.

And if you meet someone interesting, ask them if they (and their colleagues) would like to meet up for a drink with you and yours when the hall closes for the evening.

8. Start conversations elsewhere

Everyone in the building is there for the same reason as you - to meet new people in their sector - so don't be afraid to have a chat with the person next to you when you're queuing for coffee or food.

One of our clients met his 2 hottest prospects at a recent show whilst queuing pizza simply because he joined in their conversation.

9. Follow ups

Regular Tenandahalf tip takers will have been waiting for this one!

As with all business development, you'll get nothing for turning up, you'll only win work if you follow up.

Always agree to do something for the people you meet whether it's sending them a PDF brochure (so they don't have to carry any more paper), an article, a useful link or make an introduction.

The phrase I always use is "when I get back to the office I'll ..." so the person is definitely expecting your follow up.

10. Do what you said you'd do by the time you said you would

And once you've promised, do it! Nothing will dent your credibility quicker than not doing the follow up you've agreed.

10½. You might need to follow up twice (or even 3 times!)

And you may not get an immediate reply especially as - like you - the person may have been out for a few days and have a load of email and other catching up to get through. Be prepared that you may well have to follow up your follow up.

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