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TRADE SHOW EXHIBITOR PLANNING GUIDE

Preparing for a Successful Event

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PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

SUSTAINABLE ACHIEVEMENT OF
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1. INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF APPAREL TRADE SHOWS

Trade shows have a powerful and profound influence on the business of fashion. They are successful because they attract the decision-makers who select the clothes consumers purchase at retail and they bring together under one-roof key industry segments, vertically connecting the industry from sourcing to runway to retail.

For manufacturers, trade shows can provide an indispensable opportunity to communicate their sales message to the media and prospective clients - as retail buyers from around the world attend trade shows to meet face-to-face with manufacturers. Manufacturers, on the other hand, also gain the chance to gather competitive intelligence and find original prints, fabrics and other sourcing resources critical to their competitiveness and operational success.

The MAGIC Marketplace, a bi-annual apparel trade show, is widely recognized as the most influential four days in the apparel business and is the largest tradeshow in the world, with over 70% of the total apparel business – \$129 Billion annually – participating in the event every February and August. Statistics from this event and other apparel shows reflect:

- 87%¹ of trade show attendees have the power to make purchasing decisions, or the ability to make strong purchasing recommendations.
- 93% of attendees find new suppliers
- 81% are searching to expand their vendor base
- 79% leave purchase orders
- 54% of attendees are executive-level decision makers

Clearly, trade shows represent a significant marketing opportunity for manufacturers to demonstrate their production capabilities and services to the apparel industry. They provide a unique chance to enhance visibility, promote new and existing products, generate leads and drive sales.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXHIBITOR GUIDE

This Exhibitor Planning Guide was developed as part of the support provided by USAID to the Jordan Garments, Accessories & Textiles' Exporters Association (JGATE) and its members. USAID, through its Sustainable Achievement of Business Expansion and Quality (SABEQ) program, has provided technical assistance to JGATE and its members to enhance the competitiveness, productivity, and performance of their businesses.

The SABEQ program is a broad-based economic development initiative implemented by BearingPoint, Inc. and a role of SABEQ is to help the Government of Jordan enhance the competitiveness and productivity of Jordan's public and private entities to create a framework for sustainable economic development throughout the country. As part of this effort, SABEQ has worked closely with manufacturers across Jordan's Qualified Industrial

¹ <http://www.tsteacher.com/Statistics.html>

Zones to improve workforce skills, employee satisfaction and retention as well as strengthen the marketing, sales and customer relationship strategies of its management teams.

The material in this guide will give the first time exhibitor or the seasoned participant a “road map” to define, plan and execute a marketing and sales strategy for a trade show event. Each section of this guide is a stop along the road to maximizing the sales and relationship opportunities trade shows present.

Specifically, you will learn how to:

- Establish meaningful goals, plan your strategy, and measure your return on investment.
- Implement powerful, memorable marketing initiatives before, during, and after the event.
- Choose the best type of exhibit display booth that meets your promotional needs and budgetary requirements.
- Select tradeshow attractions, giveaways and promotions that complement your company image and message.
- Ensure those working the show are well trained to fully represent your company, generate leads, and secure sales.

2. SETTING AN OBJECTIVE

A trade show can bring many results, not just the obvious ones of sales orders and leads. To strengthen your trade show opportunity, you should first define your desired outcomes. Setting objectives can provide multiple benefits:

- It provides trade show planners with a direction for exhibit and staff preparation;
- It gives your sales staff direction for their time at the booth; and
- It provides a measure to assess the success of an exhibit and the trade show event.

TIPS

- Well-written objectives are specific and measurable. Keep in mind though, that in most cases, the sales cycle can be long – actual sales may take up to 6 to 12 months to complete. So establish both short-term and long-term objectives. Short-term sales objectives could include such things as the number of qualified leads or product demonstrations completed. Short-term marketing related objectives could include those that lead indirectly to increased business such as market research, i.e. competitor intelligence or networking accomplished across select target groups.
- Set objectives that are realistic and achievable but challenging for your team.
- Focus on a select set of objectives. Too many can confuse your planning team, sales staff and potential guests and buyers.
- Align your exhibit to your objectives. The exhibit is a marketing tool and it should reflect your brand, complement your marketing strategy and align to your objectives.
- Design an attractive and creative exhibit. Do something unusual, maybe even wacky, to get people's attention.

3. PREPARING BOOTH SALES STAFF

Trade show results tie directly to the effectiveness of the people who staff your booth. They are a reflection of your company, its culture, products and services.

Working a trade show can be a challenging job though. There are simply too many people and too little time. Take for example the MAGIC Marketplace, it attracts over 120,000 attendees from 80 countries and features 4,000 companies, 5,000 brands and 20,000 product lines. The pressures can overwhelm even the most seasoned of sales professionals. Help your sales staff prepare by holding a pre-show sales workshop.

TIPS

In a pre-show sales workshop, you should include the following:

- The objectives – Your staff need to know the objectives for the show and their personal performance goals that support achievement of the overall objectives.
- An elevator speech – With your planning team, marketing specialists and top sales professionals, collaborate to develop a compelling sales message that conveys the key marketing messages you want to communicate in 30 seconds or preferably less – guests are in a hurry, your message should be short. After this exercise, have your workshop participants role-play and rehearse the message.
- Product knowledge – Make sure your sales staff can answer questions beyond the basics. Include presentations in the workshop from your company's subject matter experts to enhance the staff's knowledge of your products, manufacturing processes and capabilities. If staffers do not have a ready answer, you want them to be honest and call upon a senior staffer or get the answer and follow-up with the visitor later.
- Client knowledge – Your booth staff should know who will be attending - current customers as well as your prospects.
- Event knowledge – Acquaint your staff with the location and layout of your booth and the trade show including its amenities, networking events and workshops. Give them an exhibitor list and highlight potential and current partners and competitors.
- Sales Training and Networking Guidance – All sales professionals can benefit from training and role-plays designed to practice skills in approaching strangers, collecting lead information, qualifying, presenting product demonstrations and disengaging.
- Lead management - Your team needs to understand how they will collect, track and follow-up on leads both during and after the show.
- Pre-show marketing – Your team needs to know about the pre-show promotion activities you have done to support them.
- A Review of the Do's and Don'ts – Create a list that applies to your specific situation. It can prove useful as a reminder to your staff. Ideas include:
 - Do's – Dress appropriately, keep the booth neat and well staffed, treat all visitors equally, act professionally at all times – even after hours.
 - Don'ts – Eat or smoke in the booth, sit, make phone calls, read or leave the booth unattended.

4. DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE BOOTH

Your booth should attract attention, create an impression of your company and differentiate you from the competition.

TIPS

- Plan ahead. Designing and producing a display takes time - between 6 and 9 months to complete. You need to identify your space needs, develop the design and allow ample time for production.
- Keep it simple. Overcrowding the booth with excessive information and messages can confuse the audience.
- Stay focused on your objective. To maximize the effectiveness of the booth, staff and pre-show marketing, develop a theme and marketing message and integrate them in all event elements.
- Use lighting and color. Help your booth stand out from the crowd.
- Add motion. Static booths do not have the same drawing power as a display that has motion. Motion can be in the form of a demonstration, game, product display, video or lights.
- Minimize words. Keep signage and slogans to seven words or less. Traffic moves quickly and messages need to convey fast to engage visitors.
- Have a place to display literature and store office supplies. Keep the display clutter free and have a dedicated place to display marketing collateral as well as store business cards, lead sheets, pens, etc.

5. MARKETING BEFORE THE SHOW

Attendees arrive with an agenda so pre-show marketing is necessary to ensure that your current and prospective customers visit your booth.

TIPS

- Develop a pre-show direct marketing strategy.
- Get an attendee list from show organizers and use it to identify prospects for your targeted marketing efforts.
- Create a direct mail invitation that carries your key marketing message and provides your booth number, hours of operation and critical company or product information.
- Better yet, design a multi-part invitation: Send out half of a prize or teaser in an initial announcement and reward guests when they visit your booth or participate in a demonstration.
- Remember the media. Develop a press release and promotional item for journalists. A strong, dynamic media kit could elicit a reporter's attention and gain you coverage in an event newspaper, industry magazine or website.
- Produce invitations early and mail them no later than 2-3 weeks before the show.
- Mail reminder cards 7 days before the show.
- Call or email your leading prospects a few days before the show.

6. GETTING THE MOST FROM GIVEAWAYS AND COLLATERAL

Giveaways are a trade show staple and have been since the beginning of civilized sales. Well-thought-out giveaways work. Irrelevant, unimaginative trinkets do not. So ensure your giveaways are effective and beware of catering to giveaway bandits – those who dart into booths, swipe freebies and dart out without so much as making eye contact with sales staff.

GIVEAWAY TIPS

- Candy bowls and trivial giveaways take valuable booth space and cater to giveaway bandits. Skip them, as breath mints and candy are available in the meeting rooms.
- Effective giveaways are those that provoke questions, add value to visitors and give them a reason to pause and learn something about your company and product.
- You can make a game out of the giveaway by having visitors answer a basic question like, “What is the major benefit of our product?” Takers will walk away with a message and your staff gains the opportunity to learn about the guest, pre-qualify them and gain critical lead information.
- Choose items that are genuinely useful to your customers and reflect your product or service, e.g. a fabric magnifier, SPI measurement gauge, special industry reports or CDs.
- Apparel items are a desirable giveaway and can represent your manufacturing capabilities. Given the cost of apparel items, use them in a controlled way to attract visitors.

COLLATERAL TIPS

Exhibitors bombard attendees with information. It is important that your product sheets and company brochures effectively and concisely present your comparative advantage.

- Show collateral should be unique from materials that are mailed prior to and after the event.
- Convey critical messages and selling points that appeal to prospects, e.g. a comparison of the landed duty paid (LDP) cost of your products to those made in other countries.
- Catalogues are expensive. Mark a display catalogue “Booth Copy” to eliminate “hit and run” behavior where attendees grab the brochure and fail to spend time with your staff.
- Take a minimum number of copies. Lots of material requires lots of space and staff can offer to mail material later. This removes the necessity for the prospect to carry excess paper around and it is a first step to a follow-up package with qualified leads.

7. STOPPING TRAFFIC AND GENERATING LEADS

One of the benefits of trade shows is their unique ability to bring large numbers of prospects with a specific product interest to one place. Maximizing on this opportunity is why you are there.

TIPS ON ATTRACTING AND APPROACHING VISITORS

- When setting objectives with your sales staff, set daily contact or lead goals for them.
- In the pre-show sales workshop, help prepare your staffers in approaching visitors. Role-play opening questions.
- Good approach questions lead to information that can qualify a visitor, i.e. “What brings you to the show this year?”
- Utilize the power of demonstrations. Display your product. This gives the attendees an opportunity to see and touch it. If your product is small then a “blown-up” version can be fun and add an element of surprise to your exhibit.
- Touch screens can also create fun, interactive displays to drive traffic to your booth.
- Place literature and giveaways near the back of your booth to encourage traffic flow.
- Be pro-active. Reactive exhibitors stand at their display and wait for attendees to talk to them. Pro-active exhibitors make the move. They talk to more attendees and get stronger results.

TIPS TO GENERATE LEADS

Due to the nature of trade shows, staffers have a limited amount of time to qualify leads – typically just a few minutes. Staffers must be efficient but thorough to gain an understanding of a visitor's company and their needs. The more your sales staff can learn about a prospect's needs, the more successful post-show sales activities will be.

- Create a formal lead sheet. A pre-printed form where staffers can record information gathered about the visitor. Leverage the visitor's business card but don't rely on them as the sole source of information.
- Record information on the spot. Staffers should record information on the lead sheet as they are talking to the prospect.
- Take strong prospects to a separate location – a small meeting room or quiet lounge – where you can more easily discuss their needs.

Information to Gather

Authority – What role does this prospect play in the overall decision?

Need – Does this company use or have a need for your product?

Identification – Prospects name, title, company, contact information

Obstacles – Are there any barriers to closing the business with this company?

8. GATHERING INTELLIGENCE

Trade shows provide you with a great opportunity to collect information about your competitors in a short span of time and for little incremental cost.

Before the event, get an exhibitor list from the event sponsor and familiarize yourself thoroughly with the competition. Develop a list of those companies you are most eager to learn about and develop a questionnaire or checklist for your sales staff to use in capturing information learned.

WHAT TO ASK PROSPECTS

Some of the best information on your competitors comes from attendees. It is helpful to hear from decision-makers what they think is important and most people like to be asked their opinion. The answers don't have to result in a sale to be valuable.

- What type of products are you buying?
- How often do you purchase?
- How much do you buy annually / monthly?
- What products and features are most important to you?

If you see your competitors' materials in the hands of a visitor, ask them what they think of the company, its people and products.

How do their prices compare?

Remember to pool the information gathered from your staff. Group observations will provide greater balance to the information and widen the perspective.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AT THE EXHIBIT HALL

Mystery shop competitor's booths to learn about their strategies, messaging and product features.

Rate the competitor's exhibit based on visual impact, layout and configuration, product display and demonstration.

What promotional tactics are they using to engage visitors?

What strategies appear most effective in attracting visitors?

What promotional items and giveaways are in use?

Are they hosting any event or social activity at the conference? If so, what?

How many sales staff are manning the booth and assess their strengths and weaknesses, i.e. image and professionalism, dress, product knowledge, sales skills.

What type and variety of product literature and printed materials does the competitor use?

9. FOLLOWING UP

Once the show is over, the crucial work begins. Data suggests that the majority of leads gathered at trade shows are mishandled. With planning and a post-show follow-up strategy, you can avoid this common mistake and possibly move ahead of your competition.

TIPS

- Design your follow-up plan when designing your pre-show strategy. This plan should include a strategy and action plan for varying lead types, e.g. hot leads, decision makers and future leads.
- Immediately after the show, separate prospects into categories similar to those above and follow-up with **every** visitor.
- Ideally, your first contact should be in writing. Templates for letters can be prepared ahead of time. A quick personal reference can make a meaningful difference to a form letter but it is also vital that letters go out immediately – within a few days - after the show. Send letters by mail, email or fax depending on what works best for your situation and the prospect.
- Phone calls can be a powerful follow-up tool. If possible, call every lead.
- Not everyone is going to buy product now. You may not realize a sale for months or possibly a year until after the show. Effective follow-up strategies will include both short and long-term activities.

10. EVALUATING SUCCESS

Trade shows are expensive. Booth space, booth production, collateral, travel, not to mention the time and attention required from a whole team of people. What's not so certain is the pay off – or Return on Investment (ROI) shows deliver.

Your postshow activities should include a results analysis and show evaluation. Review final costs, objectives met and sales leads generated. Keep in mind, new business can happen months after a show, so be sure to track sales results from leads over time.

Measuring and calculating ROI is challenging, however setting objectives related to ROI will give you important measures to evaluate the shows value.

In addition to the objectives, this is a good time to reflect on your trade show procedures and make notes of what you can do to make the process easier next time. It is also good to assess the performance of your sales team. Not every salesperson is good at exhibit sales so you may need to decide what salespeople you will use at future shows.

Trade Show Objectives and Related Performance Indicators Illustrative

Strategic Objective	Key Performance Indicator
Creating new sales leads	Quantity of leads received
Sales orders	Revenues from signed contracts
Building brand awareness	Number of impressions at show
Building brand awareness	Number of articles, media coverage
Demonstrations	Quantity of demonstrations
Competitive Intelligence	Quality of competitor research, information gathered
Finding new partners, sources	Number and quality of material sources identified

11. PLANNING TIMELINE

PHASE 1 - 9 MONTHS BEFORE SHOW

- Register and reserve your space with the event sponsor. Request full details on the show, exhibit requirements and a list of previous attendees and exhibitors.
- Set objectives for show
- Develop a marketing theme and plan that supports the show's objectives and includes activities for:
 - Pre-show marketing,
 - At-show marketing and
 - Post-show follow-up.
- Develop specifications for your exhibit, including booth size, technology needs, literature racks, product displays.
- Brainstorm with staff and identify possible giveaways that add value to clients and prospects and represent your product capabilities.

PHASE 2 - 6 MONTHS BEFORE SHOW

- Select vendors to support production of the booth, collateral and giveaways.
- Complete and approve marketing designs for the booth, collateral and giveaways.
- Prepare and review proofs for show elements.

PHASE 3 - 3 MONTHS BEFORE SHOW

- Order giveaways and booth supplies.
- Complete work with vendors on booth display and collateral. Place final orders and confirm delivery dates for all show supplies, adhering to trade show requirements.
- Select booth staff and develop a booth schedule.
- Plan pre-show training sessions.
- Begin travel arrangements.
- Contact event sponsor for current attendee and exhibitor list.
- Launch pre-show marketing initiatives.

PHASE 4: 1 TO 3 MONTHS BEFORE SHOW

- Prepare follow-up letters and materials for use immediately after the show.
- Continue pre-show marketing activities.
- Finalize travel arrangements.
- Schedule sales staff training workshop.

- Confirm production and delivery dates for booth, supporting equipment and supplies and collateral.
- Finalize travel arrangements.
- Schedule dinners, meetings and events with prospects, distributors and customers during the show.

PHASE 5 - 4 WEEKS BEFORE SHOW

- Hold sales staff training workshop.
- Have sales staff practice demonstrations and role-play prospect discussions.
- Create lead form and tracking database.
- Write and test follow-up letters.
- Write follow-up telemarketing script.
- Check inventories of collateral and ensure adequate quantities for follow-up.

PHASE 6 - 3 WEEKS BEFORE SHOW

- Mail invitations to arrive 2 weeks before show.
- Mail media kits to critical journalists.
- Confirm travel arrangements
- Process leads daily.
- Confirm shipping arrivals dates for booth display, promotional items and materials.

PHASE 7 - 1 WEEK BEFORE THE SHOW

- Mail reminder cards 7 days before the show.
- Call or email your leading prospects a few days before the show.
- Final briefing and role-play opportunity with sales staff.

PHASE 8 - FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES 1 DAY TO 1 WEEK AFTER SHOW.

- Review leads, send follow-up letters and make calls to booth guests.
- Analyze results and evaluate success of trade show against objectives and key performance indicators.
- Review actual vs. estimated expenses. Calculate ROI.
- Document review of show effectiveness, lessons learned and recommendations for improvements.

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