

ASSOCIATION INSIGHT

Energize Trade Show Exhibitors and Sponsors

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In a generally flat economic climate, associations can't take trade show exhibitors and sponsors for granted. While these important partners still may participate out of a sense of allegiance and good will, they are also increasingly focused on achieving the best value and ROI from their event investments.

Sweeten the perks pot. Look for additional value-added benefits that can be built into the show package for exhibitors and sponsors. Do sponsors get a presentation opportunity? Are there new sponsor venues, such as floor e-mail centers for attendees, that can be added? Do repeat exhibitors receive financial incentives and discounts?

Survey exhibitors before, during and after the show. What services are most important to them? What do they think could be improved? What do they need that's not being offered? Visit each exhibitor during the show. Listening and, most importantly, taking action helps build exhibitor trust, loyalty and a sense that the association is genuinely invested in helping them succeed.

Targeting sponsors. Past show exhibitors are your hottest sponsor prospects. Contact trade magazines about bartering a show sponsorship in exchange for a free show advertisement and free exhibit space. Keep tabs on who is sponsoring other association shows in your field to identify potential sponsors for your event.

Streamline sponsor development. Plan annual association events well enough in advance so potential sponsors can be approached with one promotional document outlining opportunities for the year instead of a constant barrage of a la carte sponsorship opportunities.

First-time exhibitor outreach. Studies indicate that, on average, 30 percent of first-time exhibitors will not return for a second year. If the numbers of first-time exhibitors warrant it, put together a special show package that educates them about the show, logistics and promotional opportunities to pull them in for their second year.

Communicate consistently. Exhibitor relations for the next show begin the moment the current show ends. Don't just rely on exhibitor Save the Date and teaser mailings. Generate a monthly e-mail program that communicates exhibitor survey information, boothmanship tips and program, exhibit and sponsorship updates for an upcoming show.

Focus on mutual success. Of course, the best way to ensure exhibitors', sponsors', and the association's goals are met is to ensure that the show's networking, speaker and educational programs are relevant, impactful and well-marketed to draw a substantial audience of professional peers and customers to the show.

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