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Tricks of the Trade: The Fine Art of Working a Franchise Expo

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Tricks of the Trade: The Fine Art of Working a Franchise Expo

Joel Goldstein

In a 2009 study conducted by *Forbes*, business leaders revealed that faceto face meetings build stronger, more meaningful relationships. Trade shows, like the forthcoming West Coast Franchise Expo (WCFE), can help facilitate these relationships by introducing exhibitors to thousands of potential franchisee leads. But in order to capitalize on the thousands of attendees, franchisors must plan and perfect their trade show approach. Here's the scoop from the superstars of the trade show circuit.

Cover all bases

After exhibiting in and working trade shows for more than a decade, Ted Looney, international development advisor for the commercial cleaning franchise JaniKing, says he's noticed that some exhibitors don't completely utilize their resources. Looney suggests viewing the necessary work for a successful trade show as a threestep process. "The biggest mistake I've seen people make is that they don't take full advantage of the whole experience," Looney said. "Exhibitors should be planning their technique beforehand, demonstrate high energy and enthusiasm during the event and administer a prompt followup after the show."

The followup process is extremely important considering 54 percent of all trade show attendees travel more than 400 miles to an event, according to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research. If and when possible, Looney suggests meeting in person with leads at local offices in your system (franchisee locations, if viable) so the chances of an inperson followup is more likely and the candidate can meet a franchisee at the same time. If this isn't an option, exhibitors can use online programs like Skype to meet with qualified potential candidates after a show. In the *Forbes* study, 60 percent of business executives said they use virtual meeting technologies "very frequently," because it saves them time and money and offers greater location flexibility.

Get ahead through technology

Instead of sending a prospective lead away from your booth with a pile of paper, you can keep your company's information memorably concise with an informational DVD or CDROM. While at your booth, you can also present a PowerPoint presentation if you feel that would more effectively deliver your message. Jeff Travitz, director of franchise sales for Goddard Systems, Inc., says his company also utilizes free marketing technology like email blasts to announce Goddard's presence and booth number at the show and invite



leads beforehand these email blasts can be used after the show as well.

Pick the *right* people

The people you choose to man your booth should not only be a reflection of your company, but collectively they should be able to deliver a consistent message. Larry Trimble, vice president of franchise development for United Franchise Group, suggests arming your booth with members from your franchise development staff people that understand the concept and know how to deliver the message. "The average franchise prospect is typically 40 or older, so you want your representatives to be conservatively dressed, articulate and highly professional," said Trimble. "They should also have a thorough knowledge of the industry, your company's history, investment costs and financing available." He also recommends paying the employees representing your booth on commission this way they are more likely to stay focused.

Share the wealth

While some franchises choose to keep the leads they've generated throughout the year to themselves, Looney advises sending those leads announcements and invitations to the show. Much of this preplanning is built into the show for you, he says. The WCFE, for example, will send exhibitors free guest passes and also let them download a database that will send invitations on their behalf. "Go through the leads that you've had for the past year and invite them to come and look at all business opportunities," said Looney. "You want the prospect to be confident in choosing your franchise. It makes more sense to sign people who are serious about your brand."

Take a break

A trade show visitor will spend an average of 8.3 hours over 2.3 days visiting exhibits on the show floor, therefore it might be a good idea to take a potential lead away for a while to make a lasting impression. While there are vendor and exhibitor areas available to sit privately with an attendee, you can also take him or her out for a meal. "Talk to a prospect as long as you have their ear. If they are viable, take them off to the side in private and go into greater detail about your brand," said Travitz.

More bang for you buck

It's a wellknown saying: don't judge a book by its cover. Just because an individual isn't dressed in a \$3,000 suit, it doesn't mean he doesn't have thousands of dollars that he's looking to invest, says Travitz. He suggests spending as much time as possible with everyone that shows interest in your brand. Also,



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you don't want to leave the event early. Trimble says he and his coworkers come early to shows and stick around after. "We engage and approach as many people as possible," said Trimble. "You need to fully commit to the event to see positive results."

Less is more

Avoid information overload and keep the aesthetics of your booth simple an attendee should be able to look at a booth and know what it is representing in just one glance. United Franchise Group represents five franchises: SIGNARAMA, EmbroidMe, Billboard Connection, Plan Ahead Events and FranchiseMart/Biz1Brokers. The company tried combining booths in the past, but Trimble says they realized it was confusing for attendees. In addition, he suggests only highlighting main points to prospective franchisees. "Remember, you aren't going to make a sale at the show. This is just the start of a research process for the attendee," said Trimble. "If you overload a prospect, he or she won't remember everything because they are also speaking with 50 to 100 other brands." Additionally, Travitz says smaller booths have been more effective for his company because bigger booths seem to intimidate attendees. Looney has found that displaying images of successful franchisees such as an individual wearing a business suit and holding a clipboard works best for JaniKing.

With the economy picking up, more people are looking to take a hold of their future by investing in a reputable franchise. A franchise trade show is a great opportunity to create brand awareness and appeal to these individuals.

About the author:

Joel Goldstein Group Marketing Director of MFV Expositions Joel has been with MFV for nearly 15 years and plays a critical role in marketing MFV events in the US and abroad. Goldstein directs a design and marketing support staff in MFV's NJ offices. MFV manages and produces three franchise events in the US, the leading franchise event in Mexico, and the newest franchise event in the UK. In addition, Joel works closely with media and association partners on event programs and online initiatives. Currently, Goldstein is spearheading the 2010 West Coast Franchise Expo, which will take place November 5 to 7 at the Los Angeles Convention Center and feature thousands of entrepreneurs and exhibitors. More information on the event is available at www.wcfexpo.com. To exhibit at the WCFE, call (201) 881-1666 or e-mail exhibit@mfvexpo.com.



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