

Score Trade Show Touchdowns In 2007

There's more to it than you might think.

By Joel Goldstein



The company budget has been approved, travel schedule outlined and the team lined up. The booth has been shipped. The team is about to tackle a trade show. And when it's all done, business will be booming. That's the plan.

The reality, however, may be that the booth hasn't been updated in three years. The franchise company has occupied the same amount of booth space for four years. And the team hasn't changed its sales pitch in five years. Meanwhile, the company has updated its logo, development goals have doubled and training for new franchisees has expanded. And the franchise organization now offers special incentives for qualified minority prospects and veterans.

Size does matter in the trade show industry.

Does the franchise firm really want to sing the same old song?

If any of this rings a bell, then maybe it's time to consider a makeover, because in order to make the most of trade show efforts, evaluating and fine-tuning the trade show program should be an ongoing process. It's the only way to keep a company's strategy relevant in today's dynamic and rapidly-evolving marketplace.

Stay the course and the franchise system risks going stale as the budget goes south. When it comes to foot traffic, displays and "elevator speeches," the company and staff should ask themselves if taking the same approach that has been followed for years is really the best way to meet the company's higher expectations. Just as a football coach is constantly

Franchise Expos

Franchise Expo South

Jan. 19-21, 2007

Miami Convention Center

International Franchise Expo

March 30-April 1, 2007

Washington, D.C. Convention

Washington, D.C.

West Coast Franchise Expo

Oct. 19-21, 2007

Los Angeles Convention Center

International Franchise Expo

April 11-13, 2008

Washington, D.C.

evaluating the team's play selection and other tactics on the field as the game evolves, the franchise company needs to be evaluating its plays on the floor to score trade show touchdowns. There are a few strategies to consider during the trade show season.

Bigger is better

Yes, size does matter in the trade show industry. That's true whether an organization is promoting franchise opportunities to franchisees or vendor-related services to franchisors. The bigger the booth, the better the chance of grabbing attention. When

(Continued on page 70)

(Continued from page 69)

done correctly, a 200-square-foot space will average 280 percent more responses than a 100-square-foot space. And a 300-square-foot space will average 360 percent more responses than a 100-square-foot space. On the same level, a 400-square-foot space will average 832 percent more responses, and so on. But these numbers are reserved for booths that staff accordingly. Draw in a big crowd with insufficient staff or even worse, have an ineffective sales pitch, and the franchise organization will be footing the bill for missed leads and numbing results.

Seeing is believing

Perhaps just as critical as booth dimensions is what is actually being shown in that space. If the photos and graphics on the booth reveal people in dated attire with out-of-style artwork, the franchise company may unknowingly market itself as a dated company with out-of-touch executives. The colors chosen for the booth and display should be coordinated with the carpet order for the flooring. And the colors should reflect the image of the franchise.

The key word, in both a visual and literal sense, is inviting. Open access to meet and greet the people who will staff the booth sends a different message than putting a team behind a counter. Even the smallest, seemingly insignificant nuance relating to physical presence can mean the difference between prospects walking up to inquire about a company, and those who take a glance and keep on walking.

Trade shows are about sending a positive visual message to draw an audience. Then the company must back it up with a highly-trained staff that can deliver an accurate and compelling message.

Yes, exhibitors who can visually shout the loudest often produce the best results.

But that's not all.

Timing is important

Many people have heard the saying that timing is everything. That applies to trade shows as well. If participants see exhibitors arrive late to set up and break down early to go home, a company's money is going to waste. That's because

other franchise systems are targeting the same prospects by erecting their booths before the show doors open and keeping the sales effort going until the last available minute on the last day, they are milking every opportunity to reach the same audience.

Remember, if a franchise company representative appears rushed to get on with other business during a trade show, prospects may wonder about the big picture. How a franchise firm treats prospective franchisees on the trade show floor can often be perceived as the first glimpse of how they will be treated as franchisees.

Trade shows are a team effort.

Team efforts

Trade shows are a team effort. Even a baseball team's best pitcher has a teammate who's ready to take the mound on a moment's notice. Before tackling the event, have a roster and a schedule outlining everyone who will staff the booth, allowing for breaks, meals and time off one's feet. A tired staff can translate into missed opportunities or unasked questions. A steady rotation, on the other hand, will keep the brand's message fresh, prospects interested and create the best opportunity to best secure such vital information as:

- Investment capability,
- Market for opening a franchise,
- Timeframe for commitments,
- Knowledge of franchising and of the concept, and,
- Personal background.

A team's dress code is equally important. Like the visual impact of the booth, how the team looks can welcome or turn away an important prospect. Business dress and comfortable shoes are the prerequisite uniform to sending a strong message and going the distance.

Take advantage of special opportunities

Over the past few years, new programs have been developed that create exciting new opportunities to reach specific markets such as veterans, minority and international prospects.

Patterned after the highly-successful VetFran program for veterans, the International Franchise Association's MinorityFran program is working with such national organizations as the National Urban League, Association of Small Business Development Centers, U.S. Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce and the Minority Business Development Agency to not only increase the numbers of minority franchisees, but also educate all communities that franchising is a smart and affordable way to realize the American Dream of small-business ownership.

If an IFA member is not participating in the VetFran and MinorityFran programs, the franchise is missing a tremendous opportunity to reach two rapidly expanding markets. Once the franchise organization decides to participate in the programs, it is important to promote involvement on the trade show booth and in all materials. More information on both of these programs is available at the IFA Web site, www.franchise.org

Another opportunity, but often overlooked by trade show attendees is participation in the International Buyer Program. If a system is franchising internationally or is considering global expansion, it should be aware of this government-sponsored program.

For decades, trade shows have been used in a wide range of industries as an effective way for international prospects to find out more about business opportunities with U.S. companies. And increasingly that is the case with franchising.

The U.S. government recruits more than 125,000 qualified foreign buyers, sales representatives, and business partners for trade missions to U.S. trade shows each year. One IFA-sponsored trade show, the International Franchise Expo, is scheduled for March 30 to April 1 in Washington, D.C. This creates a terrific opportunity for you to reach prospects ready to do business. More information is available at www.export.gov.

Effective follow-up

The franchise now has leads. What does it do with them?

If the franchise company has put

together a strong “lead sheet” at a trade show that details those prospects who have been carefully pre-qualified, now is the chance to turn the trade show investment into quantifiable results.

First, don't delay. The best way to turn a hot lead into a cold one is to act slowly. Don't forget that prospects at the trade show talked to several exhibitors. If a franchise organization is slow to follow-up, another brand may seize the day.

Second, don't give up. While investing in a franchise system is a serious decision that takes time, diligence can pay off to keep the lines of communication open, to answer additional questions and to keep a hot lead alive.

Expert advice

If the franchise company is considered a trade show rookie, it shouldn't fear speaking with trade show veterans and seeking out their advice. Invite them to dinner or meet for a pre-show breakfast. Begin by contacting the show's producer to answer exhibiting questions and realizing the best results for your investment. For a free copy of the MFV's “Tradeshow Marketing Manual: How to Make the Most of and Get the Most of Tradeshow Exhibiting,” contact MFV Show Director Richard Del Giorno at rdelgiorno@mfvexpo.com. ■

Joel Goldstein is the director of marketing for MFV Expositions. He can be reached at jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com.