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Overcoming 5 Common Obstacles to Trade Show Lead Follow Up

You've probably heard the need to quickly follow up, follow up, follow-up on the valuable leads you invested so much to generate at trade shows.

But while it's easy to say again and again, there are some real obstacles that can slow you down and get in the way:

1. Wrong information recorded

The booth staffers were not trained to ask for the information needed to qualify leads, as determined by sales. So the when the sales people get the leads and don't see the information they need, they don't feel the leads are qualified.

2. No information recorded

If the booth staffers do know what questions to ask, they still don't write down the qualifying information they discover on a lead card or in an electronic lead system. They fail to record what the attendee was interested in, and how interested they were. So even if the prospect said they wanted to meet with a sales person about a new product, the sales person won't find out from the lead card.

3. Lack of familiarity with lead recording

Trade show leads present a challenge unlike most B2B leads. Nearly all exhibitors use the lead systems from the show, which can change from event to event. Plus, the booth staffer recording the lead may only do that for one show, unlike a career telemarketer who knows how to record a lead, or a website landing page with mandatory fields.

4. Busy people after the show

Lead follow up gets pushed aside because people are "behind" at work because of the show they just attended. The sales people who were booth staffer now have to follow up on the leads — but they are digging out from being gone at the show. So the reps don't want to take the time to wade through all the leads, hoping to find the good ones. Or just as bad, the leads sit on the trade show manager's desk because they are too busy to get them entered into the company database.

5. Fulfillment unplanned

Lead follow up packets (brochures, cover letter) were not prepared before the show started to allow for follow up right after the show (or even during it).

Fortunately, these are not insurmountable issues, but issues that can be resolved with training, teamwork, and planning.

For obstacles #1 and #2, and #3, remember the words of Stephen Covey, "Begin with the end in mind." Work with your sales people to determine what makes for a qualified lead, and be sure that's the information your booth staffers are seeking to get from booth visitors. Those data points should already be data fields in your company's customer relationship management database, and also be questions that you set up to be recorded on a lead card or on the show's electronic lead retrieval system.

Before the show, coach your booth staffers to write down the information from the conversation that your sales person will need to make a good follow up call. Set expectations with your booth staffers that, if they haven't done so during their conversations, to always take a minute right afterwards to record the prospect's buyer profile, product interest, and what they promised as the next step (such as set an appointment or send specific product literature).

Go so far as to role play before the show, and have your staffers practice writing down those qualifying answers. Do the role play again at the show just before it opens, letting each booth staffer get familiar with that show's particular lead retrieval system.

To ensure qualifying info is recorded at the show, monitor the leads for completeness as the show goes on, and go back to the booth staffers that are not fully recording their leads. Sure, they may say they are so busy they can't get it all down, but without that qualifying info, all the leads will be less likely to be followed up, so they will all be less valuable. Let them know it's okay to take that extra minute; there will be more leads to get when they are done. They should write at least a sentence or two about interest level and promised follow up, even if it's a C quality lead.

To overcome obstacles #4 and #5 requires a higher level of planning. Just as you don't order and ship your exhibit the day of the show, you shouldn't attempt to figure out your lead follow-up starting the day after the show. Long before you step on the plane for the trade show, take some quality time to assign who will enter the leads into your database, and determine, order, and prepare what follow up literature will be sent. Even have the cover letter for the show written before the show starts. Just be sure you only send your "Thanks for visiting us at the show" letter to the people you did meet, rather than to all the show attendees as a post-show follow up.

With more qualified leads and a plan to get them faster into the sales people's hands, you increase your odds that your leads will be followed up better. And with better follow up, you will generate more meetings, sales, and higher R.O.I. from your trade show marketing. And that's worth overcoming a few obstacles to get.

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