

TRADE SHOW SUCCESS IS BOTH ON THE FLOOR AND IN THE FOLLOW-UP



Jacqueline Taylor, Deputy Director, Strategic Operations, Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center Network, shares her expert business advice in her bi-weekly column seen in the Houston Chronicle.

Q. How do I make the most of a trade show? My company is exhibiting at one where I know I'll meet a lot of potential customers, and I want to be sure to attract their attention.

A. Decide exactly what kind of attention you want to attract. Do you want to generate a certain number of qualified leads,

introduce new products, make onsite sales, or simply increase your exposure in the marketplace? Whatever your objective, make it quantifiable so you can more easily measure success. For instance, if you are looking for leads, determine how many leads you'd need to make your presence at the show worthwhile.

Tell your customers and potential customers that you'll be at the show and that you'd love for them to stop by your booth. Advertise in your industry publication, issue a press release, and send personal invitations to hot prospects. A special discount offer or giveaway just for show attendees can be a good draw.

Your display itself should be eye catching but not too busy. The idea is to give attendees walking past your booth just enough information so they'll want to stop and find out more. You might also want to use a contest, product demonstration or other interactive activity to generate interest. Promotional products and giveaways are always a big hit, but use them wisely. Be sure they are branded, and instead of placing them right on the aisle for anyone to take, place them where people have to at least check out what you're selling before they can take one.

Pick the right employees to staff the booth and be sure they know your objectives. They of course need to be knowledgeable about your company and your products, but they should also be personable and able to handle the constant traffic on the trade show floor. Hold a brainstorming session prior to the show to put together a pitch that will help them quickly connect with attendees and qualify them as potential buyers. It's not productive for them to spend time talking to show attendees who have no interest in your company or your products. Make sure there is an ample supply of brochures, pricing sheets, business cards and order forms available, and also determine how you'll capture contact information.

Perhaps the most critical piece of trade show exhibiting is the follow up. Immediately after the show, make a phone call or send a letter thanking attendees for visiting your booth. Send any requested information or answers to questions asked at the show. Call on the best sales leads right away, while your company and your product are still fresh in the customer's mind.



The Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center (TGC SBDC) Network serves 32 counties in Southeast Texas. The program is anchored by a vibrant office facility in midtown Houston and supported by fourteen centers located with or sponsored by colleges and universities and economic development organizations throughout the Gulf Coast. The TGC SBDC Network focuses on providing business training and advising to start-up entrepreneurs, emerging businesses, and firms needing strategies for high growth. Professional business advisors work with client companies to assess feasibility of ideas and business models, develop business plans, identify funding opportunities, prepare loan and financing packages, and analyze financial results. Business advising is supplemented by a wide range of training classes and seminars concentrating on growing a successful business. Workshops are taught by experienced businessmen and women who blend formal learning and real-world experiences into practical curriculum.