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Trade-Show Best Practices

Here are a handful of practices to improve interactions (and lead generation) at trade-shows, conferences and expositions. Enjoy!

1. Engaging Prospects and Customers at Your Booth

How can you successfully engage prospects at your booth?

There are a range of methods that can increase your success rate when engaging prospects at trade-shows. Much of your success can depend on your opening question. For example, you see a prospect looking into your booth and you walk up to engage him.

You say, "Can I help you?"

He says, "No." End of conversation!

Similarly, you might ask, "Can I show you anything?" and he answers, "No, thanks." End-game again!

One successful engagement strategy is to start with a relevant open question, such as, "What are you most interested in accomplishing at this conference?" This will typically cause a thoughtful response and provide you with useful information from which you can ask follow-on questions.

At trade-shows where there is a range of vertical specializations within a market, you can ask, "What kind of [vertical specialization] do you do?" Again, this is a reasonable, meaningful question for the prospect and the answer will provide you with the ability to engage and qualify further.

2. Trade-Show "Handoffs"

What can we do about your colleagues in your booth that bring an unqualified prospect to a demo station, provide no information, and then say, "Show her a demo!"?

Train them! Teach them how to briefly qualify people – and then, teach them the "Handoff".

A poor or fumbled Handoff in a tradeshow booth results in no gain (it may even result in a loss!). A well-managed, coordinated Handoff can move you forward considerably.

A great Handoff consists of your booth colleague executing the following conversation with the person at a demonstration station:

- ✓ Introducing the prospect to the sales engineer (at the demo station) and the sales engineer to the prospect.
- ✓ Describing the prospect's general situation – the prospect's job function and main interests.
- ✓ Outlining the prospect's Critical Business Issues (CBI's), Reasons and Specific Capabilities needed. Clearly, this may be a very limited set, based on the amount of time generally available at trade shows.
- ✓ Identifying any other important information – e.g., the prospect only has 10 minutes before he/she needs to attend a talk or presentation.

Prospects appreciate clean, professional Handoffs. Well-executed Handoffs show that your company takes a real interest in the prospect's situation and in their problems. You begin to earn their trust and generate credibility – and prospects become more willing to share information with you.

Salespeople are naturally prepared to execute great Handoffs and they can do a terrific job at trade-shows. Often, booths are staffed with marketing personnel who also need to learn how to qualify prospects and how to perform professional Handoffs. The key to success is to ensure that all booth staff are trained both in qualification and to *communicate* that information in a Handoff.

Your customers will ultimately reward you with faster, more efficient sales cycles.

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