

Strategies For A Successful Bridal Show Experience

1 What's the game plan?

“If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else,” said author Lawrence J. Peter. That being said, having a set of objectives established before the Expo can help to make your overall experience more successful.

Typical business objectives can be one or a combination of the following:

- Increased sales through new orders, qualified show leads, etc.
- Introduce new products
- Reinforce customer loyalty
- Conduct market research
- Expand your company's mailing list
- Open new markets or territories
- Gain media exposure
- Check out the competition
- Strengthen your company's image
- Provide education
- Expose new employees to the marketplace

2 Know why brides & grooms attend bridal shows.

Customers will usually visit a bridal show for several reasons. By understanding these needs, you can design a plan to help fulfill them. Here are a few:

- To learn about the what's new in wedding trends, products, services, etc.
- To see the latest fashion styles.
- To meet with companies who will best help them with their wedding planning needs.
- To compare and evaluate competitive products and services.

3 Invest in productive pre-show advertising.

Chevalier Associates, Inc. provides extensive radio, print, and Internet promotions to drive bride & grooms to our shows—and your booth. However you can also help yourself and your exhibit by conducting some pre-show promotions of your own. In fact, a recent study of the

top lead-producing companies at exhibitions found that they had only one thing in common: they all engaged in pre-show promotion.

Here are some ideas for pre-show promotion:

- Adjust your regular ads in local print publications to mention your booth at the Expo. Include show dates and locations, the features of your exhibit, any “show specials” you may be providing, etc.
- Update your web site to reflect your presence at an upcoming show.
- Send flyers, attractive post cards, etc. by mail-or an e-mail blast-to your existing database of potential clients.
- Post a sign in your place of business advertising the Expo.

For any and all of these ideas, we can provide you with the official logo of The Original Wedding Expo™ to use in any print or electronic formats. By branding the official show name, you will also brand your presence there.

4 Effective exhibiting.

The best accessory to an attractive booth is prepared and attentive staff. Nothing can adversely compromise sales or reputation more than poor in-person representation. Here are our suggestions for pre-show staff preparation (we suggest doing this a day or two before, rather than the morning of the show):

- Staff your exhibit with a sufficient number of employees, yet without overcrowding.
- Educate each employee about the show (its rules and regulations), the show audience, and your company's main objectives (see next item).
- Allow plenty of time to prepare your booth. If you're still setting up when the show opens, you're not giving your best first impression.
- Don't pack up early. The last hour of the show, when crowds have dissipated, can be the best opportunity to close a sale. Wait until the last bride has left before closing up.

#5 Properly prepare your exhibit staff.

When it comes down to it, your company's exhibition success is directly related to how well your exhibit team interacts with the show attendees. Here are some tips to share with your staff:

- Treat everyone entering your exhibit as a potential new customer: politely and with a smile.
- Be standing (or stand up) when a potential customer enters your booth. Sitting can make you appear disinterested and unengaged.
- Don't eat while you're in your booth. It doesn't look professional and can be a big turn-off to prospective customers.
- Focus on potential customers, not on chatting with friends and other exhibitors.
- If the booth is jam packed, do your best to handle more than one customer. Having literature ready to hand out can keep customers in your booth.
- If the booth has few people in it, stand near the aisles to draw more people in.
- Ask qualifying questions such as: "Do you have a photographer booked for your wedding?" This more clearly identifies potential clients. Invite those "leads" to fill out an information sheet, which will expand your database.

Your team will be at their interactive best if they are allowed a few breaks throughout the day. This will help them to relax, catch their breath, and be ready to maintain their stellar selling expertise.

#6 Promote what's "new" about your company.

The word "new" has a very important meaning attached to it. If your company has new products, services, personnel, or facilities, the Expo is the place to promote them—prominently—as savvy brides & grooms are looking for the latest ideas/offerings.

#7 Sales literature/brochures.

While it may be your goal, it isn't always possible to talk to every bride or groom who walks into your booth. That's where having sales literature on hand can help—and most exhibitors have something on hand.

However, brochures and/or flyers can often be expensive to produce and distribute to everyone who walks by your booth (unless this is one of your objectives)—whether you already have a brochure or packet made up, or will be producing something just for the expo. We suggest the following cost-savings ideas:

- When printing up your marketing pieces for the year round factor in any show you might do. It's less expensive to print more than you need once, than it is to have multiple batches printed separately.
- If you need/want literature just for the show, try creating something that is short and simple. Promote one or two of your best packages or a particular show special. It doesn't need to be fancy, just informative, neat and easy to read. Just don't forget to list your company information prominently!

#8 Many benefits are derived after the show.

A very important part to the success of a bridal expo—and one that is often overlooked—comes into play after the show is over. Collecting leads in the booth is an important goal. But why collect leads if you don't have a process for following-up after the show? The contacts you make are only as profitable as you make them.

Increase your post-show sales by:

- Contacting brides with polite phone calls, direct mail pieces or e-mails.
- Personalizing your communication efforts. Remind brides that you met them at the show.