



A Worthy Destination: Designing an Effective Exhibit

By Jefferson Davis, *Competitive Edge*

Your exhibit plays a critical role in your exhibiting success. It's where your prospective customers learn what you are all about. It's where your staff lives for a few days. It communicates your identity. It can differentiate you from the competition and make you stand out in the crowd. It can draw visitors to your booth like bees to a flower. A well designed exhibit makes a huge difference in the overall effectiveness of a show.

The key question to ask when creating your exhibit is, "What is our brand identity, and what do we want our primary visitor to experience, remember and do as a result of visiting our exhibit?" A thoughtful and well-crafted answer to this question will put you head and shoulders above the competition.

Here are seven key tips to help you design a more effective exhibit:

1. **Budget:** At least, 20% of your total exhibit budget should be allocated toward the exhibit. Do not skimp here. Too much is on the line. Consider renting as a way to get a lot of exhibit and lot of flexibility for the dollar.
2. **Booth Location:** Research by Exhibit Surveys found that there is no direct relationship between the location of a booth and the success of the show. That being said, if you can choose your location, a good approach is to plot the main entrance to the exhibit hall on the floor plan and draw a triangle with the point at the entrance. Ideally, you want to be in that triangle. Also, consider locating near a large exhibitor that attracts a lot of people.
3. **Booth Size:** You need enough space to house exhibit properties, furnishings, demonstration equipment, staff and visitors. It is always better to have a little more space than you need than not enough space.
4. **Layout:** Make it easy for your visitors to enter and exit the exhibit. Avoid placing tables across the entrance. Create distinct zones for engaging visitors, demonstrating your products or services and closing leads and/or sales.
5. **Identity and Branding:** Carefully consider the identity and brand message you want to communicate and make sure your exhibit supports both. If you are positioned as leading edge, or fun and easy to work, or solid and stable, then make sure your exhibit design supports this identity. Work closely with your exhibit designer to select exhibit construction materials, shapes, and colors that support your identity.
6. **Graphics:** There are three questions in the mind of a visitor as they walk the aisles: 1.) What do you do?, 2.) Why should I care?, and 3.) Who is the company? Make sure your graphics answer these three questions quickly, visually and effectively. Legibility is critical, consider your location and determine how far away you want a visitor to be able to read your graphics. Less is more. A strong headline with a compelling visual and a few bullet copy points is all you generally need.
7. **Creative Interactivity:** Remember, you not only compete with your direct competitors but every other exhibitor on the floor. You must offer an experience worthy of an attendee's time. One of the most effective ways to do this is through product or service demonstrations. Ask, "How can we bring our product or service to life?" "How can we make our product/service accessible and easy for attendees to put their hands on and get their minds around?" "How can we prove our claims?"

Here's a great example: a company marketing water soluble labels brought their product to life and proved their claim through a fun and interactive game. Borrowing the water gun race concept used at carnivals, they placed their labels on plastic containers and had four visitors at a time shoot water guns at the labels. The contestant who dissolved their label first won a prize. It was creative, interactive, fun and made their point.

These seven tips will help you design an incredibly effective exhibit - an exhibit truly worthy of an attendee's time - an exhibit that makes a powerful contribution to the success of your show.

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