

How to Improve Your Trade Show Performance— Measurably

by Richard K. Swandby

Why is it that exhibiting companies are continually trying to justify their participation in trade shows? This is true for every major industry. You might say that your corporate management demands it. But do they demand justification, or are they really demanding performance?

Studies which measure trade show audience characteristics indicate that over half of a trade show audience is planning to buy at least one of the types of products being exhibited. For most shows, 80% or more of the attendees have buying influence for one or more of the products exhibited. These statistics more than justify exhibiting in practically any show.

To get beyond justification, exhibitors must be concerned with performance — improved performance. . . and improving performance can only begin with a benchmark measurement. Exhibit performance is measurable.

Measurement produces miracles. Once exhibit performance is measured, better objectives can be set; more astute budgeting and planning can take place. The result: improved exhibit performance. That's what your management wants to see. When you can show improvement, you have gone beyond justification to performance.

Lead tracking and sales conversion studies are currently the most popular methods of justifying show participation. These are important measurements

of justification, but should not be taken as measurements of performance. For example, if you obtain 200 leads from your exhibit, but no orders or sales result from those leads, is it the fault of the exhibit, the show, or the sales personnel? When no sales develop, an exhibitor will often drop a show without attempting to determine the true cause of the lack of orders. Perhaps the competition simply out-sold your sales staff.

Until you determine the function of an exhibit it is impossible to measure performance. Exhibit Surveys, Inc. was the first to establish that the primary function of the exhibit is ***"selective attraction."*** In other words, your exhibit should specifically attract prospects interested in your types of products in order to achieve person-to-person contact with them.

Selective attraction and the degree of person-to-person contact with your prospects can be measured. ***Exhibit attraction*** rating and ***visitor quality*** scores measure how well you selectively attract prospects; our ***exhibit efficiency*** rating measures the degree of person-to-person achieved with them. Exhibits are currently averaging an efficiency of 63%. This means that the average exhibit achieves person-to-person contact with 63% of its prospects. With these types of measurements it is possible to determine the influence that various changes have on the effectiveness of your exhibit. It is a learning process that will help improve your performance ***measurably.***

Exhibit performance will only improve after getting beyond justification. A post-show group survey is the most economical approach to comprehensive performance measurement.



Average Net Buying Influences

1988.....	86%
1989.....	84%
1990.....	83%
1991.....	84%
1992.....	84%



Average Total Buying Plans

1988.....	62%
1989.....	61%
1990.....	62%
1991.....	62%
1992.....	63%

Audience Quality

The net buying influences indicator represents the percentage of attendees that have a buying influence for at least one of the product categories measured.

The total buying plans indicates the percentage of attendees who are planning to purchase one or more products displayed within 12 months following the show.

Trade shows also provide an opportunity to contact people who have not been contacted by a sales person within the past year. For 1987, an average of only 9% of the visitors to an exhibit have been called on by a salesperson from that company 12 months prior to the show. This means that an average 91% of an average exhibitor's visitors will be seeing the exhibitor's personnel for the first time.

The audience interest factor (AIF) is the percentage of the audience that visits two out of every ten exhibits from a selected group of exhibiting companies.



Average Audience Interest Factor

1988.....	45%
1989.....	48%
1990.....	49%
1991.....	52%
1992.....	50%



Average Hours Spent at Shows

1988.....	7.9
1989.....	7.3
1990.....	7.6
1991.....	7.5
1992.....	7.9

Audience Activity

Attendees have spent an average of 7.2 - 7.8 hours viewing the exhibits over an average of 2.1 days for the past five years. They stopped to talk or acquire literature at 22 - 26 exhibits.