

Trade Shows are *not* Sales Calls

by Barry Siskind



Selling at a show is different, and the biggest factor is *time*.

Someone once said, "If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got." When referring to successful sales people placed in an environment where the rules always change – an environment like a trade show - there could be something wrong with this statement.

At a show, selling is just not the same. The best sales people do not produce the same results when they hit the show floor because the rules change and they don't. And unless salespeople understand this and adjust to the unique pressures of show selling, their chance of success is limited. Successful booth staff are not developed overnight. It takes time, commitment, investment and encouragement,

Trade shows are not sales calls. What a sales person does on a sales call is fine in the environment they are used to and comfortable with. Selling at a show is different and the biggest factor is time. When you meet new prospect, what do you do during the initial meeting? If you are like other successful sales people, your conversation will examine the prospect's needs, your products or services, and lots of social chat. The reason you take time with prospects and include the social chat is because your ultimate goal is to develop a solid business relationship built on trust and comfort. The skill you need to do this is rapport building. Rapport is when two people who have things in common share their commonalities. Their dialogue flows easily, the communication channels are open and there is a positive feeling between each of them. The social chat is your way of finding the commonalities. Without an understanding of the time restraints at a trade show, sales people do what they always did and don't maximize the potential that a show can offer.

If you still don't think there is a need to adjust your sales techniques, try this experiment. Let's assume that you're expecting

30,000 visitors to your next 3-day show. If the show is open for a total of 25 hours, that works out to an average of 1,200 visitors per hour, or 20 visitors per minute passing your booth. If you deal with each visitor the way you would on a sales call, you will simply not have enough time. Rapport building with 20 people per minute is virtually impossible.

But rapport is still important. Try another experiment. Think about the last time you bought something from someone you liked doing business with. *What did you like the most about doing business with this person?*

Most Common Responses to "What I Like Most in Salespeople"

- Professionalism
 - Good listeners
 - Not too pushy
 - Thorough product knowledge
 - Enthusiasm
 - Caring
 - The right product at the right price
-

People like to do business with people they like. Customers coming to your show booth are no different. They just want to do business with people they like and trust. Today, more than not, we

likely do business with the individuals we meet rather than companies they represent. So, your job at a show is now redefined – Your job is “getting people to like you”, and the only way to get them to like you is by building rapport. What this clearly says is that the need for rapport is important whether you are selling in normal situations or at a show.

The problem you are now faced with is building rapport with the 20 people per minute walking past your booth. This kind of traffic is unprecedented in any other business venue, but at a show it happens every hour the show is open. Sales people who go to shows without this understanding will be wasting their time.

The solution lies in an understanding of the three barriers to rapport building on the showfloor time, fatigue and attitude.

Barrier 1: Time

Time is a barrier. Building rapport with high show volume is impossible. So, the first realization is that you should not try to deal with everyone. Only deal with those people you can help. The way you find them is by qualifying.

Qualifying is the major task of the booth person. No booth person should take any kind of action unless they know if the



prospect is qualified. For many, this is a departure from the norm. In the first few minutes of any interaction the booth person should take the role of information-getter rather than information-giver. Finding out who they are talking to is a matter of taking **ACTION** – This is an acronym for the six bits of information booth people need to qualify a prospect.

A stands for authority. Is the prospect a decision maker or decision influencer, and how are decisions made. Questions like, “do you make” the decisions on these products” or “how are decisions made in your organization” should reveal a person’s buying authority.

C stands for capability. Do they have the capability (resources) to buy your product? Asking questions that deal with budgets or past history will let you connected with a true potential buyer.

T stands for time. Deal with those people who will commit to doing business within your sales cycle. Ask the “when” question to uncover any timing restrictions.

I stands for identity. Gathering information and not recording it in an organized manner is a waste of your time. Relying on business cards, scraps of paper, note books, or worst of all, your memory, places the salesperson at a disadvantage. A lead card or computerized lead system provides a uniform method for all pertinent information needed for future follow up. Sales lead documents become the most important show reports.

O stands for obstacles. We spend much of our time looking for the right buyer, One way of qualifying prospects is by identifying reasons why they could not do business with you. It may have to do with the size of the company, geographical proximity, long term commitment with your competitor, territory, type of equipment and so on. Uncovering obstacles early in the process will save hours of time later.

N stands for need. Does the prospect have a need for your product or service? Ask a benefit question which gets to the heart of their reason for visiting your booth. Benefit questions like “Are your windows providing you with the energy conservation you require?” Rather than, “Looking for new windows?”

You should be able to complete these six questions in about four minutes. Upon completion you will be in a position to either proceed with a presentation because the person is qualified, or to disengage because the person is not qualified.

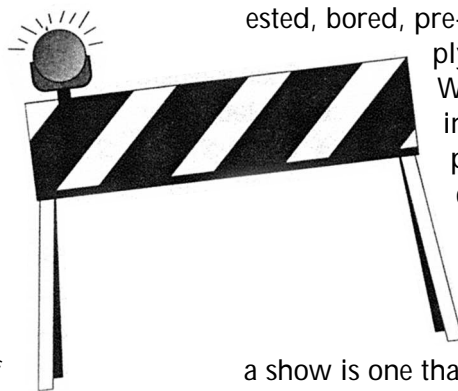
Elements of qualifying a show visitor:

Authority
Capability
Time
Identify
Obstacles
Need

Barrier 2: Fatigue

Fatigue needs to be looked at from two points of view – yours and theirs. The solution to the barrier of fatigue is common sense. Experienced exhibitors know that working a show properly requires an above average amount of physical, mental and emotional stress. The solution is to pace yourself. Working on your feet for 6-8 hours in uncomfortable shoes, speaking to everyone who passes by, and eating lots of junk food is bound to take its toll. Pacing yourself means getting plenty of rest, eating properly, and wearing comfortable clothes. Pacing yourself will help you deal with the symptoms of “trade show burnout” which most exhibitors find gets in the way of their ability to build rapport.

Attendee’s fatigue will also get in the way of your ability to build rapport. The best thing you can do for them is – don’t waste their time. Attendees come to shows with an agenda and nothing drives them crazy as quickly as inexperienced booth people who waste their time with things they are not interested in. The process of qualifying therefore has a dual purpose. One purpose is to identify those to take action with. The second is for the attendees to know who can help them. If they have a need – help them. If there is no need, then don’t waste their time – help them move along to other exhibitors – or to your competitors!



Barrier 3: Attitude

We have all seen people working a booth who look tired, uninterested, bored, pre-occupied or simply don’t care. What’s your impression of these people and the companies they represent? Probably pretty negative. The right attitude at

a show is one that says “I’m the kind of person you will want to do business with.” Slouching, doing back stretches or eating lunch does not give out this message.

Non-verbal messages have a powerful impact on your visitor. Research has shown that visitors find that the verbal messages – the actual words spoken – only account for 7% of their total impression of you. The rest comes from para-verbals (tone of your voice, inflections, volume, and pace of speaking), which accounts for 38% of the impression you make. Non-verbals like your posture, gestures, and eye contact account for 55% of someone’s impression of you. As you can see, much of rapport-building occurs on a non-verbal level. The key is to be aware of your non-verbal messages and how important they are. So much of rapport building happens on a non-verbal level. The trick is to be aware of these non-verbal messages and how important they can be.

When it comes clown to it – people want to do business with people they like. Those with whom they feel some rapport. Building rapport is something you strive for in normal situations but at a show where

time is working against you, good rapport building skills are challenged.

A lot can be said about rapport but for our purposes let’s boil it down to a simple list of do’s and don’ts that either hinder or advance the rapport building process.

Most of these do’s and don’ts are no more than common sense. But in a show setting when you are experiencing fatigue, common sense is sometimes hard to remember.

The Don’ts

- Don’t party all night before a show. The temptation is there, but you’re at a show to do a job and you won’t make it through the day on a couple of hours of sleep and the morning-after effects of too much liquor.
- Don’t fail to set a realistic work schedule. Give yourself a break – literally. Design a work schedule that gives you time off your feet. A four hour shift is about the maximum for top performance, two hours on, two hours off is ideal.
- Don’t come ill-dressed. You wouldn’t try to climb a mountain in slippers, so why try to work a trade show in shoes or clothes that are not comfortable or appropriate?
- Don’t eat, or drink or smoke in your booth. You wouldn’t walk into a new client’s office with a sandwich, a drink, or a cigarette in your hand. Why would you do it at a show?
- Don’t stand around talking to colleagues. A visitor who sees you occupied in conversation will usually walk on by.

■ Don't leave the booth untended – people have come to see what you have to offer and they deserve to have someone to greet them.

■ Don't knock the competition. It's always unprofessional behavior, especially so, when the competition is right across the aisle.

The Do's

■ Know your stuff- as in any business situation, there's no excuse for not knowing your products, services, and terms.

■ Be honest – if you don't know the answer to a question, don't fake it. Promise to find out, then follow through.

■ Know your booth – come early and make sure you know where everything is, and how everything works.

■ Know the show – be sure you know where to get help or services – someone is bound to ask.

■ Be well groomed – it's easy to start looking ragged after a long day on the floor, but as in any business situation, the first impression you make is a lasting one.

■ Keep your booth neat – a lot of money and effort went into building the booth. Take some effort to keep it looking good throughout the show.

Time, fatigue and attitude are the three barriers to building rapport on the floor of the show. Your sales people know how to do it in the field but at a show, it's a whole new ball game. Before your next show make sure everyone knows about show selling, why it's different, and what they are going to do about it. The pay-off from a small, investment in pre-show training will be astounding.

Trade show training – don't go to your next show without it ■

*Barry Siskind & president of
International Training and
Management Company based in
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.*

