

Tradeshow Tip Sheet

This month: Advance Tradeshow Preparation

- > 1865 Beach Ave NE
- > Salem, OR 97301
- > 503-371-9411
- > Fax: 503-371-9402
- > InterpExhibits.com
- > Tradeshowguyblog.com
- > Editor: Tim Patterson
- > [Twitter.com/tradeshowguy](https://twitter.com/tradeshowguy)

Gathering Information for the Upcoming Show

"Dates on the calendar are closer than they appear!"

It's never too early to start thinking about the next tradeshow. It may be a year off, or six months, or just a few months. It doesn't matter how far off those dates on the calendar seem to be – the more information you have in hand and the earlier you have it, the better prepared you'll be for the show.

If you're a veteran tradeshow manager, you know the drill. Go back to last year's file, pull out the cost figures for show set-up, booth upgrades, booth space and electrical rental, shipping, drayage and all the other stuff you'll need. Go down the list and update the information. Create a new budget to reflect this year. Contact the graphic designer if new graphics are needed. Get involved with the ad agency if a whole new booth make-over is on deck. Keep all the information in one place so it's easily accessible, whether a 3-ring binder or a specific show

folder on your computer.

Plan for the best. But prepare for the worst. Hey, this is tradeshow marketing! What could possibly go wrong?



What Are Management's Tradeshow Marketing Goals?

Being a tradeshow manager is not an isolated position. You'll have meetings with management to determine the goals of each individual show whether you go to 1 or 50 shows a year. Some of the questions that come up in these meetings: what competitive challenges do you have this year you didn't have last? What new products or services are ready for launch? Who is the audience and what is the priority of each particular show? Your objective at this point is to know the overall management goal and how that will impact the strategy for each individual show.

Then you move on to the actual booth. If you have more than one booth, which one goes to which show? Is there a reason to change anything about the booth from previous shows? Does the booth need a makeover in any way, shape or form? If there are new graphics for the booth, what's the critical time path to get them designed and produced in time to ship? These goals are typically directed by management and marketing goals, to be implemented by the tradeshow manager.

Everyone from the CEO to the front line booth staffers should know the company's specific show goals.



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Every show is different, every show's requirements differ. Do you thrive on tracking minute details?

Nuts and Bolts of Show Prep

Here's where you get into the nitty-gritty. It's where a lot of people discover the underbelly of tradeshow marketing: legwork and grunt work has to take place before you can exhibit. You're confirming myriad details of exhibiting: booth space and location, electricity requirements and locations, shipping and storage of the booth, checking



Booth Prep

Actual booth revisions often lie with your exhibit house. But you'll have to tell them what to do. Are you upgrading graphics? If so, who designs them? It could be an in-house designer or it may be an ad agency. Who confirms proofs, you or the graphic person? How long does the whole graphic production process take? What's the budget for the changes? If you work with an exhibit house on an on-going basis, it should be an easy thing to get price quotes, turnaround times and other details. If not, you'll need to search out vendors

Bottom Line

During the show the spotlight is on the company's booth and the tradeshow staff. Your products are on display, the crowd gets to peek up close. Imagine that you're readying a play for opening night. There's a lot of work to be done to prepare. Scripts are rehearsed, sets are designed and built; actors work their lines. A trade-

to make sure the booth is in good shape; listing and confirming all of the extras you might need, from food samples to laptops, giveaways to lead-gathering materials and more. Yeah, it's pretty much an endless list, isn't it?

Then you move on to confirming budget numbers, graphic updates, show schedules, travel arrangements, car rentals and hotels, staff training or updating, staff scheduling, expense accounts and reimbursements. Move on to marketing materials, whether pre-show direct mail, show brochures or other hand-outs, post-show follow-up literature and more.

Every show is different, every company's requirements vary. Some tradeshow managers thrive with this amount of detail tracking and others delegate, while others yet try to keep from drowning in the stuff. Whatever works best for you, stick with it. Keep refining your system.

who can do the work for you.

It could be that you've upgraded the booth space at the show, and require more exhibit materials. What's going to fill in the extra space? Or on the other hand, if you're downsizing due to budget cutbacks, what part of the exhibit will have to stay behind? It's probably a good idea to pull the exhibit out of storage, set it up, and see exactly what the new changes will look like.

show isn't that dissimilar from opening night of a play. If you put half as much preparation into your 'opening night' of your tradeshow booth – especially at the bigger shows where thousands of people will get a chance to engage with your company – your end result should be, well, a hit!