

Tradeshows Tip Sheet

This month: Saving Money on Your Exhibit

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Saving Money On Your Exhibit

So you want to save money on your tradeshow exhibit. Whether your budget is just a few hundred or a few thousand dollars, or in the millions - you want the biggest bang for your buck. Over-spending on any marketing effort is annoying, especially when you don't have to. If you plan properly, you won't look back at your exhibit budget at the end of the fiscal year and wonder why you spent so much and have so little to show for it.

Sure, you can cut back on travel expenses by sending fewer people to a show. You can go to fewer shows. You can exhibit in a smaller space. You can cut back on pre-show marketing. There are a lot of things that can effectively impact your bottom line. However, in this newsletter we're going to focus on the exhibit itself.

Light as a Feather, Heavy as Lead

Building materials must top the list among considerations. From a strictly economical point of view, using lightweight materials such as cardboard, fabrics and hollow aluminum frames is always appealing. The impact on shipping and drayage is dramatic and can help your bottom line today and as you ship in and out to each show.

But don't let the weight of the materials be the driving force. Consider how those materials will be seen by your prospects and clients. For instance, a back wall constructed of cardboard tubing may be cheap and lightweight. But if your clientele expects to see a higher quality presentation, such as aluminum struts and shiny lami-

Where can you cut corners? What's a good place to pare down costs? Is it in the materials? Should you bring the entire exhibit project in-house? What angles will you want to consider that will impact your bottom line?

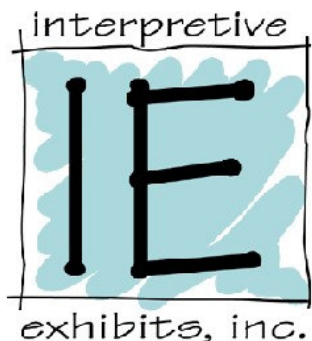
Let's take a look...



nated countertops, you may be doing your image—and your company—a disservice. If your audience consists of green, environmentally-conscious outdoor recreationalists, though, you're probably on the right track.

Fabric is very popular in exhibit fabrication - it's lightweight, flexible, takes up a small space when shipping, and can be fashioned into virtually any shape. The technology of fabric printing has come a long way in the past few years, bringing the price down and significantly improving the quality.

Fabrics are very popular due to their extremely light weight and flexibility. Would a fabric graphic make sense for your exhibit?



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How can you make a big impression with a little budget? A few well-thought-out props may do the trick!

Bringing It All Home

Maybe it's the economy. Maybe it's the self-reliance of certain tradeshow marketing directors. Maybe it's just the fact that some people find it fun to build a tradeshow booth out of old bicycle parts and tree limbs. Designing and fabricating your exhibit completely in-house is often a valid way to save money. On the other hand, you could be stepping into the unknown. And how much money are you really saving?

After seeing dozens of 'home-built' exhibits, I can safely say they run the gamut from extremely creative and fun to, uh, well, the opposite. Most of the do-it-yourself booths are in the 10-foot to 20-foot range. Anything bigger and you start to run into serious logistical and design issues. Crating and shipping can be a challenge. Getting the thing assembled on the show floor may be dicey.

Attention to Detail

It's easy enough to show up at your tradeshow, use the show-provided table and backdrop, set up a laptop, hand out a few brochures and be done with it. But what is the real impact of taking the 'bare-bones' approach? Does your audience walk away impressed? Or depressed? Do you make an impact on anyone?

There's a difference between uncreatively making use of the table, pipe-and-drapes and backdrop and taking the minimalist approach to your tradeshow booth. Perhaps you can spread out some white sand, an umbrella and a hammock to demonstrate how easy it would be to use your product

Bottom Line

Chopping your tradeshow budget is your job; cutting corners on your booth may be the ultimate task to get that budget down. So what's the most obvious place for you to start? Take the whole project in-house? Re-furbish an older exhibit with new graphics? Take a few light-weight but meaningful props to draw attention? Bring in an author or celebrity?

Whatever you choose, the most important thing to

Having said that, lots of small companies choose the DIY route because, let's face it, in the long run it may save some serious dollars. And a DIY booth has the same advantage that a custom booth does: there's not going to be another booth exactly like it on the show floor.



or service. You might be able to bring in one of your widgets, set up a \$300 banner stand next to it and start answering questions about what the heck it does! There are a ton of possibilities when you have a small budget.

If you're going to try the minimalist approach, think about how you can make a big splash with just a few dollars. Can you leave a big impression with a few well-placed props? Maybe bringing in a minor celebrity will attract people. Having a miniscule budget doesn't mean you can't dream big – it just means you don't have to spend a bunch of dough on an large, full-blown tradeshow booth.

gauge is not necessarily how much you saved with the effort, but how much you gained after the show is over. You may save a thousand bucks on the exhibit, but if the 'down-sizing' caused a \$10,000 decline in sales what did you really gain? Your objective shouldn't be seeing how many dollars you've saved on the actual exhibit – but in finding creative and low-budget ways to draw an enthusiastic crowd!