



**F R E E M A N**

# **Tips for First-Time Exhibitors**

## **Table of Contents**

Executive Summary .....	1
Making the Most of Your Trade Show Investment .....	2
Exploring the Roles of General Services Contractors & Official Specialty Contractors ..	2
Planning: 12 Months Preshow .....	3
Planning: 3-6 Months Preshow .....	6
Planning: 1-2 Months Preshow .....	7
Final 30 Days Preshow .....	8
Closing the Deal .....	9



## Executive Summary

Face-to-face marketing is a powerful force that can help you achieve strategic and long-term relationships for your brand. If you're a first-time exhibitor, remember: You will help transform an empty space into an exhilarating environment where you can teach, present, entertain, display and connect with your valued customers and new prospects.

Whether you go it alone or work with an integrated face-to-face marketing company like Freeman, learn all you can about the process. It may seem overwhelming, but you can get the help you need.

The general services and official specialty contractors can pull your project together, help you avoid logistical mistakes, and maximize your cost efficiencies. With each step, you'll learn to plan with clear goals in mind. Create the right event. Establish a budget. Select a booth that meets company objectives. Prepare and encourage your staff. Use the web to support your event. You'll also explore the benefits of preshow outreach and harness the potential of postshow follow-up.

To reach that ultimate destination of a powerful outcome, plan your work, and work your plan.

## Tips for First-Time Exhibitors

### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TRADE SHOW INVESTMENT

Face-to-face marketing gives you an edge. When you can look into a prospect's or customer's eyes and create a personal relationship, you are halfway to reaching key objectives for your brand. In fact, spending for trade shows and exhibitions is still on the rise, surpassing other marketing spend, such as print advertising, according to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR). The reason may be that exhibitors and attendees see strong value in exhibitions; according to a Benchmark Research report, 91 percent of all decision-makers find exhibitions an "extremely useful" source of purchasing information.

But it's not enough to simply choose an event and show up, say experts. Attendance doesn't ensure your company's success. With careful preplanning and a partnership with show management and the general services contractor, however, the exhibition can help you connect in a powerful way with the most active and motivated buyers in your market – while you skillfully manage the process.

Here are key pieces to know when planning your exhibition or event.

### WHAT IS A GENERAL SERVICES CONTRACTOR, AND HOW DOES THEIR ROLE AFFECT ME?

Though first-time event planning can seem overwhelming, rest assured you won't be making all the decisions alone. The general services contractor is a key contributor as you begin the process.

The general services contractor has the lead role in the production of a trade show. They are a partner and exclusive provider to show management on a particular show and work to ensure the show's success. Within that partnership, the general services contractor provides products and services that could include rental of furniture, booth space, signage, carpet and displays, to name a few. In addition to the general services contractor, the trade show offers services from other contractors, called official specialty contractors. These contractors provide services that may include transportation, audio visual, cleaning, floral, photography, security and furniture.

The general services contractor typically employs "behind the scenes" staff who provide labor (installation and dismantle of exhibit booth), transportation services (transport your exhibit to and from show site or warehouse) and material handling. Material handling includes the unloading and delivery of exhibit materials to your rented booth space, storage of empty containers during the show, and the loading of exhibit materials at the end of the show.

General Services Contractor	Official Specialty Contractors
Material handling & labor	Electrical & utilities
Rental furniture	Audio visual
Transportation	Cleaning
Signage	Floral
Carpet	Security
Displays	Furniture

## PLANNING TO SUCCEED: 12 MONTHS PRESHOW

With the contractor comes the need for planning. One of the biggest mistakes a company can make is to jump into an event without enough forethought, says Douglas L. Ducate, president and CEO of CEIR. This is why the average first-time exhibitor participates in three shows before finding the correct venue, he says. You can avoid this fate — and save money — by deciding what you expect to gain from show participation before you select your venue or come up with a budget.

Companies participate in events for a variety of reasons, explains Ducate. You can use a face-to-face event to bring a new product to market, boost your company's brand awareness and find partners or even a potential buyer for your company. Once you decide on your ultimate goal, you'll need to uncover a specific call to action: What do you want people to do when they visit you, and how will you get them to do this? Once you resolve these questions, you'll be ready to set sound and attainable objectives for your first show.

### *Choosing the right event*

Where you exhibit is as important as why you exhibit. There are a number of ways to find the right event:

- Start with big events advertised in key industry trade magazines and newspapers. They often have name recognition and the largest number of attendees.
- Check out events hosted or sponsored by industry organizations, which also have good attendance.
- Try searchable trade show databases as well as your competitors' and partners' own web sites, where you may find announcements or notices of their attendance.

*Your number one asset: people*

Your booth can be the biggest, brightest destination inside a convention center, but if it's not staffed correctly, your investment can be completely wasted, says Margit B. Weisgal, president of the Trade Show Exhibitors Association. You'll need the right mix of marketing, sales and technical staff at your booth.

"Formalized training is necessary to achieve even adequate booth presentation," she says. "We all spend a fortune on sales training, but everyone forgets that working an exhibition is very different than going out on a typical sales call."

Protecting your business includes deciding how best to invest the dollars.

*Establish a show budget*

You'll need to think about a budget. Fortunately, for those who plan right and set a detailed budget, a trade show can be a very worthwhile investment with a return.

**A tip about booth personnel:** Remind everyone that while getting out of the office may be fun and exciting, their focus must be on business. Every visitor to your booth should be greeted immediately, and actions like reading emails, talking to each other about personal matters, eating and drinking should happen away from the public eye. Staff should also take care when talking to each other regarding proprietary information, says Weisgal.

There are many elements that go into the cost of an exhibition. Some of the major expenses that all exhibitors face include:

- Trade show participation fees
- Exhibit space rental
- Exhibit design (either from a general services contractor or other design house)
- Show services including material handling, installation, carpeting, furniture and lead retrieval systems
- Transportation (shipping to and from show site, customs)
- Travel costs including airfare, lodging, entertainment and food
- Marketing activation such as advertising, sponsorships, giveaways, press releases and web site customization
- Sales training

## *Consider booth design*

First impressions make lasting impressions. The look and feel of your booth speaks volumes to top customers and prospects. It tells them what you have to offer, and how you see yourself in the global marketplace. There are many elements that go into creating a booth: size, signage, colors, and carpeting, even chairs and wastebaskets.

You've got some important decisions to make. Should you custom-build a booth or rent it? Consider this:

- A custom booth is just that – it's one of a kind. It has your colors, your logo and your size requirements. But custom booths can be very expensive. When you buy an exhibit, you'll likely pay about 50% of the cost up front. Plan for it to be used three to five years – which limits your flexibility if your company's messaging, logo, colors or other assets change.

- Your budget will need to include: booth build-out, transportation services to and from shows, storage and refurbishment costs.

**A tip for managing your expenses:** Create a running spreadsheet with all of your major budget and sub-line items listed below, including budget versus actual costs with variance.

For additional assistance, use the Freeman exhibitor budget worksheet located at: <http://www.freemanco.com/freeman/resourcecenter/#beforeTheEvent>

- A rental booth gives you more flexibility to adapt your sizes, configuration and look and feel for a specific show. You're not tied to colors, messaging or logos.
  - The drawback: you're limited on design, branding and the "custom" feel that sets you apart.

"Think about a hybrid," says Dan Hoffend, vice president of sales, Corporate Accounts for Freeman. "A hybrid is part custom-build, part rental. You can achieve the singular look you want and gain the advantages of changing booth sizes and trimming ancillary expenses of ownership. You can deliver powerful brand positioning at the speed of your business. We can help you do that."

If you choose to go it alone, you'll need to plan for everything on your own, which is not the best idea, says Steven Hacker, president of industry group International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE).

"A good way to handle your first show is to rely on an integrated service company like Freeman who can support you with everything," he says. "You'll save thousands of dollars and you won't overlook anything since you'll be working with someone who has done it countless times before."

## 3M and the hybrid exhibit

Consider what the manufacturing company, 3M learned. A decade ago, 3M had an exclusive exhibit supplier who worked only for them. Everything the company leased or used was a 3M asset. The company's business divisions leased exhibit pieces as they needed. As the number of 3M live events grew, the paradigm stopped working. 3M was spending a significant amount of money shipping booth elements from their storage location in St. Paul, Minn. Booths began looking dated. 3M wanted a change. They engaged Freeman to create a custom rental booth program.

The result: 3M saved just under \$2 million. They reduced refurbishment, shipping and warehousing costs. Now each of the company's divisions can create cost effective booths with a new and innovated style for each show.

## PLANNING: 3-6 MONTHS PRESHOW

When you plan for an upcoming trade show, factor in your marketing objectives. Think of your trade show as an integrated process, not a singular event.

As part of the process, think about reaching out to your top prospects and clients before the show. Would you like to send a direct mail piece or gift? Email blast? Phone call? These efforts can drive your top targets to your exhibit or private events.

"Your web site should feature messaging that supports the show you'll be attending. So if you're a telecom company and you're looking to introduce a new phone, your web site would say, 'See the super new phone we're going to introduce at [telecom trade show] CTIA,'" says Hacker of IAEE.

You can also use the web to push exhibition visitors back to your site by creating an event-specific microsite and providing show-specific user names and passwords to get people to come to your site after they leave the show floor.

Review all of the offered sponsorship and speaking opportunities available at the show, and discuss plans to incorporate them in your show plan. If the show permits private on-site/off-site customer events, check your budget and meet with the marketing group to discuss opportunities. Will your event be a small dinner or cocktail party? Large event? What type of event will best align with your trade show goals and your company culture?

As you approach the two-month window for your event, keep goals and objectives top of mind.

## PLANNING LOGISTICS: 1-2 MONTHS PRESHOW

Allow time to read through all of the information in the exhibitor service manual. There are many ways to ensure that you maximize your dollars while you simplify the trade show experience. Check to see the package options that the show's general services contractor may offer. Typically, you can order exhibit transportation, installation and dismantle, custom exhibit design, exhibit storage, custom exhibit rental and carpet from the general services contractor with no additional markup fees from multiple vendors. This single-source solution is the most cost-efficient way to pay for a trade show.

Whichever path you choose, plan to stay several steps ahead of your deadlines.

### *Work hard to meet early deadlines*

After you have selected, registered and purchased booth space for the show through show management, the general services contractor should give you an exhibitor show service kit filled with important information. This kit can be provided as a printed binder of information or more commonly, can be found online. This packet is essential so you don't miss order deadline dates. Each kit contains the instructions and order forms from the general services contractor as well as the other EACs. Ordering show services and furniture before deadline dates can be critical as the general services contractor often offers a discount on advance orders. It may be helpful to write these deadlines down on a large, visible calendar or log them into your email calendar to ensure that you do not miss anything.

Services may include:

- Carpet for your exhibit space
- Furniture
- Lead retrieval system
- Electrical
- Material handling
- EAC form (submit to show management for use of outside installation and dismantle labor)
- Graphic signs
- Installation/dismantle labor
- Forklift labor
- Hanging sign labor
- Booth cleaning
- Transportation- be sure to arrange inbound and outbound in advance

## *Trade show team's travel and lodging expenses*

With your budget in mind, coordinate with individual team members while booking flights. Depending on the size of your company, you may choose to use an outside agency to handle the travel arrangements. Have notes ready on the show schedule (registration and preshow meeting) and team availability.

When booking lodging, look into the hotel package rates or room blocks that the show sometimes provides. Most of the time, the trade show is held at a preferred hotel in a particular city, and the hotel usually can accommodate all exhibitors, attendees and show management.

## *Final booth graphics and content*

If the overall show theme and message have been constant up to this point, you should now be in the final booth design phase. At this stage, you'll need to review the final show graphics and content as well as exhibit renderings to allow for ample production time. Follow up with your strategic, creative and logistical teams to ensure completion of these pieces.

## FINAL PREP: LAST 30 DAYS

All of your planning and hard work will soon pay off. Below are some tips for the month prior to the show:

### *Registration and preshow meeting*

If your trade show team has not already done so, make sure that everyone is registered to attend both the trade show and conference (if applicable). Continue to work with marketing and the sales team on preshow sales tactics.

To stay organized and make sure your team is aligned with your goals, schedule a preshow meeting before the show opens to review talking points on booth content/design, top prospects, what to expect at show site, schedule of events, method of communication while at the show and any other details they need to know for successful execution.

## *Documentation for show site*

A few days prior to departure for the show, pull together all order confirmations, tracking numbers and other documentation that would be helpful for reference while on show site. Keep the contact numbers for your entire trade show team (cell numbers), show management key contacts and general services contractor close by. Also, it helps to include information on outbound shipping, your carrier and address where items are to be shipped. When you arrive onsite, the general services contractor will have an Exhibitor Service Center, staffed with people to help with any last-minute needs. If a need arises, be sure to bring your documents to the Exhibitor Service Center to speed up the process.

Your planning binder may be getting full at this point, but don't forget to include notes on what happens after the show.

## CLOSING THE DEAL

When the show closes, be sure to use different measures to evaluate your success. You may consider sending out a postshow survey to gauge the effectiveness of your marketing campaign or follow up with a gift or mailing piece to remain top of mind with your prospects and clients. The follow-up is where the majority of companies fall short, says Ducate of CEIR.

"Failure to follow up on leads is one of the biggest criticisms we hear from exhibition attendees," he says. "You need to immediately follow up with some acknowledgement that you remember what your commitments to your visitors were, and how and when you're going to meet those commitments."

Follow-up can be as simple as entering your contacts email addresses and names into a database, sending out a mass email thanking everyone for visiting the show and telling them when they can expect to hear from you again.

"Seventy percent of exhibitors don't even follow up with leads," Weisgal of TSEA says. Weisgal suggests grading leads in order of importance with "tire kickers" at the bottom and hot leads on top so you can follow up with the best leads over the phone as soon as you get back into the office.

# F R E E M A N

*Find out how Freeman can help*

To learn how you can maximize your exhibit experience, visit the Freeman resource center at [Freemanco.com](http://Freemanco.com), where you can take advantage of our invaluable tools and latest technology. Find information on all your service needs, from expert strategy to innovative creative to best-in-class logistics.

"Working with Freeman, we can do everything. You're buying from a single source. You don't need to go to several companies. We know what to do and where to go, from providing logistics to supplying AV and installing it on site. And we even support you postshow by helping you find ways to measure what you've done and the ultimate success of your show," says Hoffend of Freeman.

*Freeman is the world's leading provider of integrated services for face-to-face marketing events, including expositions, conventions, corporate events, and exhibits. The company is headquartered in Dallas, Texas and has offices in 41 cities across North America. In 2006, Freeman produced over 3,900 expositions, including 100 of the largest 200 U.S. trade shows, and over 10,000 other events worldwide. Founded in 1927, the company remains privately held by the Freeman family as well as the full-time employee owners through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP).*