

10 Tips for Attending a Trade Show

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Whether you're seeking to exhibit your products, find vendors or meet potential customers, a trade show is an excellent place to start. Here are 10 tips for making the most of your next trade show.

1. **Clarify your goals.** Before choosing a trade show, decide what you want to achieve—whether it's learning more about your industry, meeting prospects or buying inventory. Set measurable goals, such as "Sell X number of products" or "Get 25 qualified leads."
2. **Select the right show.** Visit TSNN.com (www.tsnn.com) and Tradeshow Week (www.tradeshowweek.com) to search trade shows by industry, date or location. You can start with your industry's trade show, or ask colleagues what shows they recommend.
3. **Be prepared.** Get as much information as you can in advance. Find out what companies will be exhibiting or attending. Check the show's website for a directory, map and contact information for exhibitors. Grab a printed directory when you arrive at the show and plan out what you want to see.
4. **Know the rules.** If you're exhibiting, ask about details including set-up and breakdown times, size restrictions for your booth and display, wiring and electrical outlets, location and signage. Make a list of what you need to bring—you don't want to find out at the last minute that you're missing one crucial extension cord.
5. **Staff adequately.** You need at least two people to man your booth at all times—that way one person can take a quick break. Make sure any employees in your booth are well trained in how to greet attendees and gather information.
6. **Get in shape.** Whichever side of the exhibit booth you're on, trade shows are physically demanding. Wear comfortable shoes (you'll be standing or walking all day). Have a quick energy source like nuts or granola bars on hand, and take short breaks when you can.
7. **Meet and greet.** Whether you're exhibiting or attending, a friendly attitude is key. Bring more business cards than you think you'll need, and exchange them with everyone you talk to.
8. **Attend events.** Trade shows aren't just about exhibits. Be sure to take advantage of the many learning opportunities at the show, such as panel discussions, workshops or networking sessions.
9. **Stay up late.** Don't head to your hotel the minute the show floor closes. Much trade-show business takes place in the evening. Join your new contacts for dinner, attend mixers or hospitality suites, and get to know the people you met during the day.
10. **Follow up.** Contact everyone you met at the show within two weeks. You can send information about your business, ask to connect with them on a social networking site, or suggest meeting for coffee or lunch. The goal is to move your relationship forward while the trade show is still fresh in their minds.

By Rieva Lesonsky

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