

Trade Show Planning Calendar

A good start to the planning process is mapping out a calendar of activities. Planning for a trade show begins up to a year ahead of time, so mapping out a one-year plan and giving it attention along the way is critical to trade show success. Below is a sample of the activities that should be done to prepare for a trade show throughout the year.

9 Months - 1 Year in Advance

- Select your trade shows and gather the appropriate information (space availability, call for speakers info, list of previous exhibitors/attendees)
- Determine space needs
- Secure booth space with show promoters (you can often receive discounts for securing well in advance – not to mention prime real estate!)
- Sketch out a plan for space utilization including your display, signage, meeting areas, product areas, etc.
- Develop a marketing plan and budget for pre-show marketing activities, on-site marketing (at the show), and post-show follow-up activities

6 Months in Advance

- Begin working on your display – contact your display company and set up a meeting to discuss your needs, budget considerations, and time frame. They will be able to give you ideas on getting the most bang for your buck!
- Begin working with your marketing people on show marketing items. Develop overall concept – if there is a theme to the display, that should be carried through.
- Review trade show materials to determine schedules for ordering rental items, electricity, equipment, etc.

3 Months in Advance

- Determine vendors for show items (printing, promotional items, equipment rental, etc.)
- Finalize marketing materials and display designs.
- Begin production on display.

2 Months in Advance

- Make booth staffing and travel decisions.
- Determine display and show supply logistical needs.
- Begin production on marketing materials.
- Review show goals with booth staff.

1 Month in Advance

- Preview your display. Learn how to assemble, disassemble, ship, etc. Train booth staff on booth assembly/dismantle/shipping.
- Launch pre-show marketing activities (direct mail, e-mail, personal sales calls)
- Set on-site appointments with clients.
- Plan in-booth activities (give-aways, drawings, order forms, sign-up sheets, etc.)
- Gather products to be shown/sold at show.
- Finalize travel arrangements including air, hotel, transportation, group meals, etc.
- Check on marketing materials and promotional materials progress. Schedule shipping of booth materials.
- Research and develop contact list of on-site support services in case of emergency (find the closest Kinkos, equipment rental company, fast sign company, WalMart, etc.)
- Provide booth staff with overall booth theme, messages, product info, etc.

1 Week in Advance

- Pack and ship all booth materials (capture all tracking numbers on shipments).
- Pack and ship your Trade Show Tool Kit (see list below).
- Ship display or confirm display shipment with your display company.
- Determine and communicate booth staff dress code.
- Create booth staff name badges.
- Communicate travel and registration process to booth staff.
- Arrange for corporate checks or credit card for payment of exhibit, on-site rentals, etc.
- Make reservations for staff dinners or team building events.
- Meet with booth staff to review goals, develop script for greeting and speaking to clients, review product or service details (be sure booth staff is up to speed and ready for tough questions!).
- Create trade show experience evaluation forms to be conducted with booth staff post-show.

At the Show

- Confirm arrival of display, booth materials and equipment.
- Confirm arrival of booth staff.
- Conduct "dry run" with staff of overall theme, message and goals. Review process for collecting leads, taking orders, or selling product.
- During show, check in daily on progress, activity, and goals – adjust following day's activities accordingly.
- Take pictures of your display prior to and during the show.
- Meet with show promoters regarding following year's show. Discuss successes and challenges, ask what they can do for you next year.

Post Show

- Conduct post-show meeting with staff – discuss successes and challenges – capture as notes for next year. Develop list of ideas and considerations for next year's show.
- Organize show leads and distribute to proper persons for follow up.
- Launch post-show marketing activities (direct mail, e-mail, phone calls, etc.)
- Conduct trade show experience evaluations with staff.
- Follow-up with lead recipients on lead status one week post-show. Continue to follow leads for next few months. Keep leads in database for pre-show marketing activities next year.