

Hotel Management
Issue: July 2011
The Sales Clinic
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EXHIBITING AT TRADE SHOWS, A GOOD WAY TO FIND LEADS FOR NEW BUSINESS

The objective of participating as an exhibitor at a trade show is to see as many people as possible to develop information that will locate prospects, and ultimately lead to increasing sales. Bear in mind that not every attendee at any kind of event with a trade show would be someone who needs to use a hotel property for any kind of meeting, or visit for any special reason.

Just about all associations, global, national, statewide, and regional invite exhibitors to participate at their trade shows. Just checking the websites of different associations that involve meeting and event planners offers an idea of which to select. It is obvious that selecting state-wide associations could be a better possibility of meeting more lead potentials than attending a global or national event. However, there are national and global conferences that could very well provide superior opportunities for group business leads such as HSMIA's Affordable Meetings (www.hsmia.org), or Professional Conference Management Association's annual meeting (www.pdma.org). Then there is the American Society of Association Executives (www.asae.org) Most of all national associations have related State associations. Just searching for associations in any State would reveal a good number of conferences and events taking place each year. There are groups such as STAG (Society of Travel Agents in Government), and SGMP (Society of Government Meeting Planners). Then there is AIBTM, the very large annual trade show put on in June of each year that brings in over 2,000 qualified meeting planners, and will be held in Baltimore in June 2012 (www.conworld.net).

The whole idea behind exhibiting at these types of shows is to be able to be productive in finding enough leads that could be followed-up and prospected to determine which lead would work best in bringing in group business to a property. Unfortunately, so many sales people who "work" their booths do not do it professionally and productively. Most exhibiting staff have never been trained in how to work a trade show booth. The main thing is to make sure that there is a return on investment for the property represented. This means getting many leads that can be developed into prospects which, hopefully, would develop into meaningful business. Experience in working trade shows would provide an excellent formula for determining ROI. This may be just an example: At a conference of 400 qualified meeting planners for two days, an exhibitor may have contact with 200 or more attendees, of which 50 may turn out to be leads, but only half could be qualified prospects.

This then, requires follow up of the 25, immediately following the show. Maybe 10% may just turn out to book business. The estimated dollar value of the prospects, over a long-term, against the cost of attending the event could reflect the ROI. If the total dollar value of the prospects' new business is, for example, \$100,000, and \$5,000 was spent in attending, representing 5%, that would be a pretty good value. Keeping the cost at lower than 10% is a very good return.

For a free copy of my Exhibiting at Trade Shows sheet, just email me at howardf@vt.edu

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