

## More Trade Show Techniques

In last month's column, I wrote about the value of exhibiting at trade shows, and I promised that I'd come back this month with some ideas for successful trade show marketing and promotion. There are many, many things you can do to call attention to your company at a trade show, ranging from the tried-and-true to some very innovative and creative promotional ideas.

### Starting Point

The starting point in trade show exhibit strategy is that you have to get people out of the middle of the aisles. You want them to stop at your exhibit to see what you have to offer. Your most basic understanding should be that it will probably take more than just salespeople standing in a booth or behind a table to make people want to come closer and see what you've got.

Perhaps the most common of the tried-and-true techniques is to have something to give away. Ad specialty items like pens or imprinted notepads or post-it notes or key rings have been very popular over the years. They are functional—which makes them desirable for show attendees—and they're relatively inexpensive, which makes them a desirable choice for you. Printers, of course, are uniquely positioned to use imprinted paper items as give-aways. There are any number of interesting things in this category that most printers can produce on their own equipment.

### Audience Involvement

Another approach to the give-away technique is an "audience involvement" like a raffle or game. There may not be a better magnet to a trade show booth or table than a television or a VCR or a CD player sitting next to a fish bowl full of business cards. Trade show attendees know exactly what that means, and they love to put their card in play for a chance at such a prize. Golf putting games and wheels of fortune are also quite common—an seemingly no less popular even though they might be thought of as "old hat."

(I saw a great "audience involvement" game at Southwestern Graphics in June. Monarch Paper Company had a setup where visitors to their booth threw plastic hatchets at holes in plastic trees. If you got two out of three in, you won a prize. I don't think their booth was ever empty during the three days of the show.)

Some give-away items can actually make people seek out your booth. Several years ago, one company I worked with made an investment in imprinted canvas tote bags. Plastic tote bags have been very common at trade shows for years, but the colorful canvas bags we bought had a higher "perceived value." People saw them being carried around the show by others, and decided they had to have one too. The bags brought people to the booth, and that gave my client the chance to start the process that led to some of those people becoming customers.

### Unique Opportunities

Printers have a number of unique opportunities at trade shows because of the "products" they sell. I like to think that I came up with a particularly unique and creative idea a couple of years ago, when a company I worked with took part in a national Direct Marketing Association show. All of the printers at this show—and there were plenty of printers there—had samples of their work on display, but I took a little bit different approach to it.

I had picked out six examples of the best work I thought we'd done prior to the show, and I spent something like \$2000.00 to have those six printed pieces custom framed. We hung them on the wall of our booth just like in a museum, and we invited people into our booth to vote on which one they thought was the best. There was a banner over our booth that said something like "Choose The Best Of Show" and we had a pre-printed ballot form which listed some of the production details relating to each of the printed pieces. If I remember the numbers right, we got something like 500 ballots completed out of a total of about 3000 people at the show. (If that doesn't sound like an exceptional performance to you, think of it this way: we left that show with names and some other information on 500 people who were involved in the purchase of our "products" and would have a reason to remember us when we got in touch to follow up.)

We started making those follow-up calls about a week after the show, and we led off the calls by telling our new prospects which printed piece had been judged the best. Then we went on to the discussion of getting together to talk about *their* printing needs. We got a lot of appointments—and ultimately built a few very strong customer relationships—on the back of that program. And here's another little benefit: I was able to tell one of our existing customers that one of their printed pieces had been voted "Best Of Show" in our booth, which further strengthened *that* relationship.

## **Planning Is The Key**

There are many ways for a printer to profit from participation in trade shows. As I told you last month, planning is the key. Plan what you want to accomplish and then plan how you're going to accomplish it. From the tried-and-true to the creative and innovative, if you can make yourself stand out from the crowd in a trade show, the chances are pretty good that you can use this form of marketing to add to your customer base.