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Make the Most of Your Trade Shows

By: *Nicolle Martin*

For most companies, the cost of sponsoring events is a large percentage of their overall marketing budget. For that reason, it's important to make sure every possible opportunity they generate is maximized. Yet studies show that 80 percent of companies do not effectively follow up with leads they receive while sponsoring an event. This represents a huge number of lost opportunities. Here are a few tips on how you can make sure this isn't happening to your company:

Set Appointments.

When you are at the event and talking with potential clients, set up a later time to talk right then and there! Don't wait until after the event and send them a standard, canned email. Take the time to figure out something that works for both of you on the spot and then confirm the appointment via email later that day.

Take Notes.

When you are talking with people at the event, take notes on what they tell you. As soon as they walk away, write on the back of their business card so you can remember exactly what you discussed and what their needs are. That way, your follow-up with them can be very direct and personal.

Don't Wait.

Don't delay in getting back to the people you talk with. While the leads should be immediately turned in to the marketing department, you can still send each lead an email that night from your hotel room recapping your discussion and seeing if you can set up a meeting (if you didn't do that already). Make sure you let the marketing department know about your correspondence with a lead so they can tailor their follow-up.

Categorize Leads.

As soon as you leave the event, put someone in charge of getting all the leads you received there into a single database. These entries should be categorized based on need and type of lead, appropriate follow-up should be considered, and each lead assigned to a salesperson. They should also be added to your overall marketing database.

Stay in Touch.

Companies often come back from a trade show and send out one follow-up communication. Most products and services have a very long sales cycle. So how can you expect one follow-up letter or phone call to make a sale? Stay in touch for at least one year (unless your leads request otherwise).

These simple steps can help you make the most out of your next event. While it may seem like the event is over as soon as the doors shut, the most important part is just beginning. You spent a lot of time, effort and energy to get the leads you received ... make sure you make the most of them and follow up!

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