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Tank Tops, Mobile Obsession and Stinking Hangovers

Booth Behaviors to Avoid at Trade Shows

By: *Melanie Brenneman*

I have a game I like to play. And it's kind of evil.

During the second day of trade shows, I walk the exhibit hall as soon as it opens. I backseat my other senses and really open up the ol' nostrils. Nine times out of ten, after a quick stroll I can point out which booth staffers partied *too* hard the night before – just by smell. And let me tell you, I am not a smelling prodigy.

Sure, I get it. It's a time to take out clients, meet prospects and loosen up a bit. There's always wining and dining.

But let's reset. A trade show represents a significant amount of time spent strategizing and planning as well as a good chunk of change. Your booth is your physical presence at a show, one that is subject to the whole concept of "first impressions." It's also an investment that falls into the hands of whoever happens to be at the booth. It can take only one or two bad habits from booth staffers to tank all that meticulous work.

I've done my share of staffing booths. It can be tedious and tiring. It gets slow. Mistakes happen. But sometimes our best intentions get sidelined as we become desensitized to the environment and ignore the perception of those who walk by or visit.

So, based on what I've seen, here are behaviors and activities to avoid when you're staffing your booth.

Pulling an "ostrich" with your mobile.

Time doesn't stop when you're working at your booth. You still have your regular job responsibilities along with emails to answer and projects deadlines. Disconnecting from your regular work world as well as your smartphone can be an enormous challenge. But sticking your eyeballs to your mobile device presents potential booth visitors with the not-very-tantalizing view of the top of your head and a feeling that you don't want to spend a dime of your time with them. And then the booth traffic goes down – which normally works against the whole reason for having a booth in the first place. Try to confine phone checks to breaks. If possible, step away from the booth if others are there to cover you.

Hello booth. Here's my tuna fish sandwich.

Celebrate your anchovies and egg salad ... in a restaurant or your hotel room, not at the booth. It's tempting to multitask and sneak in snack bites during booth duty. It's definitely understandable as you're probably at the booth for hours. A person gets peckish after all. As handsome or beautiful as you undoubtedly are, people just don't want to see you eating at the booth or accidentally step on food scraps when they come by. Try to save the eating for breaks so trade show attendees don't spot you nosing.

We were supposed to wear WHAT?



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It's like a game of duck, duck, goose. Jacket, jacket, TANK TOP! OK, in our space no one would ever show up to booth duty wearing a tank top. But sometimes if there isn't a lot of communication about dress standards, those at the booth can look a little mish-moshed. I'm not saying you have to have a uniform, but there should be a "common thread" dress code. It creates a polished, professional and unified appearance for trade show attendees.

No faces. Just dollar signs.

Trade show attendees that visit your booth are guests, not dollar signs. Each company has its ideal prospect. Obviously, every attendee doesn't conform to that profile. So what happens when Jane Doe, who may be from a law firm, not a corporate law department, or who may not have your target job title, comes to visit? Please don't ignore her or immediately dismiss her. And don't think you're being sly with the nametag "peek and judge." Everyone notices that.

Try to treat each visitor like a valuable contact. Even if some folks don't fit your idea of a prospect, they could know someone who does – and influence that person. You don't have to spend a lot of time and you should always have an exit strategy, but remember to treat every guest with respect.

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I have a sailor's mouth. And when I'm in public, I have to actively censor myself for everyone's good. You're at a booth, and I bet you that no matter how quiet you think you are, someone can hear you. Be careful with your word choices. Avoid swearing or badmouthing companies or individuals. The walls have ears.

Oh, just step over that.

Housekeeping doesn't visit your booth, so try to keep it trash-free and uncluttered. Handbags and luggage should be tucked behind the booth or out of site. Constantly do trash patrol. It can pile up sneakily when you're not looking.

You aren't hiding anything.

Getting back to my original day-two patrol: If you are hungover, people will be able to smell it even if you've spent two hours soaking in a tub.

And they'll see it too. You with the tepid movements and the wrinkled shirt, yeah, you aren't 100 percent.

We all think we can hide a hangover. But no one can. Try to throttle back on the boozing if you have booth duty the next day.

Trade show booth duty isn't easy. It isn't simple, and like the exhibition itself, it can require a lot of preparation. Respect your investment by ensuring your behavior at the booth supports your company's professionalism.



About the author

Melanie Brenneman joined Edge Legal Marketing in 2010 after an in-house career focused on public relations, marketing and communications for private and publically traded technology companies. As senior account manager, she helps organizations successfully market their solutions to law firms, corporate law departments and accounting firms. A typical day for her can include everything from strategic planning to analyzing email or social media performance to drafting that urgent press release you just told her about five minutes ago. It is all about results.

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