

Top Tips on How to Exhibit by Paul Webster, Webster Consultancy

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The Stand – what you get

The walls are 2.44m high (8') and covered in a light grey fabric that accepts the hooked Velcro so posters, panels and certain light products can be fixed direct to the walls.

The fascias are blue and will carry a white panel with your name in black in standard type. There will be a 5' fluorescent tube behind the fascia sufficient to light the stand. 13 amp sockets are not supplied as standard. They can be ordered direct from the electricians if required.

The floor of the whole hall, including the stands, will be carpeted. Furniture is not provided, although there are basic folding banqueting chairs available at the venue. 6' trestle tables are also available free at the venue, but please bear in mind these are too wide for most stands ie a 2metre wide stand is 6'6" wide. I recommend that you either bring your own furniture or buy from Argos or IKEA and keep for future exhibitions. A number of exhibitors are doing this now and it is very cost effective.

4' trestle tables and table covers will be available for hire. This is a far more suitable size.

The Stand - What you need

Firstly, you will need graphics. These could be in the form of roll up displays, pop ups or panels. Roll ups (or banner displays) are inexpensive, easy to carry and can be used many times. Typical cost would be around £50 plus design charges. Pop ups, the large curved metal framed displays that have PVC panels fixed to them on site can be a problem. They are usually larger than most exhibitors expect them to be and quite often don't fit on the stand. If you have a pop up and wish to use it, set it up and measure the overall length and depth and check against the size of the stand you have booked. Panels can be used in two ways – either panels of around 800mm x 600mm portrait that can be fixed on to the individual wall panels that are 1 m wide or by applying large panels that completely cover the stand walls. This second method can be very attractive but obviously costs rather more to produce. Then you have to store them and make sure you have the same size stand at future shows to get full value. Please check with the organisers the actual size of the walls to be covered in this way.

What goes on the panel is even more important. The message should be short, the headline should capture the essence of what you offer and there should be little copy – maybe a few bullet points after that. Your name and web address are also important. The main message should ideally be positioned between 3' from the floor and 6' from the floor so that it can be easily seen. People walk past stands quickly. You have to catch their attention in seconds. Benefits please, not features. They only want to know what you can do to help them...and it must be visible.

Furniture. You will need some furniture, but not much. The stands are quite small so check the size of your stand before you order or buy furniture. Pedestal tables are quite useful for displaying lap tops or PCs – a good height for viewing. Trestle tables should be covered with a decent quality table cover ideally in a colour that suits your brand, down to the floor at the front and sides so that under the table can be used for storage and you keep the stand tidy. A white table cloth is not impressive.

Plasma screens. These will need a stand and this will take up floor space. Smaller versions you may be able to fix to the wall, but you will need the contractor to help – the walls are not that strong.

An attraction is important. The plasma screen or TV will give you messages, colour, movement, light and sound – the ideal combination to get attention. Games, competitions, sweets, food or drink samples all help pull people to your stand.

Power sockets. If you need a socket, ask the electricians to bring the supply down in the corner of the stand of the leading edge of the side walls or a pole so that the socket ends up close to where it is needed but you don't want conduit running down the centre of the wall as it gets in the way of your graphics.

Giveaways. Can be a useful reminder of your presence at the show, but I prefer giveaways that relate to what you do rather than just giving a pen or a mug for the sake of it.

Literature. Don't give away expensive literature. If you do have a leaflet keep it simple, just to act as a reminder of what you do. It's good to be able to follow up with something more substantial to those that are really interested. If you have a brochure and want to give it out, make sure it goes to people who sound interested. Brochures cost money to produce.

Check List

Pens, pad, box for business cards, giveaway, competition, attraction, show offer, leaflet. Have a prepared pad where you can note name, contact details or clip a card and make a note of their interest, what they were interested in ,how serious was the enquiry and mark HOT, WARM, MAYBE.

This is about you

Dress smart or branded casual.

Clean shoes, smart hair, clean nails, clean shoes.

Preferably no garlic the night before.

Try not to be alone on the stand, you will need a break – to eat, for the toilet, and importantly to get a few minutes fresh air.

Ladies - you might want to consider the height of your heels. It's quite tough being on your feet all day.

Set up the afternoon before. Make sure you have everything you need. Why rush in on the morning of the show, in a panic, not knowing where you are going, having forgotten something important, getting in a bad mood and starting your day in completely the wrong frame of mind.

How to behave on the stand – some dos and don'ts

Smile! Greet visitors with a genuine smile. Make eye contact. You might want to stand just off your stand or at least at the front so that visitors don't have to make the decision to come on to the stand.

Ask them about their business, find out a little about them, what they are looking for, problems or issues they might have, then you are more likely to know whether you can help them.

Treat the show rather as you would a networking event, somewhere where you can talk freely to people without going into a full sales pitch. You have all your sales material there, so can do this if it seems relevant, but don't go straight in with a pitch. It is rarely welcomed and generally doesn't work.

Don't

Eat on your stand

Spend hours on the mobile

Read the paper.

Who will approach you when you are 'otherwise engaged'?

You could miss the one person that could be really important to you.

Don't worry about 'rent-a-crowd'. You don't need hordes of people. You are probably only able to speak to 25-30 people during the day and you need to do that with the right people. You need to come away with a small number of quality leads not scores of cards that won't do anything for you.

Some interesting pointers

Don't spend too long talking to time wasters, but always be polite. You never know. You can't always judge by appearances. Always leave the door open.

Welcome your customers. They are your ambassadors. They are good to have on the stand. They make it look busy (and that's an attraction in itself). But maybe don't have them on for too long. You could miss a potential new customer.

What to do when visitors come on to your stand and start selling to you...because some do at every show. Ask them for their card, say you are a bit busy (or make up an excuse if you are not). If they really persist, tell them you have paid to be there and sell, why didn't they take a stand too. We will have panels in the hall requesting visitors not to sell to exhibitors.

If it goes quiet – and it often does towards the end of the afternoon – talk to the other exhibitors. They won't mind. You have all paid to be there to get new leads and other exhibitors can be a very good source of new business, partnerships or joint ventures. We will hold a drinks reception towards the end of the afternoon to encourage networking between the exhibitors and the visitors in the hall. Don't leave before the show closes. It's discourteous – and you could miss a really useful lead. I have seen it happen. At one show, I asked an exhibitor not to leave early, they stayed – and they thanked me for the advice as they picked up a big order in the last five minutes.

Before the Show

Invite your database including your customers. They will expect to be invited and they will be your best ambassadors at the show. You might also be able to sell them services other than the ones they know you for. This happens quite a lot and is an opportunity not to be missed.

Use every means at your disposal to attract visitors to your stand at the show...emails, social media, press releases, a flash on existing adverts ('See us on stand no..') a note on your website, a note at the bottom of your emails. Organisers generally do everything they can to attract visitors, but the very best shows are those where all the exhibitors, speakers, sponsors – everyone – gets behind the

event to spread the word. This makes for a better, busier show for everyone involved. It costs nothing and it will make the show more valuable to you.

After the Show

Follow up your leads. Most business is generated after the show. So many times I have heard exhibitors say they got nothing from the show, then 3 or 6 months later tell me about the sales that came in later. Following up the leads is essential and it must be done very quickly – 24 – 48 hours at the most. **READ ON....**

A major survey in the exhibition industry found that 83% of exhibitors went to exhibitions to get new leads. They also discovered that 79% of leads were never followed up. This is a tragic waste of investment. The follow up is where the sales come from; no follow up... no sales.

Enjoy the show – and if you have any questions, please contact me, at any time.

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