



Turning Trade Shows into New Business Machines

Most agencies know trade shows from the vantage point of their clients: designing booth graphics and/or attending shows on behalf of a client.

Having talked with, or worked with 100's of agency principals over the past three years, I've heard many say about trade shows: "I've tried to prospect at trade shows, but I often feel like I'm invading a prospect's space". Or say, "I find it hard to organize a plan that makes it worth my while during the show. I'm simply too busy".

With the economy struggling, referrals and networking slowing, and cost of travel increasing, using trade shows as a new business generating machine is a shrewd and fiscally sound approach for agencies. Whether it's building your own internal effort or using programs like RSW's TSI (Trade Show Impact) program, prospecting at shows can be a very productive use of resources for agencies.

Key to success is creating a well-organized, consistent and compelling program that is highly likely to motivate prospects to want to meet with you.

Key is sticking with your plan. Don't send out one letter or only make one call. Get your new business development person or your outsourced new business development firm on task and focused on making the program work. Key is getting prospects to commit to specific times/locations for meetings...otherwise they aren't going to be as likely to take the time to meet with you.

And key is sending materials prior to the show to warm up prospects, confirming meeting times just prior to the show, and following up in a timely and consistent manner after the show.

Here are the steps used in the TSI program when working with our clients to maximize their potential coming out of shows:

- Identify the trade shows that are best aligned with your strongest categories.
- Identify prospects off of last year's trade show list that you want to target.
- Identify marketing prospects in these companies (in our case we also call to confirm their attendance at the show).
- Create a compelling/differentiating communication strategy (or as we call it, "Brand Story") and carry that messaging throughout all outreach to prospects (letters, collateral, messaging).
- Send prospects information about your agency (either via mail or email).
- Call (and email) to alert the prospect know that you've sent them something.
- Once you connect (or even if you don't) first try and engage them in meaningful conversation about their business and about your ideas/insights on how you can help.
- Once you've engaged, see if they'd be amenable to a meeting at the show.
- Send them a note thanking them and confirming the meeting with them.
- Call and confirm just prior to the show.
- Have a successful meeting!
- Follow-up after the show. Usually the second hardest part about prospecting is closing the deal after the initial meeting. So key is staying with the prospect after the show. Send articles, send collateral, make calls, stay with them! They just met a lot of people at the show.

So while face-to-face meetings (or calls) when only one-on-one is the ideal state of affairs, capitalizing on trade shows to meet many is a good way to go. After all, prospecting is a bit of a numbers game, so hitting large numbers at a trade show, meeting new people and following up with new, fresh connects after the show contributes to the potential for new business success.

Again, key are the "3 C's" ... consistency, consistency, consistency. Consistency of messaging, consistency of outreach, and consistency of the methodology used to reach out. Absent of the "3 C's," your trade show effort will be far less than productive and could verge on a bit of a disappointment.

About RSW

Reardon Smith Whittaker is a lead generation and agency branding consultancy that operates like a virtual new business development group to help agencies build pipelines of qualified new business opportunities and more effectively position themselves in the marketplace. RSW recently launched its Trade Show Impact (TSI) program to the agency community. This 3-month program helps agencies significantly improve their prospecting potential going into and coming out of targeted industry trade shows. More information can be accessed at www.rswus.com or by calling 513.559.3101. Sneider can be contacted at mark@rswus.com.



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