

Boothmanship Basics

Whether you are a trade show rookie debuting in a “ten-by-ten” or a seasoned show veteran with dozens of shows exhibiting in a “fifty-by-fifty island,” the purposes of attending trade shows are the same: to increase sales; generate leads; network; and enhance brand awareness of your company or products. To accomplish these goals, the physical booth must attract the appropriate attendee while your sales team must connect with them to close the deal onsite.

Boothmanship is the art of combining booth design and booth etiquette to attract, connect and win over attendees. These skills help eliminate many often over-looked and self-imposed barriers to attracting attendees out of the aisles and into your booth. By following some simple and not-so-obvious Boothmanship DOs and DON'Ts provided by the Craft & Hobby Association you can get more people into your booth where they can go from “attendee” to “customer” with a little encouragement from your sales team.

Booth Etiquette: Making a great first impression

DO:

Show up early to prepare.

Treat each day as opening day – show up early to get settled in your booth, make sure displays and items are organized and be relaxed and ready to greet the first customer.

Put cell phone on vibrate.

Even if you never answer the phone while in the booth, a ringing cell phone leaves the impression you have other more important things you need to be doing.

Turn your watch face to inside your wrist.

Running a booth is just like running your business and time is important. However, checking your watch will give the impression that you have better things to do than talk to your prospects. A watch turned in allows you to sneak looks without being obvious about it.

Be engaging; ask open ended questions.

Stand at the edge of the booth on the aisle and greet attendees by smiling and making eye contact. Effective openers invite conversation. The standard “how are you” will more often than not result in a response of “fine” as your prospect walks down the aisle and away from your booth. Instead ask “what’s the craziest thing you have seen today?” or “what solution are you looking for today?”

Dress appropriately.

Your attire should be in keeping with your company culture and booth theme, but should also relate to your attendee. If attendees are dressed in casual pants and gold shirts, a salesperson in a suit and tie can be intimidating.

Wear comfortable shoes.

This is part of dressing appropriately but definitely deserves its own category. Trade show floors are uncomfortable. Comfortable shoes will keep staffers happy and will allow them to better resist the urge to sit down to rest. Sitting staffers will see fewer prospects.

Know your booth, know the show.

Know where items are placed in the booth. If you have to look around for a sample or catalog or even a working pen, the impression is you are not prepared. Know how to answer basic attendee questions about the show floor. Where are food courts and bathrooms, where is the Keynote and when? These non-product conversation pieces are a great way to engage an attendee or keep one from wandering too far.

DON'T:

Cross your arms or put your hands in your pockets.

Remember every booth staffer is a stranger to the attendee. Negative body language creates the impression you don't want to be approached. These non-verbal signals will send attendees to friendlier booth staffers – in your competitor's booth!

Bad mouth competitors or show management.

An attendee who has travelled to a trade show finds value in that show and the exhibitors there – this includes your competition. Attendees want to hear how great your product is and how it can help them solve their business problems.

Leave the booth unattended.

A trade show is an interactive experience. Attendees will walk right by an unmanned booth – they do not pick up literature from tables with “Take One” signs. Be sure to schedule breaks and lunches so that there is always adequate staff in the booth.

Eat or drink in the booth.

If you must eat in the booth do so in a private or closed off area. No one will approach someone who is eating. If you must keep drinks in the booth – keep them out of sight under counters or in cupboards.

Check email, voicemail or read in the booth.

While your business goes on outside the trade show, and we must all stay connected to the home office, checking email or voicemail while in the booth sends the signal that you are busy and shouldn't be disturbed. Plan times/breaks for checking message and retuning important calls.

Sit down.

Standing allows you to engage the attendees, and once engaged, moving into the booth with subconsciously get them moving into the booth as well. If you must sit, use stools, which allow you to maintain eye level contact.

Hand out brochures first.

Inexperienced staffers often hand out brochures as a way of greeting. This does not encourage conversation, and often the attendee will say thank you and leave thinking they have all they need. Additionally, most brochures are discarded by attendees unless they remember the interaction with the staffer as valuable. Brochures should be a way to close a conversation and promote follow up action.