

How to Reach your Current Clients at Conventions and Trade Shows

Expanding your focus and improving your results

by Robyn Davis, When I Need Help

Although many exhibitors will tell you they are focused solely on generating new leads and cultivating new business at conventions and trade shows, by ignoring the opportunity to engage existing clients, they are missing out on an opportunity to improve results. Statistics say it is five times more expensive to acquire a new client than it is to keep a current client. At the same time, experts suggest you contact your current clients between once a month and once every two weeks to stay in the forefront of their minds. Keep your current clients and improve your frequency of contact by expanding your focus to include these clients in your efforts as an exhibitor at upcoming conventions and trade shows.

As you are making your preparations for an upcoming event, you will want to consider your client list. First determine which clients are based in the immediate area or between your office and the host city and then consider which clients may be planning to attend the event.

For clients who are not currently planning on attending your event but are based in the same city, reach out to let them know you are coming to town. Then, utilize this time to connect by offering free expo hall tickets (if available – check with the Event Management first to be sure), inviting them to an evening reception you are hosting/sponsoring, or setting up another time to meet outside of booth hours. You may even consider extending your trip by a day or two to plan for meetings with clients nearby or along the path you travel to get there. If it makes more sense, consider driving so you can visit these clients on the way. Although you may miss your airline miles, your clients will appreciate your extra effort in providing personal, face-to-face attention and your finance department will appreciate the budget conscious way you are accomplishing a number of client visits in one extended trip.

For clients who are also attendees, start by including them in your pre-show marketing efforts. In the time leading up to the event, send them a tailored version of the e-mails, physical mailers, and other communications you have already prepared for prospective clients. Inviting them to come by and receive a special gift (even if the special gift is not expensive) or an extra entry in your sweepstakes, for example, will make your clients feel appreciated.

Once your clients come into the booth to enjoy whatever your pre-show marketing efforts have promised, you can introduce them to key company personnel and highlight some of your new offerings which may be of specific interest to them. If you happen to have prospective clients in your booth that may benefit from a quick conversation, an introduction may be appropriate but only if your happy client is happy to share a few kind words.

Keep your visits inside the booth brief so as not to distract from the business at hand (greeting and quickly conveying your value proposition to attendees) and to conserve space (so that other meetings, demonstrations, or even just brief conversations can take place). If your company has access to a meeting room, you can use that to continue your discussion or iron out details for a new contract. However, most of your existing clients will probably prefer a meeting somewhere less formal when possible (keep reading for more on this).

After leaving your booth, one option is to escort your clients around the exhibit hall, introducing them to vendors who may be useful to their business and providing advice as to those who may not. This can be a helpful way to get to know your clients even better if you take full advantage of it. Be sure to listen to the comments they make and the questions they ask – this way you can better tailor your future conversations according to their current needs as you observe them even if they are not able or willing to verbalize them to you.

Another option is to attend a pertinent session with your clients. During the session, you will both learn about some of the current industry trends and/or gain a more in depth understanding of a specific topic of interest. As before, pay attention during the session and make notes as needed so you can, not only answer your client's questions, but also provide your own insight as to how your company can help to improve their results in this area or one related to it (for any session you would attend with a client, there should be direct relevance or a logical jump from the session content to your company's offerings).

Outside of booth hours, be sure to take advantage of the time you have. Remembering that you are on a business trip for work, not enjoying a vacation, will be the key to your success at any event. First, plan to take full advantage of your meal times by scheduling each of your breakfasts, lunches, and dinners as time to meet with clients. You may even consider hosting an evening reception to maximize your visibility with many of your current and prospective clients at once (this can be especially time and cost effective if you have many clients in attendance but only a few days in town).

On the other hand, while you are working, you can incorporate a little fun. Many clients would love to attend a local sporting event or meet up for drinks – think about putting together a foursome for golf, inviting your clients up to your corporate box seats at the baseball/basketball/hockey/other game, or meeting down at the hotel bar during cocktail hour. As long as you remain professional and these encounters take place outside of booth hours, you are only adding to your potential for results.

Finally, after the event, follow up as soon as possible. Thank your clients for taking the time to meet with you and refresh their memory as to any relevant information you had discussed. Deepening your professional relationship with current clients is essential – as they say, people do business with people they know and like. With these tips, you can expand your focus to use your next convention or trade show as another opportunity to remind your clients why they continue working with you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Robyn Davis is an accomplished event hostess and experienced marketing consultant... she is here when you need help! Robyn has more than ten years of leadership experience and a well rounded background. Offering on-site sales and marketing support to exhibitors and pre-/post-event consulting services, Robyn is definitely not just a stereotypical “Booth Bunny.”

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