

WORKING THE FLOOR... FIVE STEPS TO BETTER BOOTH INTERACTION

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About the author

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How many leads did your staff bring back to the office after your last trade show? Were your sales people able to initiate the sales cycle by booking appointments with these prospects? By training your booth staff to treat trade show interactions as what I call "speed networking", you can significantly increase your return on investment.

Speed networking is designed to make your staff more productive. This form of networking should not be confused with that practiced at business networking functions, where the main purpose is meet people. Trade shows are not about meeting people; they are about collecting qualified leads.

The ideal speed networking interaction should last five to seven minutes, during which your staff must engage and qualify a prospect, present a solution, plan follow-up and disengage. Use this five-step approach to collect more and better quality leads at your next trade show.

Engage

Never allow your staff hang out in the back of your exhibit, waiting for people to come into the booth. Move them forward and encourage them to make eye contact with people passing by. Booth staff should stand, rather than sit, ideally within two to three feet of the aisle. Attendees who are interested in your offering will slow down and examine your booth. This is the moment to engage them by asking a business-focused question.

Qualify

Use the first minute you spend with an attendee to ensure that they are indeed a prospect. Develop a series of qualifying questions based on your company's customer profile. Make sure your staff listen carefully to the answers so they can discern what information about your company will be most relevant to present if they are successful in qualifying the prospect. If the attendee doesn't qualify as a prospective buyer, your staff should disengage (see step 5 below) and move on to the next prospect.

Present

Throw your generic "elevator pitch" out the window. Instead, customize your presentation to your prospect's business. Provide them with a solution that addresses the concerns they have expressed in your qualifying discussion. Ideally, your booth staff should possess an extremely good knowledge of your products or services as well as the solutions you have delivered to customers. Case studies are an excellent tool to educate your prospect. The more you have at your fingertips, the better.

Follow-up

If you fail to plan any future interaction with the person you just spent four to six minutes educating, you've completely missed the boat. Discuss when and how the follow-up will take place, as well as who will be doing it, and be sure to follow through. Make notes so none of the details are forgotten. That way, if someone else is handling the follow-up, they'll know exactly what to do and when.

Dis-engage

Not surprisingly, disengaging is what people generally find most difficult about speed networking. A lot of us are not comfortable ending a conversation in business and worry that we are being rude. Remember that you are at the trade show to talk to as many qualified prospects as possible. Disengage by telling your visitor that you enjoyed your conversation and thanking them for stopping by your booth. This is far from rude. In fact, with a well-structured interaction, you're more likely to send them away happy.