

TRADESHOW SECURITY

The main purpose of attending a trade show is to highlight the work of your company to a new audience. While the temptation is to show “everything” you have, be careful to safeguard critical intellectual property in this open environment. This is especially true when exhibiting outside of North America where the rules of conduct and ethics are quite different. Some of the tactics that you and your sales forces should be aware of are:

You may be approached by both overt and covert collectors of competitive information. Some will be the sales people from your competitor companies and still others may be friends of a competitor who have been asked to collect information on your company.

You may receive invitations to sponsored hospitality suites where conversations tend to be less guarded in this casual environment where liquor is usually served. The rooms could be “wired” to collect information that is more freely stated in casual conversation.

You should never leave anything in your hotel room that could be valuable to your competitors. It is not unheard of for rooms to be searched by competitors, especially during events such as the opening and closing of the show, social mixers and the main award banquet.

Hotel staff may be “persuaded” to retain copies of faxes and other documents sent through the hotel’s business center. Always ask yourself if the document can wait until you get home.

During a tradeshow your exhibit may be visited by customers who ask unusually detailed questions concerning marketing, regulatory affairs, status of the product introduction and even proprietary technical information. Your staff has every right to be suspicious of these detailed questions.

If you take a computer to the tradeshow, clear off all valuable information on the hard drive and make sure that the information you do need for the show is on a CD. This way, you can take all your information with you when you leave the booth overnight.

You must also safeguard any prototype products that you have at the show. Never leave them in the booth overnight where they could be copied or stolen.

If you have a “draw box” or other lead collection system in place, make sure that someone is responsible for taking these leads on the show floor and safeguarding them. Once again, this is information that your competitors would want to have if for no other reason than to keep it from you!

It is sad to think that these security steps are required, but in today’s business climate, they are a reality.

About the Author

Brian Keobke, CME, is Senior Exhibit Marketing Specialist for The Portables, Canada’s largest exhibit and graphics company. Brian is a Certified Manager of Exhibits (CME) and a 17 year veteran of the tradeshow industry. Brian consults, develops and trains companies and their staff in the art of effective tradeshow marketing and exhibit design. Brian’s articles have appeared in newspapers and magazines across the country. To receive additional articles or to book an in-person seminar, please call 1.800.663.1737 or email displays@theportables.com. Articles also appear online at www.theportables.com.