

10 tips on how to be a successful - ie profitable - exhibitor by Noelle Walsh, Director of The Value for Money Co Ltd www.ukgrandsales.co.uk

1 **Smile!**

2 **Never sit down**

Don't even have a chair on your stand or you may be tempted to. Customers are standing and they like to be face to face with standholders. Even if you do intend to get up when interest is shown, some customers will have walked by when they see you sitting there rather than bother you.

3 **Use your complimentary tickets**

Most organisers give you a certain number of complimentary tickets to give to your own customers. You may say, why should I do the organiser's job for him/her? Aren't they supposed to bring in the customers? But if you have a customer who has been to that show before or who lives in the area and has bought from you before, why wouldn't you try and encourage them to come back and buy again? A handful of our exhibitors ask for more comps where they have a good database in that area and the results speak for themselves. One company told me that her comp customers always come to her stand first before they shop elsewhere so within an hour of the show opening, she has usually taken her stand costs and so the pressure is off. This particular company send out about 400 comps at one show where they are very popular in the local area and usually get about a 40% response rate, which is astonishing when you consider that a 1-2% response rate is considered good in this industry. Another company with a high ticket price product only exhibits at shows in areas where they have had meaningful enquiries. They send these enquirers complimentary tickets, followed up by phone calls or emails expressing their hope that they will see them shortly at the show and can now pretty much guarantee that all their shows will be very profitable.

4 **Organise a competition on your stand**

It's difficult to ask *everyone* who comes on your stand for their name and email. (Hopefully, you are getting contact details from those who actually buy from you.) One way to collect more data is to organise a competition on your stand and make sure you promote it. For example, you're a garden designer charging £500 minimum for a basic design. Offer one basic design in a competition to be drawn on the last day of the show. Collect names and addresses (one exhibitor at a 4 day show collected 750 good quality contact details this way and had two firm substantial orders within two days of the end of the show) and towards the end of the show, ask the organiser to draw the winning name. Get someone to photograph you and the organiser doing this, send the photo to your local paper and to the winner's with a short 'press release' on you and the competition and you may even get some good publicity for your company as well as all those names. Follow up by emailing all the 'losers' with the pic of the draw and apologising for the fact they didn't win and perhaps even offering an extra bonus in the form of, say, £50 worth of free plants for orders placed within a week over a certain level. Follow up again a month later and again three months later. Then email them all the following year when you are hopefully exhibiting at the show again with an offer of complimentary tickets.

5 Do your homework – ask the organiser for the show demographics

You need to know what sort of people usually visit a show in order to be able to focus your products appropriately. Audiences change each day so it would be helpful to know if they get older or younger, for instance. Don't necessarily keep your stand looking the same each day – if an audience gets younger, then make sure that products more likely to attract them are pushed more to the forefront. In my experience, most shows start off with their most upmarket audience. Though that's not necessarily true of shows where big ticket items such as sofas or garden buildings are the main products where a decision may only be made by a couple who can only visit at weekends (which tend to be the final days) .

6 Check out testimonials from other exhibitors on the organisers' website

Look at what other exhibitors say about shows on the organiser's websites. They should give contact details for the company giving the testimonial or you can google their name – email or ring them and ask their opinion. Bear in mind what they are selling, though. If they had a good show selling cheap and cheerful items and you are selling high-price products, this may not help you in your decision making!

7 Have a come-in product price level

Your main product may be a high price item such as a sofa or specialist lamp or fur coat or leather boots. Try and have another one or group of products that are at a much lower price level which will bring in customers to your stand so that you can start building a relationship with them and find out more about them which you can use to sell to them. You may not make a sale this time but you have at least been able to communicate, tell them about your products, hopefully even taken their details so you can follow up.

8 Dress your stand

If you're exhibiting at a home and garden show, for instance, customers expect you to look good. Why should they buy a decorative accessory which they hope will enhance the look of their home from you if you can't even make your own stand look attractive? I don't think it's any different with fashion. Have you even seen two stands at a show – one beautifully presented, the other just a row of rails - both selling some of the same products but the former stand selling them at 20% higher prices than the latter? And getting away with it. It's all a matter of environment. Customers are often willing to pay more for the same item if they feel happier about the environment they bought it in. They feel that it says something about them, something good!

9 Collect names and addresses of customers (see competition above) and put them on your database as soon as you come back from a show and then follow up. Write to them and say you hope they enjoyed the show. Perhaps make them a special offer to buy from you now. Or give them a list of other shows you will be attending that year. *Remember, though, that names and addresses, including email addresses, are personal data and must be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act – check the Information Commissioner's website if you are unclear: <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>*

10 Don't rush off the second the show closes – or, worse, start packing up half an hour before it closes. There are almost always still customers at the show which has been advertised as being open until a certain time. While there may be only a few customers, they are obviously still there because they like the products on offer and haven't finished their shopping yet. Exhibitors have told me of last-minute sales they made which transformed

the day from being an also-ran into a one-of-the-best. At one show a few years back, one customer spent £7,000 on a stand in the last 20 minutes.