

Tradeshow Tips ~ Good Shows in Bad Times: Exhibiting When Your Industry Is In Crisis

Right now, chances are you'd rather be in any industry than mortgages and home loans. A few months ago, pet foods were on the hot seat, and a good while before that, high tech was under a laser beam of disgruntled scrutiny. And have you noticed how many tradeshows are being cancelled in these hard economic times? Do you think that is a good idea or a bad idea? Do you still want to continue to market your business? Of course you do!

Every industry has its good times, when there's a lot of positive public buzz and money flows like champagne. However, every industry also has its bad times, where scandal and recall and bad business decisions can hamstring an entire sector. What do you do when this happens to you? Is it possible to turn in a great tradeshow performance when everything else is going wrong? Is exhibiting even necessary during these bleak periods?

The answers to these questions may surprise you. Read on to discover what you need to know:

Here are five strategies you can take when your industry is the one facing hard times.

Number One: The Show Must Go On

The first step is the simplest. Keep exhibiting! Many times when times are tough and money is in short supply, the tradeshow budget takes the first hit. This can be a very bad decision.

Attendees know full well that the industry's having a rough time long before they get to the tradeshow. They read the same papers you do and face the same challenges you're encountering.

When they come to the show, attendees are looking for two things: what's new and exciting -- and in times of trouble, who's still at the show. Maintaining a presence at the tradeshow is a powerful, tangible way to say, "We're still here, we're still a player, and we'll still be here when this slump passes."

Forgo the show and you're saying that your company doesn't have the staying power or ability of its competitors. This is one case where out of sight is quite literally out of mind. Maintaining a presence -- even if it's a downsized, circumspect one -- is essential.

Number Two: Take Your Head Out of the Sand

It's important to acknowledge the reality of the industry situation. Attempting to ignore the facts and act as if everything were business as usual can come off as ignorant, wishful thinking.

However, the focus should be solution oriented. Position your organization as the one with the vision and strength to lead the way out of the current morass -- or at a minimum, survive it with your head held high.

One way to do this is via educational programming. Hosting a speaker or conducting a seminar specifically pinpointing the challenges facing the industry is a great way to showcase yourself as an innovative, problem-solving, forward thinking organization, rather than one bound to the whims of the marketplace.

Number Three: Be Positive

It's important that your exhibit team display a positive, upbeat attitude. There are two reasons for this:

1. People are attracted to cheerful, optimistic people. A good attitude conveys confidence and faith in the future -- traits that appeal to customers, vendors, potential partners and investors. No one wants to enter a relationship with someone who doesn't believe in themselves -- and exhibiting is all about relationship building. Position yourself and your organization as a company that's ready and willing to face and overcome the current challenges.

2. Business is by its nature cyclical. There will be up times and down times, no matter what field you're in. You can't tie your organization's success to that of the market as a whole. Carrying on and making the best decisions possible in the light of circumstances is the method "winners" use -- and they bring that methodology to the show floor.

Number Four: Emphasize Value

Be sensitive to the challenges attendees are facing. If you're having a hard time in business, chances are that they are too. This is an opportunity to focus on the value your products and services provide to the attendee -- showcase exactly what they'll get for their money.

During economic downturns, buyers tend to be more price sensitive. Other motivations fall by the wayside before the pressure of the bottom line. Recognize this by focusing your campaign on value.

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Number Five: Take Notes

Competitive intelligence is always important, but seldom as much so as when an entire sector hits hard times. Fortunes can be made and lost in the blink of an eye, which is why it is important to keep a careful eye on what your competitors are doing.

Make sure to have one or two qualified staffers walk the show and gather market intelligence. They should take note of who's there and perhaps more importantly, who isn't. What are staffers saying? How are they saying it? A staffer's level of engagement is often directly proportionate to their faith in their employer -- if they're dour and downbeat, they might be convinced that the future is bleak.

Don't miss out on networking opportunities at this point. Keep ears and eyes open and mouths closed as much as possible - you'll often hear inside information after hours that would never be shared on the show floor.

Intelligence gathered at shows can help your organization make effective strategic decisions to ride out the industry downturn with some degree of comfort and style.

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