

**Tradeshow Tips ~  
Exhibit Inspiration ~  
Where do the ideas come from, gambling VS planning.**

Where does inspiration come from? Why do some exhibitors consistently come up with creative, eye-catching, effective displays while others have a table with a skirt banner and some brochures? How do people know what to say when they're standing on the floor? Are some people born exhibitors, blessed with a salesmanship gene?

I don't think so. Effective exhibiting is learned, not instinctual. However, some of the lessons you need to learn don't come neatly delivered in a classroom setting.

If you find yourself in need of inspiration, try the following:

- Attend a show outside of your own industry. If you're a high tech guru, go to a craft or apparel show. What can you learn from their decidedly more organic approach? If you're a crafter, what could you pick up from a trip to Silicon Valley?
- Bring a newbie to your industry show. After you've been to a dozen industry events, you tend to get a little jaded. A set of 'Baby Eyes' without preconceived notions, can pick up on items you might never even notice.
- Talk to the youngest employee. It doesn't matter if they work in the shipping department or they're interning with the comptroller. Ask for an hour of their time and pick their brain. What music do they listen to? What shows do they watch? How do they spend their time? Repeat the exercise with your oldest employee.
- Get on the web. Google some keywords related to your industry and follow a handful of random links. Let your curiosity be your guide: where will your clicking bring you?

Inspiration can't be purchased, but it can be actively pursued. Open your mind and look beyond your usual arena to seek out new exhibiting ideas. The best ideas can come from the strangest places — but you have to look for them.

When it comes to how you find inspiration for your business at a tradeshow, think of this. Are you a gambler rather than a planner? If you turned on the local news recently, there's a better than even chance that you'd see a story covering a huge jackpot in the state lottery. When it is huge, like several hundred million dollars, people line up at convenience stores across the state, hoping against hope to cash in and win big.

There are basically two types of people: gamblers and planners. Both would like to have the big bag of cash, but they take different routes to achieve it. A gambler might plunk down a dollar — or two, or twenty, or two hundred — in hopes of winning big in a lottery, while the planner follows a less exciting route of saving and investing. At the end of the day, who's more likely to have the big bucks? Chances are it's likely to be the planner.

Tradeshow exhibiting works the same way. You can gamble on having a good show, approaching it in a frenzy because 'everybody's doing it' and you've heard there's big money to be had, or you can approach it methodically, making a plan, doing your research, and making those actions that are prudent and will improve your bottom line.

Some gamblers win. That's what keeps lotteries going, after all. Some exhibitors show up with only half an idea of what they're doing, a horrible exhibit and only fledgling show skills, and yet still have a triumphant show. But the odds are against most gamblers. For every winner, there are thousands of losers. For every successful 'We just wing it' exhibitor, there are hundreds who look at the time and effort expended and realize they could have done much, much better — if only they'd taken the time to learn what they should be doing.

The choice is yours: do you want to gamble on your tradeshow success? Do you feel lucky? Or will you take the time and effort to find inspiration to make the greatest opportunity of this type of marketing?

