

ME PRODUCTIONS

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Q&A
SMART ANSWERS
By Karen E. Klein



Deidre Underwood
ME Productions

How to Put on a Show

First, find some exhibitors. These hints may help this event coordinator to persuade more of them to sign up for consumer expos

Q: I am an event coordinator who organizes business expos where entrepreneurs can display their products or services in public venues, such as shopping malls. We have done Internet marketing, newspaper ads, flyers, posters, and radio ads, as well as cold-calling, faxing, and e-mail. So far, none of the marketing methods has generated enough interest from companies wanting to book space at my events. What would be the right avenue for us to generate more business? -- M.E.M., Illinois

A: If you've done a lot of marketing and still are not generating "enough interest," you may need to rethink your business model or find a way to reduce your operating expenses. Perhaps you have based your company on unrealistic projections about how many customers you could attract?

Another thought: You have tried everything to bring in new business, but how long have you been at it? If your business is relatively young, you may be on the right track but you simply haven't built in enough time for your expos to catch on. Starting a business can be slow going. You've also got a tough target audience: Entrepreneurs are notoriously tight on marketing --

particularly during economic downturns such as we have seen over the past three years. And when a private company cuts its budget, items perceived as "expensive extras" -- such as attending tradeshow and expos -- are among the first to get the ax.



TIGHTER FOCUS? "Clearly, you've tried many different avenues to communicate and advertise, while trying to stay within a budget. So, it might be the message, not the mode, that is the problem," suggests Linda Hamburger, an event planner with ME Productions. "In this case, it might help to consult with an agency or PR professional to ensure that your ads and brochures are well developed and consistent."

You might also reexamine whether you are hitting the right target market with your ad campaign, and also take a look at where your leads are coming from. "Maybe this campaign is aiming too wide and the contacts should be generated from businesses that have already participated in similar shows," Hamburger suggests.

Also, be careful also about how you position the business expos. For instance, while you want to aim for a unifying theme, participants also need to be assured that they won't be set up side-by-side with competitors. "For example, health fairs often generate a lot of interest from a variety of businesses and physical therapy offices," says Hamburger. "This type of expo can include many participants with an assurance that direct competitors won't be vying for the same passers-by."

SHOPPING FOR VENUES. "Ride the wave," advises Deidre Underwood, also of ME Productions. "Find out what major conferences are coming to town, and then tie your show in to those particular themes. For example, the Miami boat show attracts 150,000. A nearby mall could feature boating-related products at that same time."

And remember, all malls are not the same. A retail center featuring anchor stores such as Neiman Marcus or Saks differs markedly from a mall catering mainly to families with children and featuring toy stores, indoor recreation venues, and movie theaters. "So, matching an event to the mall it is held in is yet another way to help assure a return on investment for your prospects," Hamburger says. perceived as "expensive extras" -- such as attending trade shows and expos -- are among the first to get the ax.

Overcoming The Fear Factor

With the specter of terrorism continuing to impact business gatherings, an expert has some thoughts on seminars and

Q: Can you give some specific ideas as to what might help?

A: Here are some things people can do to help compensate in these difficult times:

