

## Communication is the key to gaining support for your exhibit program.

## Gaining—and Keeping— Corporate Support

**Bv Margit Weisgal** 

oo often, exhibit managers operate without authority or accountability, and with little support from senior management. The reasons vary, but the reality is that exhibit marketing is not always well-understood.

Other internal marketing communications are more visible or produce quantifiable results. In the case of trade shows, traceable outcome can take years with actual sales occurring only through combined efforts.

For an exhibit manager, gaining corporate support takes a lot of time and a lot more effort. The primary job is making an invisible task visible in terms of expenditures and accomplishments. The answer lies in stronger communication. You need to keep management informed of pre-show planning, expectations, and results.

First, conduct an internal survey to find out where you stand. The easiest way is to provide multiple choice answers that let colleagues and managers define their perceptions. Questions could include:

- 1. What is the purpose of our trade show exhibit?
- 2. Rank objectives in order of importance.
- 3. Who makes the buying decision among our customers?

Examine shows in which you already participate to ensure the message you're sending is a message your audience needs to hear. Combine the results and present your report to top management. Incorporate colleagues' desires so that no one will be able to say they didn't have a finger in the end result.

Now the burden is back on you. For future shows you need to provide information to managers about what to expect as well as what you need from them-all with deadlines. Define mission statements and objectives in advance, then evaluate your success post-show.

You also need to develop strategies that reflect audience needs and objectives. Because the trend is to provide more technical expertise at shows, appropriate personnel must be present with the blessing of that manager. There should now be a shift from opposition toward support.

Finally, your main job from here on out is to keep upper-level management apprised with progress reports. Other marketing efforts are visible because management is kept aware of what is going on. If you keep the trade show program a mystery, no one will be willing to play sleuth to find out how it's going. When budgets need to be cut, a lack of visibility translates into lack of importance. Reports will change that perception.

Most executives know what works and what doesn't, and they recognize the value of trade shows in sales and marketing. You, the exhibit manager, are what makes them effective. You provide exhibit staff with opportunities to speak with customers and prospects in a cost-effective venue. It's about time you got support as well.

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## **About TSEA**

Since 1967, TSEA (www.tsea.org) has been providing knowledge to marketing and management professionals who use exhibits, events, and face-to-face marketing to promote and sell their products, as well as to those who supply them with products and services. Members benefit from access to education, networking, resources, advocacy and member-only discounts on products and services that all exhibit and event professionals use. To register for any TSEA education program at the member price or to join TSEA and enjoy the benefits all year at the discounted show rate, please use promo code: XYZ SHOW