

The **INBOUND MARKETING GUIDE** **TO TRADE SHOWS**



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Introduction

The Inbound Marketing Guide To Trade Shows

Participating in trade shows can quickly consume your marketing budget, but in order for it to yield a positive return, you'll need a well-planned strategy and flawless execution. Most companies plan a year ahead, and with good reason. On the trade show floor, exhibitors have but a moment's glance to catch the attention of attendees and establish a lasting impression.

Herein lies the challenges; how do you get attendees to find your booth in the vast maze of trade show floors? How do you create a lasting impression? And what can you do to turn trade show attendees into actual business opportunities? In short, how do you produce a return on your investment? **The answer is simple** -- [give your trade show strategy a whole lot of inbound marketing love.](#)

Trade shows give you the perfect stage to be creative in front of audiences that are relevant to your industry. While it's a great opportunity to catch meaningful prospects, there is a risk of being easily overshadowed by other trade show participants with bigger budgets and fancier presentations. Sufficed to say, participating in trade shows without a solid strategy and ample planning time is a losing investment.



Whatever your trade show budget may be, inbound marketing can help you reap rewarding results. Think of it this way, the trade show floor is the ocean and you are the fisherman -- fishes don't flock your way without the right kind of bait. Inbound marketing creates precisely the bait you need. Not only that, but it also empowers your trade show campaign in every stage, from preparation, to the actual event, and even after the trade show.

There are five fundamental tenets to inbound marketing that can help you get the most out of your trade show campaign, namely: content marketing, public relations, social media, search engine optimization, and lead nurturing. These tenets are perfect for creating a buzz prior to the event, getting your prospects looking forward to your trade show participation, getting attendees to find and stop by your booth, generating interactive engagement, strategically engaging in opportunities after the event and closing sales.

Before Creating A Strategy

Trade show planning can be a behemoth of a task to accomplish. There are several things you need to take in careful consideration that will take a dedicated investment of time, manpower, and money. But before you dip your foot in the planning stage, you must first solidify your brand identity, get everyone in your team on the same page, and know the options available to you within your budget.



Here are a few items to consider:

Website and Social Media Accounts

Is your brand name and logo uniform across your web assets? Make sure your web assets such as your social media channels and your website contain not only the right information, but more importantly, the same brand name and logo.

Business Cards

Do your employees have identical business cards containing the company's current logo and business information? Keeping your business cards in check will help avoid confusion surrounding your brand and will strengthen your brand image. You should get this ironed out before your employees start handing out business cards at the trade show.

Collateral Content

If you have participated in trade shows before, check to see if your old collateral contains updated information. If you've added new products or services, or have changed locations, phone numbers or other business information, it's time to revamp them.

Values and Objectives

Are your employees all on the same page when it comes to what your business stands for and what you are trying to accomplish? Having a clear definition of what your values and objectives are, as well as making sure everyone in the company are well-informed is key to sending the right message and pursuing the best leads.



Trade Show Technology

Take a look into what's new in the realm of trade show technologies. Participating in trade shows can come with an expensive price tag so make sure that every purchase and every bill is backed by a solid strategy.

New trade show technologies are constantly being developed so do your research before you start shopping. Among the popular ones are those that can help attendees navigate the vast trade show floor to find your booth, help your booth stand out, help you collect information, and help you get your message across. It's important to do some digging beforehand and find what effective tools are well worth a piece of your budget.

Here are a few of the top trade show technologies that you should consider for your booth:

Automated Lead Retrieval Systems

Indoor Positioning Systems

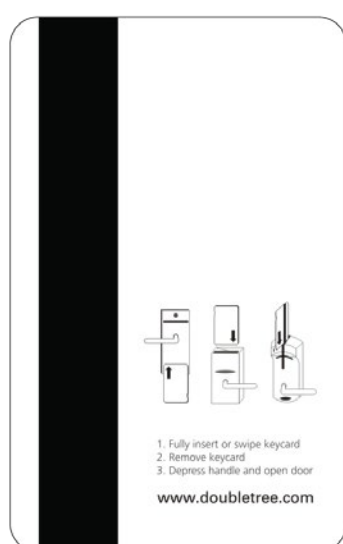
Barcode Tracking

QR Codes

Digital Signage

Electronic Frames

Interactive Presentations



Inbound Marketing - **BEFORE** the Trade Show

PR

Contact the organizers of the trade show and pitch having a thought leader from your company speak at the upcoming show. Being featured as a speaker gives the opportunity to demonstrate your company's unique value proposition and developing innovations. If selected to speak, your thought leader(s) should discuss the latest industry trends, newest technology, and your company's proactive role in responding to these changes as a leader in your industry.

To build awareness of your company's attendance at the trade show, distribute a press release about your participation in the upcoming trade show prior to the event. Discuss the specifics of your participation, what your company is looking forward to, where your booth will be located at the trade show floor, the pre- and post- trade show events and mixers your company will be attending, products or services you may be unveiling at the event, or speakers that may be speaking on behalf of your company. Don't forget to publish it in the news section for your website and share it across your social media channels once it has been published. Be sure to encourage the trade show host to share this across their channels as well.

Whether it is hosting an event at the show, having a representative guest speak, or simply hosting a booth for the event, every notable action should be publicized.

Content Marketing

So you're investing a lot of time and resources on an upcoming trade show, but are you rallying the spirits of your audience and firing up their curiosity? If content marketing isn't a part of your trade show strategy, you're missing out on a great means of generating buzz and anticipation on your upcoming trade show participation.

Now when we say content marketing, we're not talking about your lackluster ho-hum text on a page. To create excitement, your content must be exciting. Let your creativity flow. Here are several things you can do:

Blogging

Create a list of blog topics relevant to the trade show and compose them months in advance. Schedule the articles to go out in the weeks leading up to the trade show. Make sure your articles are linked to the trade show event page and are shared in every social media channel you own.

You may want to consider creating a call to action at the end of these blogs leading to a landing page that allows people to sign up for an offer relevant to the trade show. A behind the curtain look at your latest advancement, or a brief meeting with your CEO may give you the opportunity to create contacts prior to the show. Be creative.

Video Blogs and Webinars

Video blogs and webinars give you more room for creativity. They are especially great for discussing elaborate topics that may be too long and complicated to discuss in

text. Try hosting a discussion of predictions and what to expect at the trade show. Who are the speakers not to miss, the must-go events, etc. Don't forget to share these in your social media channels as well.

Guest Blogging

Write articles about your company's upcoming participation, industry trends, or about the products and services you may be unveiling in the upcoming trade show for noteworthy websites in relevant industries to reach a wider audience. Similar to the video blogs and webinars, you can also make predictions about the trade show. Consider creating a checklist of what not to miss at this year's trade show.

Social Media

Social media offers interactive ways to promote your trade show presence. Building a following takes awhile so be sure to have an active social media presence months before the trade show. You should develop a social media plan so that you can achieve a consistent flow of useful and relevant content for your audience.



There are several social media management platforms that can help you organize and program the publishing of your posts such as HootSuite and Sprout Social. Be sure to take advantage of these platforms. Don't forget to interact with your audience regularly to keep them informed and excited about your upcoming trade show participation.

Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook can be used to invite guests and create buzz over the approaching show. LinkedIn and Facebook provide page building functions in which companies can invite specific users to participate in discussions and keep them informed of your company trade show news. You should also join specific pages created by the trade show organizers to interact and share with others who are interested in the event.

Include keywords within your social media group pages and updates to improve search marketing tactics. By displaying phrases specific to the event, you will become more findable, and therefore more valuable.

Twitter

Twitter is one of the best social media channels you can use to aggressively promote your trade show participation. Most trade shows use a specific trade show hashtag to generate buzz about the event in the Twitter-verse. Use this hashtag in your tweets.

Establishing a relationship with the trade show organizers is another way you can use Twitter to your advantage. Don't hesitate to send tweets directed to the trade show's account. Mention the event in your tweets and ask to be retweeted.

LinkedIn

Look for the trade show event's groups on LinkedIn and become an active member. You may also join several other groups relevant to the industries or businesses attending the trade show. Engage in the discussions regularly and use these groups to share your content and generate buzz about your upcoming participation in the trade show.

Google+

Take advantage of the Google+ communities. Join industry-related Google+ communities and spread the word about the trade show and what they can look forward to in your booth. Use the trade show hashtag as well as industry related hashtags and keep an active interaction with your audience and followers.

Facebook

Create a Facebook event page about your presence in the upcoming trade show and invite all of your fans. If your business is planning to hold a pre- or post-mixer at the trade show, be sure to create an event page for that as well. Encourage your fans to share the event and invite the people in their network.

If you're planning to offer a few goodies up for grabs to giveaway before the trade show, Facebook is a great channel to promote contests. Throw in a few bucks behind your contest to reach a larger audience through Facebook's ad network. Don't forget to share your trade show related content on Facebook and your other social media channels.

Search Engine Optimization

Once you have confirmed a trade show reservation, your company should develop a landing page to be used primarily for SEO. Include the year of the event in the URL of the landing page to avoid timely confusion to your visitors, reading `yourcompany.com/TRADE-SHOW-NAME-2014` for example.

Web users may be exposed to this page when searching for the specific trade show on search engines such as Google and Bing. SEO can also be arranged to display this page when users search related words or competitor names so that your company remains salient.

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Again, the landing page could also include a form or submission box to schedule appointments with representatives from your company. It is important to organize and schedule these meetings prior to the trade show in order to access potential new business and gain the greatest return on investment from the show.

Lead Nurturing

Building sincere relationships with prospects can foster new ventures and lead to an enduring business relationship. Constant engagement and accessibility are the keys to growing your following and fostering your connections. Schedule time before the show to accept meeting requests with prospects at the event. Be responsive to their requests, and thank them for their interest.

Since many attendees arrive a day or two early for these conferences, plan a pre-event mixer such as a happy hour meet and greet at a local pub. As an added incentive to this, you can offer free drink tokens or appetizers for attendees who decide to come. This is an opportunity to speak with your prospects in a casual environment, building rapport and credibility.

Inbound Marketing - **DURING** the Trade Show

PR

Collect details of unofficial trade show events such as happy hours and dinners, and have employees of your company attend several of these functions. Presence at these events will bring a positive image to your company. Along with attending the event organized by other participants, plan to host your own unofficial trade show mixer around the main event itself.

It's important to have items for attendees to take home that accurately reflects the image of your company. Create trade show goodies and service brochures highlighting your company values and what you have to offer. Hand out spec sheets that focus on your company's noteworthy accomplishments. This may include sales reports, consumer satisfaction testimonials, and product samples.

Having fun "giveaway" products that can help promote your company's name is a bonus. Hand out shirts, koozies, and other unique items for attendees to hang on to after the show. These items should be memorable, long lasting, and appealing to the attendees. Do not buy cheap items that people will not hang on to. Although they are cheaper, they will be discarded and the investment will be lost.



Content Marketing/SEO

Online resources will be extremely helpful during the trade show. Designate a member of your team to blog during each important moment of the event to let those unable to attend know about any new product lines or technology announced at the show.

If you know who the speakers are before the event, as well as what they might be discussing, it would be smart to draft pre-written articles and tweak them to include realtime quotes before publishing the articles shortly after the speaker addresses the crowd. This pushes you to the forefront of articles that will be written about the event.

Don't forget to capture the event in photos and videos. You can share these captured moments in your social media channels and you can use them for your blog posts. Be visual! Include a title along the lines of "live from XYZ trade show" to track traffic and shares across online platforms. Don't forget to tag your content accordingly with trade show hashtags to expand your audience.

Social Media

During the trade show, you should delegate a representative of your company at the trade show to monitor your social media channels, as well as publish posts and pictures in realtime. Invite your followers to check out your booth and share teaser images of your swag items and your booth. Keep an eye out for mentions of your company at the trade show, and don't forget to track hashtags and use it in your posts. Be sure to reply to each message, post, and mentions accordingly.

Attaching event specific deals and opportunities to the trade show hashtag is another way to take advantage of social media attention during the trade show. Limited time offers can quickly spread to a large audience on Facebook or Twitter. Offer deals such as “10% off your next purchase if you call during the trade show” and use the trade show’s hashtag for increased visibility. This gives audiences who are not at the trade show an opportunity to engage with your company.

Lead Nurturing

Making the connection for consumers in person to online platforms will build lasting relationships between them and your company. Be sure to keep this in mind and bring a means of doing this in the trade show. As part of your booth presentation, have a laptop or a tablet prepared for visitors to sign-up for company updates, limited time offers, or other deals such as entering to win a 70”TV that’s hanging out in your booth. Maybe host a game with prizes. You can require other details to be filled in, but make sure to have them include information such as name and email address to keep in touch after the trade show.



Inbound Marketing - **AFTER** the Trade Show

PR

Assign writers to guest blog on related industry sites to write a recap of the trade show. These blogs should be published immediately following the event. Related businesses will want to spread the trade show updates to their customers as well, so consider posting on their blogs to get your company's name out to new audiences.

Content Marketing

A recap of the trade show should be made to inform those who could not attend and remind those who did attend about the highlights of the event. A good way to do this is by hosting a free webinar featuring a roundtable discussion with senior managers who attended the show. Try inviting other attendees or even speakers to participate and expand your audience. Record this discussion, and post it on social media channels and blogs for others to watch.

You should also create a written recap on your company's blog. This blog post could cover new technology, products, or other changes in the industry. Try an article on the "Top X Takeaways From 2014's XYZ Trade Show." Include photos of guest speakers and products for added visuals as an 'inside look' for the reader.

During the show, prospects will ask numerous questions about your company and its services. Post these questions along with your responses on your blog as an information source for your prospects. This way, prospects can easily visit your blog to find out more about an area of their interest.

Social Media

After collecting the names of colleagues and prospects, follow them on Twitter, add them on LinkedIn, invite them to your Google+ page, and friend them on Facebook. As soon as they connect with you on your social media channels, send them a message acknowledging how great it was to meet them. These messages work better if they include personal anecdotes such as, "I really enjoyed your speech about the future of so and so."

If your company had a speaker at the conference, demonstrated a new product, or compiled video of their trade show experience, post this on social media as soon as possible. Promote these videos and pictures across all channels. And be sure to make any speaker presentation slides available for download.

SEO

Add questions asked during the conference to the FAQs page of your website. Select questions that visitors would be interested in along with your answers to each of them. Take advantage of this opportunity to improve your keyword strategy! These questions are also what prospects are typically searching in Google to find the products and services your company provides.

Upload all of the pictures you took at the show to your Flickr page, and include keywords about the trade show and the year for those searching through the site. You want to make it easy for visitors to find your content among all of the posts. Many other companies will be blogging about the event and will need quality creative commons licensed images to put with their posts.

It's never too early to start preparing for next year's trade show! Create a page for the following year's event with the URL yourcompany.com/TRADE-SHOW-Name-2015. Although many of the details will not yet be in place, put the dates and any other available information on this page. Get a head start, and be the company that leads the buzz for the next conference.

Lead Nurturing

Hold on to the connections you've made at the trade show. Use email marketing to nurture trade show prospects. Follow up with your prospects but don't hound them aggressively. Instead, offer items of value that they can appreciate and give them plenty of reasons to look forward to your next correspondence.

This can be achieved by extending "trade show only offers" to them, sending them your written and visual recap content, sending them to social media and online sources, referring them to your value based conversion points, and eventually leading them to request more information around the solutions your company offers.

Making the Most Out Of Trade Shows

Trade shows are expensive to join and may not yield satisfactory results without a well-devised strategy. To make the most out of your company's trade show participation, you should back it up with a robust inbound marketing campaign.

In the vast trade show floor, your booth may be difficult to navigate to, especially if you're overshadowed by larger, big-budget players on the floor. In a setting such as this, you can't leave it all to chance and expect attendees to stumble upon your booth, lingering long enough for you to capture their interest as well as their information. You have to plan every minute detail to ensure your trade show participation is worth the money and effort you're putting in. With inbound marketing in your arsenal, you'll be able to get the most out of trade shows by producing real results and an increased ROI.



Inbound marketing allows you to go an extra mile before, during, and even after the trade show. Through inbound marketing, you can build hype about your upcoming participation, you can get found on the trade show floor, you can build lasting relationships with your audience, and more importantly, you can position yourself as an actively engaged valuable leader in your industry.



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Questions or Comments?

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