Trade Show Leads

What to do with all the leads you get from events

Somewhere, some time, you will get yourself a handful of leads. It may be from a networking event, a seminar, a conference, or the mother load of all lead gathering events, a trade show. Regardless of their origin, there are a few things you can do to help manage these leads to use them to your best advantage.

Now, each source of leads usually comes with its own set of rules. If you get them from a networking event, they will have a different level of quality and qualification than those that come from, say, a seminar or conference you attended. Hence your handling of these leads as well as your follow up will vary. Trade shows have their own sets of rules since there is a large amount of pre-show work you should do in order to collect the largest amount of qualified leads you can. Notice I said qualified leads. That's the number one goal of having a booth at a trade show. You can't just hand out yo-yo's and collect hundreds of business cards or lead forms from people who only stopped by your booth to get their free gift. That's the difference between a qualified lead (someone who shows genuine interest in what you are displaying) and a visitor (someone who just wants the toys you are handing out, or is just curious).

I'm not going to go through what to do to optimize your trade show experience in this article. I am going to talk about what to do with all the leads you get from participating in a trade show. I am assuming you already read articles and books on how to prepare for a trade show and did the countless hours of research to ensure you get a ton of worthwhile leads. Hence, getting qualified leads is assumed. Now we need to discuss what to do with those leads. Obviously, going through the hard work and spending time and resources to acquire leads only to have them sit in a pile on someone's desk collecting dust is a huge waste of time and money. Don't laugh – I see this happen very frequently.

I know someone who spent a few thousand dollars to have a booth at a local chamber of commerce expo to show off their new business – waterless grass systems and artificial putting greens for residential usage. He collected several (many) dozen leads of which numerous amounts were from extremely interested visitors. Unfortunately, when they got back to the office and unpacked everything the next day, they realized that they had lost all their leads. What a waste. Leads should be treated like gold! I will assume that you will figure out how to get quality, qualified leads and that you won't lose them.

Here then are eight tips on what to do with all those good leads you get from your next trade show.

1. The most important thing to do, in my opinion, is consider timing. The sooner you follow up on a lead you obtained from a trade show or similar event, the better. Leads from these sources age faster than a cheap wine. People will actually forget that they visited your booth at all, let alone what it was you were discussing for 45 minutes. When I go to trade shows as an attendee, I always throw my business card in as many fishbowls as I can. Not because I really expect to win a trip or gift basket. But I like to see which companies actually follow up with me. In nearly all cases, less than 10% of companies ever contact me after a show, ever! Follow up quickly and with everyone. If you can call them the day they return home from the show, then do it. If you said you'll mail them information after the show (which is always better than handing out literature at the show since it almost always ends up in the trash), then overnight it as soon as you get back, if not sooner. If you have fellow employees back at the office while you're at the show, set it up so that when you call them during the show with someone's address, they'll overnight the information so the interested parties will have it as soon as they return to work or home.

2. Pick out the higher probability and most qualified leads and follow up with them first. Although one never knows where a lead can take you, or when, you should really follow up on all of them. But prioritize them so you manage the hot ones first.

3. Call once per week till you reach them. Don't give up too soon and don't call too frequently (i.e., every day) or else you will be a nuisance. These days it takes from six to seven attempts to get through to someone in business. On average, a typical sales person gives up after two or three. Be patient and persistent.

4. Mix up the methods you use to contact them; including phone, fax, email and mail. People respond to contacts differently. There's a better chance that you will reach them, and get a response, by using various media. Phone and email are usually the best since they are more real-time. I frequently rotate. I'll call the first, and maybe second, time. Then I'll send an email a week later. Then I'll call again a week after that. And so on. You'd be surprised how many times I get a response from the emails more than returned calls. And they are frequently very positive and productive.

5. Organize your business cards (or lead forms) by category. You decide how to categorize them since it will vary by business, industry, product interest, and/or your process. Then follow up using various ways and with different messages depending on the category. Track your success and failure with each method so you can do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

6. Attach the business cards you collect (or lead forms) to 5x7 cards so they stand out more and you have room for notes, dates, appointments, etc. Manually organize these cards by putting them within the pages of your calendar (Daytimer-type book) so you know when to follow up with them. Write notes on the back of each card with your conversations, meetings, follow-ups, etc. This method is good

for a low volume of leads, but can become overwhelming and a lot of work if the lists and/or follow up activities get too large.

7. For larger lists and activities, use automation. A PC with a simple and good contact manager (e.g., GoldMine) can save you enormous amounts of time. Plus, you will be able to simply follow up or do email campaigns, letters, etc without the burden or administrative overhead of doing this manually. Thus, you will be able to do more with less effort. And doing more means more contacts and follow ups with your prospects. If you are part of a larger organization that has a marketing department that handles leads using automation, make sure you are part of the database network so you can share this valuable information to do your follow ups and track your progress.

8. Have a process and strategy before you begin. Whenever you get a lead, whether it is one from an incoming phone call or a stack of business cards from a trade show, you have to have a consistent and well thought out plan of what you will do with them (i.e., call first, then send email, then fax, then send your newsletter, etc.). You should do this process each and every time for consistency. If you know your process works, because it was developed from processes you've done before that are proven to work, then doing them for every lead you get will increase your probability of getting to the next step (i.e., a meeting to learn more about your prospect's needs and to discuss your product/service in more detail). If you don't have a process or don't know if the one(s) you use work, then start experimenting with different methods and techniques, measure their results, and refine and replicate the ones that work the best.

Successfully managing the leads you get from events takes commitment and time. If you're not prepared to spend the time needed to handle these leads properly, then why participate in an event to begin with? Treat these leads like gold and you'll increase your sales results.

Good luck and good selling!

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