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WHAT'S UP WITH WOODBRIDGE?

How a small Ontario town became a window manufacturing Mecca.

Game of Shows

Good show preparation always pays its debts.



by Rich Porayko

Brace yourself: tradeshow season is coming. One does not simply show up at a tradeshow and start exhibiting. Winter is almost over and now is a great time to get prepared.

Industry events happen all the time but the big ones are typically bookended in the spring and fall. I am always surprised when a company doesn't create an event calendar. It should be done even before holidays are scheduled so key players aren't double-booked. When it comes to company activities of this importance, a lion does not concern himself with the opinion of sheep. If you plan on sending a team to a particular event, this is a good time to block out office holidays during the absences so that there are staff available at the office to pick up the slack.

I'm using the word calendar but what I really mean is a communication tool. You know how your staff always says that communication needs to be improved? They don't want corporate fluff. This is what they are talking about. Who, what, when, where, why and how much.

Once you have your year planned out, consider the best way to take advantage of key events. For starters, be present and engaged. Plan on arriving early and leaving late. Flag the presentations you want to catch and the companies you want to visit. If you travel out of town and spend valuable show time in your room "doing email" and not where the action is, you are missing an opportunity.

If you have a bit too much of a good time after hours, suck it up, Buttercup. Large water, coffee, ibuprofen, fresh breath, eye drops, repeat.

If you have a display, booking early is your best bet to secure a good location, which is crucial for a good booth. Many tradeshows avoid putting competitors near each other so even if there are good locations still vacant, they may not be available if a competitor is parked across the aisle.

I'm a slow learner, it's true, but I learn. I've been known to rant early and often about the cardinal sins of exhibiting at tradeshows: eating, sitting, texting, talking on a phone, clutter, forgetting business cards. The solution is simple.

Just don't do it.

Staffing can be tricky. Too many staff lurking in the booth will scare visitors away. Too few can leave visitors waiting for information. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. If I learned one thing from managing tradeshow booths is that crowds attract crowds. Like a juggernaut, if your booth is busy, momentum will build, drawing more and more visitors. Granted, many of these are often literature/swag collectors (and competitors, often from overseas) that use the mob as a distraction to grab and run.

I'm often asked about the size of the booth. There are a lot of different factors but my general rule of thumb is to go with a double booth (10-by-20 feet) preferably on an endcap or you don't go at all.

Even if you aren't exhibiting at a booth, there are ways to build brand awareness during industry events. Consider sponsorships or submit a call for papers to present a seminar. At the very least, dinner with existing or potential partners goes a long way. Nothing replaces face time. Some of my longest and strongest relationships started out at a welcome reception or tradeshow dinner.

There are exceptions but, for the most part, leave your spouse/partner at home. They get in the way. Spouses often don't realize that conferences and tradeshows are a lot more work than they think they are. There is very little downtime. For professionals that take trade events seriously, shows start at breakfast, last all day and carry on into cocktail receptions and late dinners.

Don't forget about follow-ups. Whether you are exhibiting, walking the show floor or attending seminars, follow ups are what it's all about. If you return from an event without any deliverables or follow-ups, it's safe to say that either you lost focus or it was a dud and not worth attending in the future. Once you've accepted your flaws, no one can use them against you.

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