



N P A R A L L E L TM

**TRADE SHOW
BEST PRACTICES**



HOW TO SET TRADE SHOW GOALS

Many of our clients desire to know the best way to evaluate the performance of a trade show. It's a good question and one that is answered very simply: business goals. When business goals are established, the performance of your trade show can be evaluated by how these goals were, or were not, attained. A company can put together some very necessary and helpful goals through a few simple steps, as well as using a useful acronym: S.M.A.R.T.

The first step is answering a QUESTION. This is foundational as companies seek to move forward in creating and executing goals: what is the company's purpose for this event? This will set the entire foundation for the goals. Perhaps the purpose is to increase sales, showcase a service or product, or maybe this is strictly a marketing opportunity. Regardless of what it is, this question is crucial for companies to answer as they seek to establish goals for a trade show.

The next step is RESEARCH. Let us help you with this. We know the trends and love to talk about ways to implement your ideas, improve your current initiative or brainstorm a direction to take your aspiring trade show exhibit. We like to research and teach our clients new ways to communicate their message, service or product and how we can differentiate our clients on the show floor.

Lastly, step three is WRITING S.M.A.R.T. GOALS. This acronym is broken down into five specific words that are guidelines to use when writing business goals. The keywords are simple/specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. All business goals should encompass these concepts. An example of a goal like this would be, "to increase attendance at trade show booth by 20% over the next year." As you can see, this goal is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. Knowing this aim, we can help you plan for and achieve it by implementing strategies and components that attract and drive attendance to your exhibit.

Once the S.M.A.R.T goals are established, be sure to prioritize the pre- and post-show elements. Many of our clients' goals are executed during these times; they set up a social media campaign, send follow-up emails or build a customer contact list – all of which would never be reached if they were not proactive in organizing the bookends of their events.

S.M.A.R.T goals should be evaluated after every trade show, not only to determine if goals were accomplished, but also to observe areas of improvement for future events. In the end, goals are foundational and matter greatly to the success of a trade show event. Companies are guaranteed to experience consistent growth as they routinely circle back to goals - goals that are simple, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

Many clients of ours believe they need to have their goals written before engaging with us; however, we love to help our customers write their goals.

TRADE SHOW TRENDS

nParallel attends hundreds of trade shows every year; this allows our team to experience trends within the industry, first-hand. As innovators, nParallel is in a constant state of education and learning to ensure the organization is not just keeping up with the trends, but setting the trends. Here are a few we are seeing at trade shows across the nation—no matter how big or small the event.

Less Paper

Instead of bringing 1,000 pounds of paper brochures, which is outrageously expensive with drayage costs, companies across the nation are becoming more printer-friendly. Most organizations are skipping the collateral and printed paper altogether and are going paperless. There are dozens of businesses that offer solutions that provide real-time collateral sending. This mode of communication allows companies to:

- Send targeted content
- Track who it was sent to
- Take notes of what conversations took place
- Easily follow up with interested attendees
- Evaluate the ROI

Trade show attendees receive more collateral than they know what to do with. Countless attendees throw it all into the coined reusable tote they received at the event, only to throw it all away later.

The paperless solution provides customers the convenience of easily tracking collateral they receive, as well as the ability to engage in a sales conversation with electronic material that can be reviewed smoothly. Many clients have found great success with these new and improved modes of communication.

Going Digital

This trend isn't going to shock anyone. It's one that is not going away and will be used to continue to provide more efficiencies and even stronger customer engagements in the future. Right now, we're seeing exhibitors use backlit SEG walls to make a significant impact on customers. One of the enormous benefits of backlit SEG walls is the ease and cost of installation and transportation. It's a great way to communicate a message in a bright and big way.

Overall, digital's presence has been increasing in all aspects of a trade show. At nParallel, digital offerings are an integral part of everything we create. Digital allows our clients' brands to come alive in a tangible and memorable way, making a positive impact in the way the brand engages with a potential customer.

Going Green

Recyclable, sustainable and reusable are terms that are revolutionizing trade shows. Recyclable material trends seem to ebb and flow with what materials to use and how to use them, and right now, there's a huge trend in custom rentals to be more sustainable and to save costs. This trend allows clients to utilize a huge inventory of components, in conjunction with custom-made pieces, to provide companies with an exhibit that is uniquely theirs for a portion of the cost it would take to create a new-build exhibit. What clients like about this green option is they can reuse existing displays, walls, floors—really anything—to have a structure that is sustainable, yet customized to their brand.

VIP Treatment

Trade shows present significant opportunities for companies to treat current and future customers with a high-level of attention. Providing current and potential customers an upgraded treatment can help to strengthen business relationships.

Companies that give their clients VIP treatment invite customers to company-only dinners and are sure to introduce clients to influential guests at networking events. VIP treatment is really about companies elevating customer relationships and striving to make them feel valued and important throughout the trade show experience.

nParallel has seen an increase of VIP treatment over the past year and hear many client success stories who have positively benefited from this inclusion.

Personalization

The idea of personalization at trade shows has been a recurring theme in past years, and it continues to be relevant and meaningful. Before the trade show begins, many companies find out which clients plan to attend the event and then tailor their trade show offerings and experiences to these audiences.

An easy way to start personalization is to send customer surveys to find out who is attending and what their purpose is to gain insight and better customize the experience for clients. We help our clients customize their exhibit to accommodate personalized experiences with show builds that include conference rooms or demonstration areas for smaller groups to experience the brand in a more engaging way.

Unique Experiences

Customers go to trade shows with the expectation that they will talk a lot of business, learn about a variety of different companies and see up and coming products. One of the trends we have recognized in recent years is that companies strive to push beyond these expectations and work to create unique, memorable experiences for their guests.

By creating an exhibit that feels more like a place to hang out is a trend that many of our clients desire. Examples include a booth complete with food and beverage options, a visitor lounge and a place for charging cell phones and more. Creating a unique exhibit experience can make a company memorable in the eyes of a potential client.

We're always watching the trends for our benefit, as well as our client's. Stay tuned for trend updates via our newsletter and blog.

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR YOUR TRADE SHOW EVENT

The digital space provides countless opportunities and tools for efficient marketing that drive sales, retention and brand value. With a general understanding of these tools and a strategy to tie them to business goals, a company can get the most out of their trade show investment.

Website

In today's world, a website may be the most critical component of marketing a company can create. It is often the first or second impression that a customer has of a business. A potential client's first stop to find information about a company - before or after the trade show - will likely be the website. It is important to make sure the messaging clearly states what an organization does, what unique value they offer and what the next step is for the potential client.

The internet is vastly visual, so the design of a website is important. Consult with a web design professional to make sure the layout and visual elements of the site are uncluttered and easy to navigate for visitors.

Content Marketing

At its core, content marketing is about giving something of value to customers in exchange for an action that moves them further through the sales funnel. The content behaves much like the freebies that drive traffic and engagement at a trade show booth.

Video

Digital platforms are expanding rapidly to incorporate video. How-to videos, behind-the-scenes videos and live streaming Q&A sessions are popular formats that provide useful information to potential clients while bringing them to the website or social channels.

Trade shows are unique opportunities to feature eye-catching videos and tease additional videos to drive follow-up traffic to a website. Don't be distracted by the allure of a "viral video," but rather rely on the timeless strategy of meeting an audience's need.

Blog

Blogs are short, easy to read articles, usually published on a regular basis and housed on a website. They should provide useful insights for an audience and display an expertise on a subject. Timely industry trends, company news or interesting brand pieces are good topics to cover. Blogs are great conversation starters and can draw attention to particular products or services.

White Papers

Similar to blogs, white papers exhibit a company's expertise and provide valuable insights to an audience. The difference is that white papers tend to cover more timeless content. They are longer, with more in-depth information about specific topics. White papers are robust and frequently used as incentives for significant conversions.

Mobile

Mobile devices like smartphones, tablets and smartwatches are quickly becoming the primary tools for online and social media browsing. GPS and near field communication (NFC) make it possible to deliver precise digital ads and content to people in a close vicinity or around the trade show booth.

The mobile environment should inform how content appears and functions. For example, browsing a website on a phone is a much different experience than browsing on a desktop. Make sure the text and images are clear on smaller screens. Best practices dictate that web pages and emails should be designed to be "dynamic," meaning that they will automatically change how they appear, depending on the size of the display used. This is something done in the HTML code as they are built.

Email

With all the new ways to communicate, email almost feels old-school. But it is an essential tool to deliver high-quality brand communication. If generating content like videos, blogs and white papers on a regular basis, companies should distribute them to email subscribers as part of regular communication with clients.

Before the trade show, plan a series of emails to send to new leads. Answer common questions and give valuable information that leads to a purchase decision. In each email, make a clear call to action that moves them further through the sales funnel.

As any business person will attest, the inbox has a lot of competition, so make sure the subject line is clear and compelling and the body content is valuable to the recipient.

Social Media

At nParallel, we have a lot to say on this topic so skip to page 9 to learn more.

SEO & SEM

Search engine optimization and search engine marketing have to do with how search engine sites like Google and Yahoo list web pages, in relation to the hundreds of other pages on the internet that are similar. They do this with website-reading robots and algorithms that look for keywords on a web page to determine how relevant the page is to particular search criteria. Ideally, companies want their business to appear near the top of the list of results when a potential client searches for products or services.

To improve the odds of being found in a web search, use language that is common to the category of products and services and adheres to web design best practices.

Search engine marketing refers to the banner or text ads that can be purchased through search engine sites. For a certain “cost per click” or “cost per impression,” the search engine will show a company’s site as a top result for searches that match predetermined criteria. This can be highly useful. However, it usually requires a larger budget and time commitment to see results in the long run.

To maximize a company’s reach during a trade show activation, investing in SEO and SEM could increase the visibility of the brand against the competition.

Digital marketing is ever growing. By keeping up with the trends, you may be able to get in front of your competition earlier.

CREATING A SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR A TRADE SHOW

Building social media into a trade show strategy can help guarantee the best return on investment. Brands can gather more high-quality leads and convert to clients more efficiently with a little planning and by utilizing the tools provided by social networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The best part—a person doesn't have to be an expert to take advantage of these simple tools and strategies.

Tagging and Mentioning

The power behind social media is the ability to connect with other users. This is done primarily with hashtags and mentions. If that sounds like Greek to you, here is a quick explanation:

Hashtags are words or phrases that begin with “#” - they categorize posts and enable users to find relevant content quickly. For example, a social media user could search for “#ILoveTradeShows” and be immediately linked to all the posts that include that hashtag.

Trade show organizers often will promote a particular hashtag to help attendees see what is being shared about the event. For example, organizers of Acme Trade Show 2016 might ask participants to include #ATS16 in their tweets or Facebook posts related to the event. Do a little homework to find the hashtags that are popular in your industry and try to work them into messaging when appropriate. As a best practice, don't use more than two hashtags in a post.

A business is identified on Twitter by their handle. It is the “@” character followed by the account name. Including a handle in a post will notify the person or business that they have been mentioned in a post.

Channels

There are a lot of social media channels out there, but each brand doesn't have to be active on all of them. It is important to understand the company's audience, what social media channel they use and the primary use of the channel. For most businesses, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are ubiquitous and have the most functionality. If the brand is aesthetically focused with a younger client base, Instagram may also be a useful option.

Capture Leads and Track Your Audience

A key feature of social media networks is the ability to target messaging to very specific groups of people, based on criteria like demographics, location, interests and web traffic. Facebook and Twitter even allow companies to upload lists of emails and phone numbers to create custom audiences for ads. This allows brands to speak to very specific needs of customers and impact potential clients.

With Facebook's tracking pixels and Twitter's tags (short bits of code pasted into the back end of a website), companies can target recent site visitors, even if they did not fill out a lead form. This is perfect for finding potential clients who need just a little extra information to become leads.

Before the trade show, we recommend getting acquainted with the audience targeting options available on the relevant social media channels and copy the appropriate tracking tags onto the website.

Social Media Advertising

Social media channels like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn provide an easy entry into the world of digital ads. Their ad management platforms guide users through the ad creation process step by step. The minimum ad spends are fairly reasonable with daily budgets as low as \$5 per day, in some cases.

What to Post

Here are a few simple ideas to help plan messages: try to schedule a Facebook post every one to three days and at least one Twitter post per day. LinkedIn can be less frequent with one post per week. Though the channels vary in format, messaging can be repurposed across multiple channels.

Pre-Show

Share details of the booth. The first step is to let people know that your company will be at the trade show. If the trade show organization has a Twitter account or a Facebook page, be sure to include the handle and any hashtags for the event. This increases the likelihood of attendees seeing the post.

Introduce Trade Show Staff

Help connect the audience to the booth staffers right away. Share information about their experience and specialties as well as fun bits about their personalities. Attendees are more likely to engage with the staff if they feel a connection or see them as sources of valuable knowledge.

Tease Promotions

Get the most mileage out of the exhibit and share images before the show. This will help attendees recognize the brand as they walk the floor. Talk about the company's promotions or a particularly engaging element in the display to get participants to look forward to visiting the booth.

Pre-Show Lead Promotion

Offer a special perk for attendees who sign up for more information before the show and allow them to pick up their giveaway at your company's trade show booth. This could be promoted through social channels. Be sure to include the trade show hashtag and handle.

During the Show

Connect with New Social Media Followers

During the show is a prime time to add new fans to the company's social networks. Display a sign asking people to follow the brand on Twitter and Facebook pages. It's an ultra-low-pressure way to stay in touch. As people begin joining your social audience, respond right away with a personal "thank you" to show that they are an important connection.

Schedule Posts and Ads to Run During the Show

Most shows will have a calendar of events or seminar topics that can be referenced before the event. Use this information to tailor messages about the brand, products and services to schedule social media posts for those key times. Ads allow for greater targeting to focus on the actual trade show attendees. Twitter is a great platform for sharing in-the-moment information. Be sure to include a link to the company's website in social media posts.

Engage with Presenters

If the trade show has special guest speakers or presenters, they will probably have social media accounts, and much of the audience may be sharing the experience as it happens. On Twitter, this is referred to as "live tweeting." Respond to what others are sharing and talk about key insights that customers might find helpful. Simply being a part of the conversation helps broaden the brand's exposure to a wider social audience.

Feature Relationships

Does the sales team often run into longtime clients or business relationships at trade shows? Share a picture of them at your booth—with their permission of course. Include a message about how the organization appreciates their business. It will demonstrate to others how clients are valued and make longtime customers feel like celebrities.

Post Show

Capitalize on Web Traffic

After the show is over, a brand will probably see a spike in web traffic as potential customers try to learn more about the company. Be sure to implement the social media tracking tags into the website as mentioned earlier – this will allow a brand to target those web visitors with additional ads on social channels. The messages of these ads should focus on getting these web visitors to become leads.

Qualify Leads

Once the team returns with a bag full of new leads, be sure to separate the most valuable leads from the rest. Create a custom audience on Facebook and Twitter, with the phone numbers or email addresses gathered and target them with an ad to bring them down the sales funnel. Those who are ready to buy will engage.

Recap The Show

Not everyone is able to attend the trade show, and those that did were probably overwhelmed with information, so providing a recap is very valuable. This could cover industry developments, unique presentation material or even a collection of the best performing posts from your social media accounts.

Get Feedback

Social media is a great tool to facilitate conversations with followers. Ask them what they liked about their trade show experience or how to make it better.

Social media is a powerful engagement tool that can produce exponential growth over time. Be intentional about communicating strong content and brand values. Companies can learn a lot about their audiences and improve the return on investment for trade shows and other marketing initiatives.

REDUCING TRADE SHOW COSTS

Companies put a lot of value into trade show events. The uniquely strong benefits these events offer in expanding networks and generating leads are just a few of the many advantages drawing companies to put in the time and money. Let us break down some of the costs that we will be taking into consideration for each and every event activation.

Drayage

Though exhibitors expect an invoice after a trade show, they're commonly caught off guard by the staggering amounts of on-site costs. In short, drayage is the transportation of the exhibit. The detailed work it takes to move hundreds of pounds of freight and material to an event is vast. The proper understanding of what exactly drayage encompasses will help companies get ahead in eliminating unnecessary overhead and reduce trade show costs.

Labor

A big part of the drayage cost is in labor. Every step of the process takes workforce. From directing the material-handling process from one place to another to checking shipments as they arrive - there are always people making the process happen. Labor costs associated with drayage are determined based on where shipments are delivered. Recent surveys have discovered that labor costs are lower when companies ship directly to the show site versus to the advance warehouse.

Shipment

It goes without saying, but the heavier materials are, the higher the cost will be to handle them. The type of packaging used is also key, as some are cheaper than others because they're easier to handle and lighter. The kind of transportation carrier used is another reason prices tend to increase. A specialized carrier is going to cost more than a standard carrier.

Cutting Costs

On-site show services add up quickly, but that's where we come in. We are passionate about lowering drayage costs through efficiencies in each project. In the concept and fabrication phases, we ensure the design-build is lightweight and efficient. We also find opportunities to ship directly to the show site versus to an advance warehouse.

A recommendation we frequently make to clients is to streamline paper usage. Though some tangible collateral is expected, many companies are going paperless to help reduce their material costs. Paper is heavy, and eliminating it is one of the easiest ways to cut costs in the shipment process. Many exhibitors have found that collateral ends up in the garbage soon after the event and a more productive way to communicate information to customers can be through email.

We're here to help you with solutions to bring your trade show costs down. Don't hesitate to call us to talk through solutions.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS: THE WHY AND THE HOW

Trade shows are known for creating a substantial marketing experience. They provide an opportunity for exhibitors and customers to have valuable face-time and conversations. The challenge, however, is measurement. Companies are always seeking better ways to measure the value of marketing activities, and trade shows should be treated no differently. Understanding the value of measurement and how to go about it are key elements to increasing a trade show presence and maximizing an exhibit's potential.

Justify Your Presence

Thousands of dollars - and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars - are often invested into a trade show exhibit. How will companies know if it was worth the investment? Some organizations count leads, but developing a larger measurement plan will provide businesses with a reliable, objective outlook on each trade show so they can accurately measure its effectiveness. Measurement will justify a company's presence at an event and showcase its value.

Data Data Data

Analysis supplies companies with palpable data. When it comes to business, accurate numbers never hurt anyone, especially in this context. With data, exhibitors can evaluate how each event performs. Eventually, this data can be used to compare trade shows to one another, allowing exhibitors to see what is working for or against them. This can help the brand create more successful events over time. The data can alert companies to the adjustments necessary to make their presence more efficient and thus generate more leads and revenue.

How to Measure

Now onto the big, daring question: HOW? Measurement is hard, which is why so few people do it. But as stated earlier, the reasons to measure are too beneficial not to.

S.M.A.R.T Goals

We believe in this concept to the core so check out page 1 to learn more.

ROI

Return on investment is the ultimate measurement for companies, and it's obvious why. ROI is data and provides numbers of actual revenue brought in through a trade show event. ROI is calculated by gross profit minus marketing expenses/ marketing expenses. These metrics provide an excellent resource to weigh effectiveness against other marketing and advertising plans.

Post-Event Evaluation

This measurement tool is ideal for optimizing future events. A post-event evaluation will allow a team to discuss what worked for a particular trade show and what didn't. Moreover, since ROI can often take a few months to determine, depending on the company's sales cycle, this evaluation can provide a direct measurement that views the practical items of what did or didn't work. It's important that the assessment is scheduled before the trade show so that companies don't neglect it in the business of post-event follow-up.

Measuring the effectiveness of a trade show will set exhibitors apart from others because it will provide the tools needed to maximize each event to its full potential.

WAYS TO READY A TRADE SHOW TEAM

When an organization has a brand new trade show booth, the next step is to assemble a team of professionals to run it. For the exhibit to be the most efficient, it is important to train the show floor team with some key tactics. It takes more than knowledge of the company to be successful, so here are some keys to get a team headed in the right direction.

Etiquette

While most people have had experience in customer service at some point in their life, it is crucial to go over some basic tips before the trade show. One of the best ways to draw a person into a booth is by looking approachable, and the easiest way to do this is by simply smiling. Being at a trade show is similar to being on stage—everyone is watching the staff's every move, so remind everyone to be gracious and helpful. While long days can sometimes be challenging, encourage the team to be intentional in every interaction and to avoid being on cell phones, eating or drinking while on the show floor.

Dress to Impress

Sometimes even the most basic aspect of attire can get overlooked when planning for a trade show. It will be important to set a dress code for the staff to ensure they understand the expectation and can plan accordingly. At nParallel, we recommend leaving the high-heels at home and opting for a more comfortable shoe that can be worn 12 plus hours at a time. We also encourage wearing attire with pockets for business cards, pens and other quick access items that may be needed. Excellent hygiene is a must and keeping perfume and cologne to a minimum is important. At the end of the day, make sure the team can put the company's best foot forward.

Start a Conversation, Not a Pitch

Everyone is expecting to be pitched to all day at a trade show, so to stand out from the crowd, teach the team to be conversationalists over salespeople. Teach active listening, positive body language and encourage asking open-ended questions. Real conversations are always going to be more effective than a “one-size-fits-all” approach. So let employees interact in a natural way with potential customers and make sure they follow-up on any promises of calls, emails or any other requests that may have come up.

Understand the Information

This one might seem obvious, but it is imperative to make sure the trade show team is adequately versed in many areas of the business and not just the product at hand. If it is not possible for every team member to be an expert in all sectors, select different staff members to be knowledgeable on certain subjects so there is always someone on the floor to answer specific questions. Ensure everyone is aware of key objectives and messages, so one clear voice is heard in every conversation. We recommend creating a document of key messages and provide that to each trade show staff member at least two weeks in advance of the trade show. This allows the team to prepare and be confident on the day of the trade show. nParallel clients have experienced great success is scheduling a multi-hour training session to go over best practices for engaging with customers and running through the key messages to increase brand consistency.

If you need help in training your team, let us know. We're happy to help!

N P A R A L L E L™

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