



STRONG ARM SALES STOP SUCCESS COLD

It happens more often than you'd ever guess – in fact, it might be happening at the booth right next to yours. Recent surveys of trade show attendees show that the most dissatisfied attendees are those who purchase something that they really didn't want. Needless to say, these attendees don't have a high opinion of those companies that 'strong-armed' them, and report that they'll be unlikely to do business with them again.

How can this happen? What possible way is there to force attendees into purchasing something unwillingly?

Not all the 'people pleasers' at a trade show are booth staff. Some are walking the aisle, as attendees. When these types run into an overly-forward, persistent salesperson, they can be bullied into a purchase. That's not the way you want to do business.

Instead, train your team to have a needs-focused approach. By engaging attendees in conversation, questioning and listening more than talking, and truly focusing on solving the attendee's problems, you are far more likely to make a sale the attendee is satisfied with.

Key to this is five questions, the Familiar Five that should be part of every sales conversation:

What: What exactly does the attendee need? Do they have problems with their existing suppliers? Are they trying to make-do with a product that doesn't exactly fit their needs? Perhaps the product works perfectly, but it's too expensive. You need this answer before you can move on to any other questions.

Why: Why would your company be the best suited to meet the attendees' needs? If they mention constant technical difficulty, do you offer 24 hour support? If they need a size 3 widget, does your company manufacture size 3 widgets?

Who: Relationships are key to business. At the same time, our mobile society means that rapid staff turnover is a fact of life. Two companies may have had – or come near – a business relationship previously, only to have things not work out. Yet this fact could be completely unknown to your booth staff. Arm your team with some corporate history, along with selling points that illustrate how things have changed in the interim.

When: When your team says something, attendees want to know they can count on that as fact. Clients want to know you have a track record and that you'll maintain it when they remain with you. Feel free to use concrete examples: Even though we're consistently introducing new and innovative models, we still provide parts, service and support to every model we've ever made – all the way back to day one.

How: How your company conducts itself is becoming a much more important factor to many of today's decision makers. Consumers want to avoid being tainted by association with any scandal-ridden firms. If an attendee brings up a current negative newsmaker, avoid the temptation to 'dish'. Instead, answer with a comment that shows your company's strength and leadership. "We know that those types of things happen in our industry, but we've found the better route is the straight and narrow. That way we can stay focused on our customer and their needs."

Now, admittedly, it can be difficult to fit all of this into the thirty seconds you have with the average attendee. The temptation is to talk faster, attempting to cram in as much information as you can. But don't. Your job is to get them talking – and once an attendee starts talking, they are far more likely to spend some additional time at your exhibit.

Body language also plays a role in how your sales team is perceived. Here are five key things to remember:

1. **Keep Your Distance:** Crowding can be intimidating, especially if the staff is of large stature and the attendee is smaller. A good rule of thumb is to keep at least one arm's length between the two of you.
2. **Keep Your Arms Down:** Some staffers, especially the flamboyant, dramatic types, have a tendency to talk with their hands. This works fine in a social situation, but can be unnerving or distracting when you're trying to do business.
3. **Keep Things Open:** Very skittish or shy types may subconsciously feel 'trapped' if you position yourself between them and the way out of your exhibit. You don't have to be an Old West Cowboy with this – there's no need to always stand with your back to the wall – but be aware of spatial issues and attempt to keep things open and comfortable.
4. **Keep An Eye:** On the way the conversation is going. If you have the slightest suspicion that an attendee is uncomfortable, or just doesn't like you, hand them off to another staffer. Sometimes personalities just don't click, and it's better to step out gracefully than attempt to blunder through the encounter.
5. **Keep An Ear:** Open for what the attendee is saying. People can tell when you're really listening and when you're going through the motions. A million subtle physical cues give it away. Don't try to 'phone in' your interest. Pay attention!

Go over these items with your team before the show. When your team is skilled, they won't need strong arm tactics – which will make everybody happy!

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