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## GETTING THE MOST FROM ATTENDING A TRADE SHOW

Trade shows can be an excellent opportunity for you and your business, whether you are an entrepreneur or you're representing the company you work for. Thousands of people set up trade show booths and trade show displays across the country at a huge variety of industry events. However, many people don't know how to take advantage of the opportunities a trade show offers. Some plan on simply attending, setting up their trade show booth, and then staying there all day hoping to attract new business. Manning a trade show display is only part of the reason you should be attending a trade show. The other vendors at a trade show can provide you with a wealth of new information and contacts in your industry; all accessible in the same room on the same day—this is the unparalleled attraction of a trade show for your business.

If you plan to attend a trade show, make sure you are not the only person there representing your company, even if you are a small business owner with few employees or a sole proprietorship. You will need at least one person to staff your trade show booth, and another to walk the floor taking in the other trade show displays. If necessary, get your spouse or a good friend to come with you and give them a crash course on how to handle your trade show booth while you check out the other vendors – and only do so when it is slow so you don't miss important business opportunities. When you make reservations for the hotel you will stay at during the show, try to find a room as close as possible to the actual location—preferably within walking distance. That way, you won't have to bring anything with you to the venue other than the materials for your trade show display.

Before you attend a trade show, go over the list of vendors who plan to put up trade show booths. Make lists of the vendors you must see, the vendors you would like to see, and those you can live without seeing. You may even be able to schedule appointments with your top priority vendors. Research the companies and determine ahead of time what you would like to find out from each trade show display and what your goals are regarding each vendor: are they competition, or a potential contact? If they are a potential contact, how would they specifically benefit your company? Have questions ready to ask vendors to save yourself time walking the floor. Another good timesaving strategy is to obtain a map and a directory of the trade show when you arrive on location, before the show begins. Use the map to plan your route, and check your prioritized list of vendors against the directory to find out whether any vendors have been added or dropped out.

During the trade show, be active in your quest for information. Don't feel bad about passing by trade show booths that don't interest you. Like you, they are attending the trade show to generate new business, and they don't want to waste time talking to someone who isn't a potential customer. Visit your targeted trade show displays, engage in a dialogue with the vendors, and ask questions. If the trade show booth offers handouts, samples or other materials, take only those you actually want to find out more about. It can be difficult to tote a loose stack of glossy brochures, catalogues, and bulky product samples around a busy trade show floor. If possible, arm yourself with an empty briefcase or duffel bag to stow materials. Use your time wisely to gather intelligence on your competition and make new industry contacts that will benefit your company.

When the trade show ends, especially if it is a multiple-day event, take the time to make notes and organize the materials you gathered before you leave the event. If you need to mail reports, brochures or other materials to your colleagues, prepare the mailings right away while "who gets what" is still fresh in your mind. Make sure to store your trade show display safely so nothing is damaged and you can find everything you need the following day. When you return from the trade show, remember to follow up with the contacts you have made—and start preparing for next year's trade show!

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