

# CATALYST

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## Planning Ahead

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Typically I'm pretty good at planning big events ahead of time. I almost thrive on it (this really agitates my husband because should he not live to the next day, he knows I have a plan). Trade shows are big events. I pack my time from morning to night and then try to get it all done.

A past issue of Catalyst covered the must-haves of trade shows: lead generation, ROI, media relations and exhibit effectiveness and logistics. In the planning process for trade shows it's important to look at not only what has to be done but what you would like to accomplish. That means looking at the opportunities the show offers, as well as figuring out those opportunities that may not be quite so obvious. A few of these include:

**Educational classes/seminars.** I don't know a trade show that doesn't have classes or seminars and staff education is a smart investment. If there's someone on your staff that wants or needs training, consider sending them to the show to attend educational classes. Make it a dual purpose trip so that they can help with trade show logistics, as well. If they've never been to the show, give them time to walk the show to see what competitors are doing and to gather new ideas for next year's booth. A new set of eyes can bring back great ideas. They'll also take back a better understanding of the industry and be a much more powerful team player.

**Networking.** Between breakfast events and evening receptions there is no excuse to not make connections. Break away from your co-workers (your comfort zone) and meet new people. When attending an event, especially for the first time, I generally set a goal of how many people I would like to connect with. I never know who I'll meet and what it will lead to, but my experience has been extraordinarily positive.

**Media relations.** Plan time with the press. Trade shows are a great opportunity for executives to talk with the press about plans for the upcoming year; new products (get your product managers involved!), new initiatives, etc. The key is to set an appointment, be prepared with talking points, press releases and information sheets. One-on-one meetings allow editors to ask questions without others getting an angle on their story. Editors are some of the busiest people at shows, so respect their time and provide them with solid news.

**Timing.** Create excitement by making new product introductions, personnel announcements, and new promotions at the show. Use the timing of the show to your advantage. The industry is present so give

them something to talk about. If you have a new product / service that will be ready a few months before the show, it may pay to hold the release of that product right up until show time. This increases impact due to the show exposure and prevents competitors from creating a competitive response to have at the show. Never miss the chance to get more ink!

**Attention-getters.** Every show has its awards for marketing, new products, packaging, etc. Research those opportunities a year in advance. Walk the show and look around the lobby areas or read the Show Dailies to find areas you're missing out on and plan for the following year. "Going green" is a big topic these days. If you have a product or process that fits the bill - get it in there early and reap the awards!

**Competitor espionage!** Visit other booths (don't forget the international areas). Attend press conferences. Do you see any ideas that you'd like to implement in your own booth? Are there new competitors? What products are most prevalent? Are the product offerings changing? Talk with exhibitors about their products; their viewpoint of the show. Sometimes the most interesting people to talk to are new exhibitors who have a fresh perspective. Don't have the time? Send that person you brought for the educational seminars with a list of goals and objectives. If you are an exhibitor, your badge will get you in the show early each day before the show opens. This is the most effective time to walk the show as you don't get stuck in traffic and can view specific booths and displays at leisure, without the booth staff wondering who you are and why you're looking.

So, if you just came off a big show or are planning for the next, plan your time for smarter employees, greater awareness, competitor intelligence - and ultimately more business.