

Getting the Most Out of a Trade Show

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Attending a trade show in Canada? Here are 5 useful tips.

1. Set objectives. Shows are big and filled with many opportunities. Set realistic objectives prior to visiting the show. That way, you'll get more out of the show than if you simply wander aimlessly waiting for opportunity to strike. Your objectives can include: visiting specific clients, learning about a specific market niche, meeting Canadian media representatives, attending seminars and networking with colleagues and clients.

2. Develop a plan. To spend your time productively, you need a plan. Your plan can include: visiting the booths of companies you want to learn more about, keeping appointments with clients and walking through the whole trade show floor. That's a lot to do in a short period of time. So before your visit to Canada, collect as much information about the show as possible. Check the show's Web site and the sites of exhibitors to decide whose booth you want to visit. You can even use a copy of the show floor plan to plot your visit.

3. Take notes. Another important task is to come up with questions that you can ask to assess a potential client's needs. These questions should be well thought out to give you the data you need quickly. If you need more extensive information,

then make a follow-up appointment off the show floor. Bring a note pad with you to record your conversations. These notes, along with the clients' business cards, will prove invaluable after the show.

4. Avoid information overload. There is a lot to see and learn, so avoid what is not relevant. If someone is offering to demonstrate a product and you have no use for it, politely thank them for the offer and walk away. If you are offered brochures and catalogues, take only those you think will help you. It is also appropriate to give an exhibitor your business card and ask them to send you brochures.

5. Plan follow-up activities. In some cases you will want to proactively follow-up with clients. In other cases you will leave the follow-up to them. Regardless, you need to think about how follow-up is going to happen. One stress-reducing trick is to prepare your follow-up correspondence before the show, when you are neither tired nor jet lagged. Your post-show follow-up should be done within the first two weeks after your visit.