

TRADE SHOW ATTENDANCE TIPS

MAXIMIZE YOUR TRADE SHOW EXPERIENCE

While we can provide trade show exhibitors with all the tools they'll need to have a successful trade show, we can't ignore the trade show attendees. Here are some great tips for trade show attendees via About.com.

REASONS TO ATTEND

No matter how small your retail business may be, the benefits of attending a trade show sponsored by vendors or industry associations far outweigh any reason not to attend. These conferences have been developed in order to give retail owners, buyers and managers the opportunity to meet existing suppliers, conduct business meetings, network with others in retail and investigate new products.

If you're currently struggling to operate your business with few to no employees, chances are you may feel like you don't have the time to attend a trade show. Consider hiring temporary help, asking family to assist or simply plan to close shop for a day in order to attend the trade show.

Once you've decided to attend the trade show, you'll need to plan ahead. To get the most from attending a trade show, you should have a strategy. Knowing what you would like to accomplish before, during, and after the show will help maximize your time. Here are some trade show planning tips:

PRE-SHOW PLANNING

- Avoid the confusion at the show by pre-registering.
- Have a goal of what you want to accomplish, such as which vendors to visit, what items you need to purchase, what seminars to attend and which new product lines you'd like to see.
- Know your inventory needs before the show. More efficient purchasing will save you money by grouping your orders to take advantage of discounts and special offers, as well as keeping you within budget.
- Set appointments with any vendor you'd like to meet with during the show.
- Plan to bring any employees who would greatly benefit from attending the trade show.

WHERE TO STAY

- Check to see if the trade show organizers have reserved rooms at a discount.
- Make reservations for transportation and lodging early.
- Try to book a hotel very close to the trade show.

WHAT TO WEAR

- Pack comfortable shoes, wear business casual clothing, and remember you are a representative for your business.
- Allow enough room in your suitcase(s) for bringing back more than you take. This includes literature, freebies, and product samples.
- Some exhibitors provide bags, but come prepared by bringing a comfortable carryall for all that literature.

AT THE TRADE SHOW

- An updated show guide will probably be provided when you arrive. Take some time to revise your plan if necessary.
- Make sure your badge is in plain sight while browsing trade show booths.
- If possible, request literature and samples be mailed instead of having to carry them with you.
- Have a pen and notebook ready for notes and use business cards to jot down information on the back.
- Take advantage of show specials, discounts and sales where they are truly bargains and needed in your store. Check freight costs and delivery dates.
- Keep track of orders placed so you'll stay within your budget.
- If you are planning to purchase any custom merchandise, bring your artwork and other files on a flash drive. Most vendors are equipped with laptops and can quickly send the data to the appropriate department.
- Take a break after a few hours to refresh, have a snack and get some fresh air.
- Leave the show a little early to avoid long lines for buses and cabs.

NETWORKING

- Bring plenty of your own business cards.
- Don't be afraid to introduce yourself to others.
- Attend seminars and workshops if available. These educational presentations are why you came.
- Don't linger too long at each booth and don't stay in a conversation with a company in which you're not interested in doing business.

AFTER THE SHOW

Identify if your objectives were met and if the cost of attending the trade show has had a positive long-term effect for you and your business. Evaluate if you had not attended the trade show, what would have been the cost and time to achieve the same amount of business. If you planned your attack, you will be confident in knowing the time you have spent at the show was worthwhile.