SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

GLOBAL MEETING STRATEGIES

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THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Many marketers up until only a few years ago viewed tradeshows and conferences as an afterthought. Today, however, 49% say they are a vital component of any marketing plan or indeed the lead marketing tool that they use, according to recent research by global events organization the George P. Johnson Company (GPJ).

"A further 46% put events on an equal footing with other elements in the marketing mix," says GPJ's Vice President and General Manager Kim Myhre. "This is an incredible endorsement. It shows just how important they have become for companies that need to get eye-to-eye with the customer."

But why in a virtual world, where people could just as easily tour an exhibition online, is there a demand for travelling, in some cases, thousands of miles to visit a bustling live tradeshow? And why do companies spend a significant proportion of their marketing budget on displaying their wares at such events?

Well it seems nothing beats the power of meeting people face to face.

"These days we are bombarded with marketing messages," says Duncan Reid, Event Director of Confex, the exhibition for the conference and exhibition industry held in the UK. "Technology means it's difficult to esc ape. Marketing is becoming more and more intrusive thanks to email and mobile phones. Exhibitions provide a haven where you have one-on-one mind share. There are no other distractions. They provide a real opportunity to engage in conversation face to face."

Trevor Foley, Group Chief Executive at the Association of Exhibition Organizers (AEO), says this aspect of exhibitions is one of their major unique selling points. "They offer an opportunity to deliver 'permission' rather than 'interruption' marketing," he explains. "We don't watch TV or buy magazines and newspapers for the advertisements, but, at exhibitions the visitor (customer or prospect) is turning up to see them. The exhibitors ARE the editorial content at an exhibition."

Five steps
to tradeshow heaven

Duncan Reid, Event Director at CONFEX, gives five ways to make the most of your exhibition presence:

1. **Let visitors know what you are doing**
   – the organizer should provide a list
2. **Inform your customer base**
   – it's a great opportunity to boost existing business relationships
3. **Tell the press**
   – publicity is key
4. **Prepare staff**
   – everyone from the CEO to administration should know strategy and objectives
5. **Review**
   – make sure you have some way of measuring results and follow up all leads as quickly as possible while event still fresh in minds

DEMANDING ATTENTION

This high level of attention and engagement means that exhibitions make it easier for companies to differentiate themselves from their rivals. This is the ticket to commercial success in a global economy flooded with similar products and services that are almost indistinguishable from each other, and where media and marketing overkill is spawning increasingly skeptical consumers who are becoming expert at filtering out promotional messages.

"Securing the audience's attention is an increasingly difficult task," says GPJ's Myhre. "Recent research by Forrester shows that in the US people are media multitasking. The TV may be on but the viewer is simultaneously using the computer, reading a magazine, talking on the phone or downloading music onto their iPod. Add to this the rise of remote shopping and it's easy to see why more brand owners are turning to events. After all, the chance of having the audience up close and personal, interacting with and even concentrating on the brand is becoming an increasingly rare one."

But it's not just in the US and Europe where people are recognizing the power of face-to-face communication. Exhibitions are becoming increasingly popular in Eastern Europe and Asia.

German statistics from AUMA provide a good idea of the level of growth in Russia, for example. The number of trade fairs conducted by German trade fair organizers in the country has increased by a quarter to 25 between 2003 and 2005 alone. A further three events are planned for 2006. These events account for almost 15% of the exhibitors and visitors at all German foreign trade fairs. Russia is, therefore, the second most important target region for German trade fair organizers after China.

"Exhibitions provide a terrific opportunity to present your product and services face to face. They are one of the most powerful marketing and communication tools," asserts Elena Slomchinskaya, Exhibition Director at Expocentr, the largest organizer of international and foreign trade fairs in Russia, who also gives an unusual physiological reason why this is so. "Events are all about using your senses to communicate properly," she continues. "The ultimate face-to-face communication stimulates two important neurotransmitters, which enhance pleasure and serotonin to reduce worry."

In Asia during 2004, 8.1 million square meters of tradeshow space was sold by event organizers to their clients – over 40% in China and 25% in Japan, according to research by Business Strategies Group for UFI, the global association of the exhibition industry. Among the 1,750 events held, up 5.7% on the previous year, 59% took place in those two countries. The study also reveals healthy forecasts for this year. "We believe that the exhibition industry will grow by around 18-20% in Asia in 2005," it predicts, "with the strongest growth still in China.

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Exhibition World

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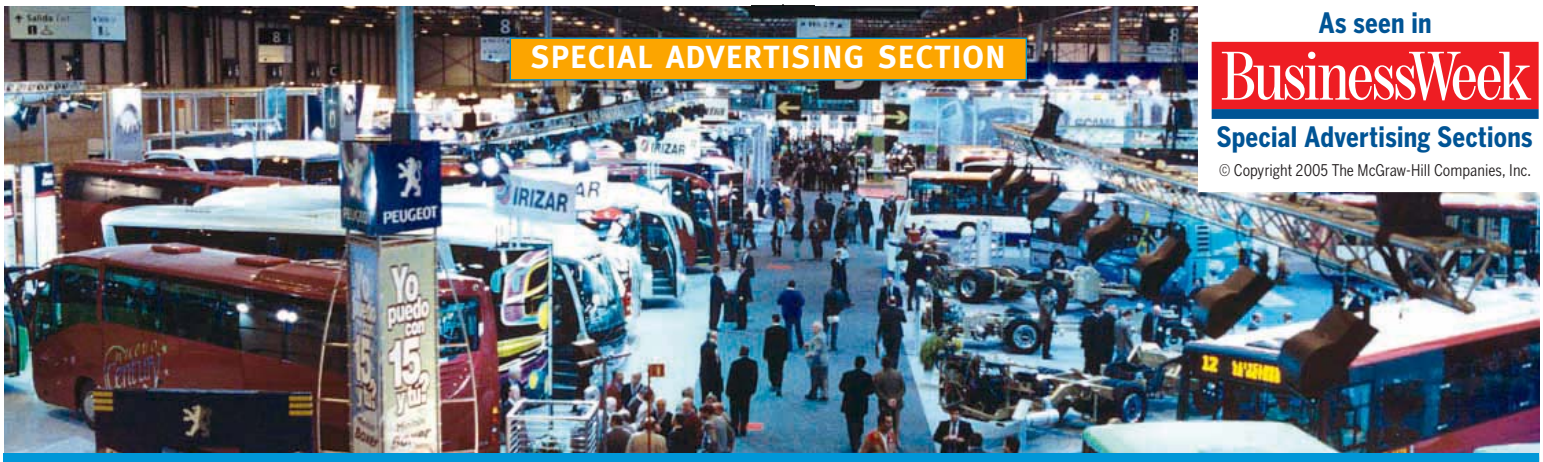

Tradeshow ROI by numbers

9% of companies' marketing budgets go on radeshows on average*, but...

23% of companies' business is generated through tradeshows on average*

76% of exhibition attendees arrive with an agenda**

48% of exhibition leads don't require a sales call to close the deal**

56% less is spent on converting exhibition leads into sales than those generated by field sales calls**

87% of exhibition attendees say they will share information obtained at exhibitions with their immediate superiors**

SOURCE
*Exhibition Association of Australia
** CEIR

DELIVERING THE EXPERIENCE

Of course, when visitors do drop by, it's essential that staff are trained to deal with them face to face, that the booth is inviting and that the whole experience reflects the right brand or corporate image. Improvements in technology mean that there are fewer constraints at exhibitions, providing more potential to create a striking, original and inviting booth that can immerse visitors in a company's brand experience. "As a result, many show organizers now offer facilities for laptops, Internet access, etc. to be used on the stand," explains Nexus/h's Openshaw. "Manufacturers of bathroom accessories, for example, often have 'working bathrooms' with Jacuzzi's bubbling as if they were in a show home, likewise car manufacturers have their new models on show. These experiences enable the customer to engage with the brand. Exhibitors at business-to-business events can learn a lot from the consumer market. They need to stop thinking they are constrained to using the walls of the exhibition area. There is so much potential for great creativity to really bring people to the stand."

But of course different companies require different approaches and flamboyance for flamboyance's sake won't work unless customers can relate to it and it matches a company's vision and values.

"The key to a successful event experience is to start with an understanding of the attendee and then setting very specific objectives for what you want the event to achieve," says GPJ's Myhre. "Then determine what the attendee must feel, think, know and do to achieve your objectives."

The work GPJ carried out for Camp Jeep at the New York International Auto Show vividly illustrates this. With Daimler Chrysler it created a powerful real-life indoor Camp Jeep test ground. In addition, the Camp Jeep experience also incorporated several other highly interactive components, including live entertainment and product specialists answering even the most obscure Jeep questions, as well as a mini trail-rated course for children. According to company officials, traffic was three times as much as anticipated, with around 20,000 people attending Camp Jeep each day. Visitors averaged 30 minutes at the Camp Jeep display, versus about five to seven minutes spent at other automakers' exhibits.

These figures speak for themselves and it's vital to take the time to devise ways of measuring statistics that will show that objectives have been met and indicate a return on investment (ROI). Only then can the marketing spend be fully justified.

The best exhibition organizers and venues measure the success of their show themselves, providing good data for exhibitors. Feria de Valencia, for example, hires a consultancy to carry out questionnaires during its event to test satisfaction levels for visitors and exhibitors. These questionnaires cover aspects referring to the exhibition business, together with the technical issues such as assembling and installation of booths, and the services offered. These are essential for the success of future shows.

It's also vital that exhibitors measure success too. Once again, this can only be carried out properly when carefully thought out before the show during the planning stage. "If the objective of the exhibition is to secure sales, for example, pre-coded literature can be used to track where sales have come from," explains Openshaw. "What's more, by monitoring stand attendance levels using special light pens that can scan visitor badges, you can assess how many of the people you invited have turned up, while also picking up information on the calibre of visitors through job titles and company name. Special show offers which run for a limited period can also be used to ensure that ROI is maximized."

There are many other techniques that good organizers will be able to recommend, but the key to all of this is that the work doesn't stop once the show is over. An immediate and detailed follow up of leads should be the icing on the exhibition cake, ensuring that maximum marketing rewards are reaped and that these have been measured effectively.

"It is at the end of the fair when the efforts made during the event come to fruition," says Fremin Lucas, Director General of IFEMA. "A fair is usually a starting point. The subsequent work will make the utmost of the participation in the event."

After all, for the personal touch to work, it must be carried out properly and followed through beyond the show. Essentially, the key to a successful tradeshow presence is to plan and implement it as carefully as any other marketing campaign.

WRITTEN BY IAN WHITELING
DESIGN BY DOTCOMMS.COM

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UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, promotes, represents and serves the interests of the world's leading show organizers, fairground owners and operators, major national and international associations of the exhibition industry and industry partners.

As a non-political and non-profit organization present in 75 countries across five continents and with 300 members organizations, UFI's main goal is to represent the exhibition industry worldwide and to emphasize its unique marketing characteristics for the development of world trade. UFI members manage over 4,500 exhibitions around the world.

"Being a member of UFI is a proof of quality and international recognition, assuring excellent services for the benefit of both exhibitors and visitors," says UFI managing director, Vincent Gérard.

Mash Media is the UK's leading publisher of magazines and directories for the exhibition, event and conference industries.

From the launch of the ***Who's Who in Exhibitions?*** Directory in 1994, the company now publishes eight titles, including ***Exhibition News, Conference News, Conference and Meetings World, Exhibiting***, the 50-year old ***Exhibition Bulletin, Exposegodnia*** in Russia and the international ***Exhibition World***, the official publication of UFI.

At the heart of, and dedicated to, the markets they serve, the portfolio has become the 'must-read' of the industry.

"It is our objective to provide our readers with the most interesting and valuable editorial and the most comprehensive and accurate data in the market place," says Mash Media managing director, Julian Agostini.

More than marketing

Although tradeshows offer an excellent marketing opportunity, they also offer much more.

According to global exhibition organization UFI, you have your entire marketplace at your fingertips. As a result you can add additional value to your exhibition presence by making sure you take the opportunity to:

1. **Gain feedback** from your clients to immediately obtain a real-time insight into market expectations.
2. **Research market potential** and assess your competition to help stay abreast of product advances and new technology.
3. **Identify new agents and distributors** and recruit new staff, as well as initiate new alliances and establish joint ventures and project partnerships.

WORKING TOGETHER

The benefits of face-to-face contact and the ability to be able to give visitors the chance to try out products first hand or physically experience the essence of a brand has led to talk of exhibitions challenging other marketing media. Certainly the ability to cut through the marketing fog that clouds most media to create a platform from which to engage effectively with existing and potential customers is a strong proposition. But maximizing the marketing effect of a tradeshow requires the use of a combination of marketing tools, from email and the internet to the more traditional magazine advertising and direct mail.

"Exhibitions should be viewed more as a component of a marketing strategy instead of being in direct competition to other media," says Kate Openshaw of UK-based full service advertising agency Nexus/h.

GPJ's Myhre agrees, saying: "The real question is not if exhibitions are a challenge to other media, but how exhibitions and other media can be better integrated to create more powerful marketing results. It's not a matter of swapping one for the other. Businesses need to apply each type of media where it can most help shift the customer through the sales cycle."

This is where online technology, which was once heralded as the beginning of the end for live events due to virtual exhibitions, has come into its own as a registration and pre-tradeshow marketing tool.

"With exhibitions providing such fertile ground for meetings, exhibition organizers are now offering all manner of sophisticated appointment scheduling software to facilitate not only a good number of meetings, but meetings with people that match the profile they are seeking," explains the AEO's Foley. "Planning is the key here. Exhibitors should invite customers and prospects to come and see them at particular times, ensuring that key contacts are there to greet them. An appointment in the diary greatly increases the chances that the prospect will attend the show. Achieving this is ever easier and cheaper with electronic communications. Emails and even a 'come and see us' message on the home page of a company's website can be very productive in generating the right kind of traffic to a stand."

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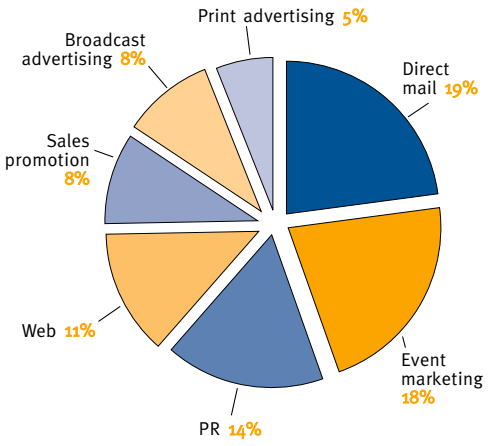
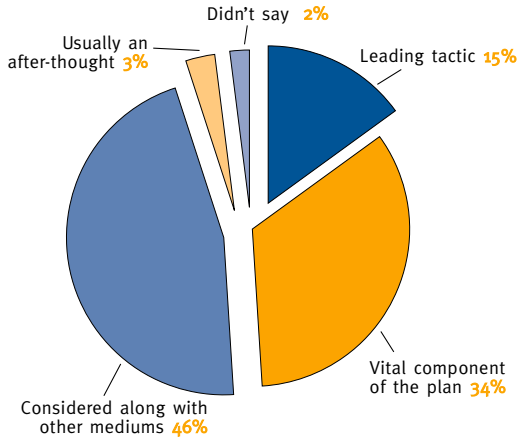
What marketing disciplines deliver best ROI?



What role do events play in your marketing campaigns?



Source: Event Trends Survey 2005/2006 The George P. Johnson Company & the MPI Foundation
Sample: 125 marketing directors or individuals with specific responsibility for marketing in leading European companies (July 2005)

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