

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRADESHOW EXPERIENCE

Tradeshows are a great way to network with industry experts, learn new skills and best practices at informative seminars, and meet with prospective vendors and business partners. But with so much going on, it pays to be prepared. Here are 7 tips to help you make the most of your tradeshow time.

1**UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH**

Before you go to any tradeshow, it's important to understand what you want to accomplish. Is your goal to visit vendors at random just to see what's out there, or are you trying to sign up and work with new partners? Either approach is fine, but if you're aiming for a more focused experience, you should do a little homework. Start by researching which vendors will be at the show, so you can have a plan of attack and hit the tradeshow floor running. Knowing what you want to get out of the show will help you maximize your time.

2**IDENTIFY THE SOLUTIONS THAT YOUR BUSINESS IS LOOKING FOR**

In addition to researching vendors, it's important to understand and evaluate your business needs, so you can find the right match and meet the right people at the tradeshow. Your business may need marketing help, or solutions to improve your inventory management. Understanding what to solve for can help you focus your efforts when you get to the show. It will also help you find the right vendors, programs, and technologies that will best fit your business' needs.

3**RESEARCH SPECIAL SHOW OFFERINGS**

Knowing the vendors that will have a presence on the show floor is only the starting point. Tradeshows are a great place to sign up with vendors at a discounted rate, especially if you do your homework. As you evaluate your business needs and research the vendors that you want to visit, find out if they have any promotions or special offers. Learning a little more about these promotions may help you decide whom you want to see and which vendors to visit first. These special offers may even make the difference in deciding between two partners with similar products or services.

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MAP OUT WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

Tradeshows are big events. There's always lots to do and lots to see. The event centers themselves are enormous too, and it can be easy to feel overwhelmed once you get there. Even for multi-day tradeshow events, you may not be able to see every booth. To get the most out of your experience, map out where you want to go and what you want to do. Make a plan to visit the vendors you want to connect with and know where their booths are located. Having a simple plan of attack (and a map to guide you) can help you to maximize your time and efficiency at the show.

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SCHEDULE APPOINTMENTS WHEN YOU CAN

You already know who you want to see and where you need to go. After mapping your plan, check to see if the vendors you want to visit offer the option to schedule appointments ahead of time. Scheduling appointments will allow you to skip long wait lines and maximize your time at the event. Appointments also give you an automatic "in" with the vendor. You may even receive emails and offers ahead of your appointment, so you can research the vendor and get a feel for the type of products and services they offer.

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DON'T FORGET THE EDUCATIONAL PANELS

There's more to tradeshows than visiting vendors alone. Tradeshows offer a treasure trove of knowledge from some of the industry's most recognized and respected thought leaders. Find out who is speaking and make a point to sign up for several seminars. These speaking events and panels are a great way to stay up to date industry best practices and they give you a chance to network and meet like-minded people and businesses from across the country.

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DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW UP

What happens after the show is arguably just as important as the show itself. When you get home, gather a list of all your new contacts—the people, the vendors, the prospective partners. Follow up with anyone whom you feel could help your business. You don't want to be forgotten in the after-show shuffle. As people get back to their businesses and day-to-day lives, drop a line just to say hi and ask for more information to help you make an evaluation about how they can benefit your business.