



Trade shows increase awareness about your products, showcase your services and enhance your image among your competitors and potential customers: in all a very powerful way to increase your sales. It is critical to arm yourself with the most compelling trade show display you can. At an event where your booth is one of hundreds, an attractive display creates the opportunity for a worthwhile discussion of your company.

## Graphics

Compelling is a relative term - keep in mind, the graphics on the trade show display are going to compel prospects, suspects and customers into your booth as opposed to allowing them to walk right on by. The goal of these graphics is not to be the most informative or the most colorful. You don't have to have millions of photos, or so many product descriptions that your booth looks like alphabet soup.

Good graphics consists of three ingredients:

1. Excellent (not good, excellent) photography of your product(s), or excellent photography of what I call men and women in motion.
2. Your logo or company name across the top and/or large enough to be seen from across the hall.
3. A features and benefits panel - a screened-back vertical rectangle containing at least three or four bullets with copy that translates the most important features of your product(s) into benefits.

## Photography

Let's begin with photography. The standard approach to product photography at trade shows has always been as many photos as possible, typically several dozen images, all 8" x 10" mounted on foam board and Velcro® taped to the display. It's a time-honored tradition that couldn't be more wrong. Instead, like so much other advertising, in the trade show booth, less is more. Try using only four or five images that are at least 20" x 30". Studies show you have about seven seconds to attract a customer walking past a trade show booth: making them squint at 20 photos in seven seconds will get you nowhere.

Larger photos are more compelling, more colorful and, when shot and displayed correctly, they will stop people in their tracks. I recommend working with a professional photographer for these images and taking advantage of a mural. While it will likely end up costing more than those product shots you took in the warehouse with your new digital camera, you will see a noticeable difference in the traffic to your booth. When finishing off your photos, mount them with pliable plastic coverings, not foam board, so they can be used over and over again without damage. Foam board ages quickly and there is nothing worse than a booth that looks like it's seen one too many tradeshows.

Like good photography, displaying your company's name and logo is simple and easy to do correctly, but often overlooked by first-time and seasoned exhibitors alike. The name/logo should be the uppermost addition of the display, running laterally and spanning the length of your booth (at least 10 feet wide). It should be visible from



far enough away that passers-by are not left wondering which booth they're about to happen across.

A Features and Benefits Panel is a chance for you to herald your goods and services. Like photography, your goal is to be compelling, not overwhelming. The message should be three or four short descriptions of the foremost benefits of the company. You need to connect with your potential customer, but leave them wanting more. A successful panel message brings customers to you seeking more information and excited about getting it right away. In that single instance, you've branded your organization by your uniqueness and your product's intrigue.

## Display Structure

A key stumbling block for first time exhibitors is the selection of the display itself. Too many young companies attempt to build their own displays, which look unprofessional and can cause more than a few headaches during transport and set-up. In general, a pop-up display is the best option for budding exhibitors. The displays are affordable, easy to maintain and set-up and with compelling graphics and a keen salesman, can make any company look like IBM while on the trade show floor.

A 10' pop-up trade show display is a good choice. It's lightweight, easy to install (if it takes more than 15 minutes, you've done something wrong) and it comports well with the "Get-Home-Syndrome" at the end of the show. The "Get-Home-Syndrome" says all you really care about

at the end of a trade show is easily dismantling the display, putting all the components into the case and exiting the exhibit hall.

If you can afford it, reserve 20' instead of the customary 10'. Why? Have you ever tried to talk to a prospect or suspect while your colleague was talking to another prospect or suspect in a 10' booth? There's no more room for anything else. I don't care if you're a Fortune 500 company or a mom and pop. It's all about room. If the demand is great, you need more space.

Here are some other easy rules of thumb when buying, setting up and utilizing a display of any kind:

- The simpler the better. Good, clean design and presentation speaks volumes about an exhibitor.
- Keep background colors neutral if you have individual graphics. Bright photos/logos/benefits panels leap off neutral backgrounds. Grey and black are the most common colors used in trade show booths.
- If you have a mural, gravitate to a darker colors, imperial blue and black. Frame the graphics with blue or black to help them stand out.
- If it takes you more than 15 minutes to set up a booth you have the wrong booth, too much display information or are otherwise making your display too complicated.



- Never, let me repeat that, never place your table parallel to your display. It's a mistake that the vast majority of boothsmen make. They set up a long table, stand behind it, blockading themselves from their customers and blockading their customers from their display.

## Showtime

Now that you have your booth organized and you've learned how to attract prospective customers to it, remember that attending a trade show is just one step in the process. It is critical that you not limit yourself to one show. You and your management team (or you, if you're it) should determine to go to a minimum of three shows annually. Choose those that are attended by the decision-makers in your industry and find something new and exciting for your display each and every time you're in the booth.

Trade shows are excellent sales builders and the company that ends up with the most leads at the end of the show...WINS!

*Jim Deady is the founder of Showstopper Exhibits selling trade show displays, banner stands and other trade show booth materials at [www.showstopperexhibits.com](http://www.showstopperexhibits.com). With more than 35 years in the advertising business, Deady also provides online assistance with developing graphics packages and "boothsmanship" – the etiquette of selling at trade shows.*

