

## To ensure trade show success, divide and conquer!

Smith Marketing Services

As new generations enter the marketing profession — and as the tools and technologies available to incoming and current professionals evolve and improve — it is nevertheless useful to revisit some of the basic tenants of our discipline which, new bells and whistles aside, may not have changed all that much at their foundation. In my estimation, one such category is participation in trade shows.



As such, we thought we'd recap some of the ways to ensure a strong performance *and* measurable results at your next such event. At SMS, we divide the trade show planning process into three distinct and more easily managed stages.

On the following pages, we'll take a look at each one — along with some 'practice what we preach' examples.

Enjoy and give a shout if we can help in any way!

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## BEFORE THE SHOW

- **Planning & Strategy:** Long before bags are packed and flights are booked, our smartest clients have worked backwards several months to be sure there is a distinct and measurable set of objectives for attending a given show. Are we rolling out a new product? Looking to pitch key editors? Running an in-booth product demo? Trying to book actual appointments with prospects or current customers on, or even off, the show floor? Or even dual-purposing the event to meet with and train sales reps? Whatever the goal, and it's entirely possible to juggle several at once, it's critical to ID them and establish appropriate metrics, lock down the budget, and begin the early stages of scheduling and logistics in order to avoid the added costs, missed opportunities, and added stresses of waiting till the last minute.
- **Booth Thematics & Design:** With objectives in place, it's time to turn the attention to booth content (e.g. themes, graphics, demos, floor plan, etc.) that aligns with or furthers your aforementioned objectives. Here is also when you make decisions related to booth placement, traffic flow to and within your booth, what eye-catching and on-message visuals/presentations/videos/demos will be required, which physical products you'll be bringing, how you'll capture and follow up on leads, and how you'll handle staffing (e.g. who's going; getting the show on their schedules, how they'll be trained, etc.). Lastly, now's the time to order carpet, furnishings, and such if you can -- as doing so may help you realize hundred of dollars in early-bird discounts.
- **Pre-show Promotion:** Activities here include everything from creating a Save-the-Date postcard to be mailed to customer and/or attendee lists, to securing on-theme freebies as handouts, to promoting your booth via trade ad slugs (*"See us at the ABCD show: Booth 123!"*), social media, or e-newsletter blasts to a prospect and/or customer database.



A 'save the date' postcard, like this one SMS created for the Railway Supply Institute's 2018 RSI/CMA show, is a great way to build interest, excitement, and engagement with show attendees. An added plus to the tactic: It can be sent out months in advance of the show, *before* you may have all of your booth plans nailed down.



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## DURING THE SHOW

- **Booth Set Up:** If your ad agency or marketing firm doesn't handle this for you, someone from your company should plan on showing up a day ahead of the show to supervise/QC booth construction, act as liaison with AV, lead-retrieval, or other suppliers, assist with set-up, and troubleshoot if needed so the client can essentially step into the booth and 'go.' Throughout the event, that same someone will should also be 'on call' to assist with setting up hospitality suites, delivering press kits, supporting any staff or executive presentations or round tables off the show floor, and ushering editors/reporters to the booth for their prearranged interviews during the show.
- **Videos & Social Posts:** While the show is running, consider assigning someone to write social posts, take pics, and even conduct video interviews in the booth to convey some of the excitement of the show. The resulting content can be distributed via social media during the show to generate buzz and both traffic -- AND after-the-show for their continuing news value or ROI.

Signage you can spot from across the show floor, a strong booth position that's mindful of traffic patterns, and a booth design that is welcoming are all hallmarks of the tradeshow booths we design/supervise for New York Air Brake. The booth shown here, also featured over a dozen product stations — each of which clearly depicted (or physically demonstrated) primary benefits at a glance: One example was a water-resistant slack adjuster (used in conjunction with rail car braking) that was submerged in a water tank.



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## AFTER THE SHOW

- **Booth Tear Down:** As soon as the show closes, someone from your company (or a trusted ally) will need to be on hand to supervise deconstruction of the booth, to ensure reusable assets are boxed-up/returned, materials are safely packed, and that shipments are properly marked for their return trip.
- **Post-Show Follow Up:** Assuming you've put a plan in place to capture and follow up with leads, now's the time to do take action on those follow-up activities *before* the leads become stale, before your competitor gets to them first, and before the show generally recedes into distant memory. At SMS, this can be as simple as drafting a standard follow-up letter/email that sales-team members can easily customize to address the prospect's area of interest. It's also perfectly acceptable to follow up with hard-copy or electronic literature, pertinent and useful links to your website, and even links to videos created at the show (which can serve as a great refresher for attendees or an ice-breaker for folks who may have missed the event altogether).
- **Post Mortem & Lessons Learned:** Finally, make a point of analyzing the show after-the-fact. Did you hit your benchmarks? Are there things that worked exceptionally well or didn't work out as envisioned? Are there any other lessons that can be applied going forward? As with continuous improvement in the manufacturing environment, the answers to these and other soul-searching questions can help gauge ROI – and, of course, make you better/smarter at the next show.

Shown here are screen-grabs from video we shot at an industry-leading rail supplier show. Each day of the show, best-of video clips were shared on social media *and* projected on a video wall strategically placed in the registration area. Afterwards, a complete highlights video was produced — which was also shared via social media and nifty follow-up emails to attendees, as a reminder about the show's value and to spotlight some of the event's most exciting products.



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**Thanks for your time! | [Smith Marketing Services](#)**

Comments or feedback regarding this document may be emailed to [info@onlinesms.com](mailto:info@onlinesms.com) — attention Doug Smith (President) or John Hoeschele (Vice President). Similarly, we welcome the opportunity to discuss *your* company's marketing goals, strategies, and tactics: Just email us at the address above or call us at 607.257.7000 to initiate a free, confidential, and no-pressure consultation.

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