



Showcase Your Social Skills

Here's how to turn your trade show booth into a social content opportunity

BY MOLLY SOAT | STAFF WRITER

msoat@ama.org

As any modern-day trade show exhibitor knows, designing a compelling in-person experience is only half the battle. You also have to integrate social media content and community-building efforts into your brand's trade show presence to ensure that you get the most

bang for your buck. "Social media is about building and becoming a valuable part of your industry's community. That doesn't change when you go to a trade show," says Traci Browne, social media consultant and author of *The Social Trade Show: Leveraging Social Media and Virtual Events to Connect With*

Your Customers. "At the trade show, you have a huge audience. By using social media as part of your trade show strategy, it amplifies what you're doing."

Here, Browne and other experts offer advice on how to marry online tactics with your offline trade show strategy.

1 Be social from the start. "Look at the overall goals of what you want to accomplish at the show and figure out how you can use social media to reach those goals," says Jackie Kaufenberg, community manager and social media strategist at Hutchinson, Minn.-based online marketing firm Vivid Image Inc., who is a certified trade show marketer by the Exhibitor Media Group.

Plan how to incorporate social media content into your trade show strategy from the start, and be sure to create

content that would appeal to potential customers whether or not they're in attendance, Browne says. "You need to consider all those communities who can't be at the show. When you plan your strategy that way, you'll reach a wider audience and get more bang for your buck for exhibiting. You want to be the eyes and ears of your community members who are stuck back in their offices," she says.

Post some pre-show content on LinkedIn and Twitter the week before the show, just as attendees and other exhibitors are gearing up, Browne says. The week leading up to the event is a good time to start show-related discussion threads and post teasers of what your company will be exhibiting. Remember to use the show's hashtag for any tweets leading up to the event, but don't go overboard with hashtags for your brand and products, she says. The event hashtag is enough to get your company's name into the event's Twitter feed.

2 Plan your placement. As a general rule, ignore Facebook at trade shows, experts say, as most attendees use LinkedIn before a show and Twitter during it. "Look at what the show management is using because that's a great place to start—not exhaustive, but a jumping-off point for planning your on-site strategy because attendees are already there," Kaufenberg says.

Adds Browne: "LinkedIn is good before and after the show because you can post meaty content, but people aren't standing on the trade show floor checking LinkedIn group discussions. They're checking Twitter. ... Attendees can just glance at it every now and then, and get updates and add to it on the fly. It's easy for brands, too, to participate because they're short messages and you can add things in real time very easily."

Most experts agree that social media marketers should follow the 80/20 rule when posting content, where 80% of content is thought leadership and 20%

"LinkedIn is good before and after the show because you can post meaty content, but people aren't standing on the trade show floor checking LinkedIn group discussions."

TRACI BROWNE, *THE SOCIAL TRADE SHOW: LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIRTUAL EVENTS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS.*

is promotional, but it's OK to adjust that ratio at trade shows, Kaufenberg says. Since attendees are there to learn about products, they're more willing to click on product-centric content, she says.

However, the promotional content should be presented in a service-focused way, Browne says. "Attendees know why they're going [to a trade show] and that they'll be sold to," she says. "There is room for more self-promotion, but it still has to be done with the idea of what the benefit is to the attendee." Browne suggests posting something like, "Stop by our booth for a discussion on ways to help reduce your risk of litigation," instead of posting a more transparent plug for your consulting service. "It's that little turn in phrasing that turns something promotional into something that's valuable for the attendee," she says.

3 Get visual. Trade show attendees are there to work, but that doesn't mean that you can't have a little fun with your social media efforts. "A lot of exhibitors are getting on Instagram because people like photos of themselves," Browne says. "They love photo booths, so set one up in a corner of your booth. And if you tag [those Instagram posts] with the show hashtag, they will post on Twitter, too."

Make sure to shoot some product demos in the booth to post during the show or keep for later. Browne advises keeping your smartphone at the ready in case there's an impromptu video opportunity. "Your videos don't have to be professional quality. People are expecting

them to be made on the fly, and it makes them feel authentic," she says.

The show floor can get noisy, so make sure that your videos are audible, Kaufenberg says. "Find a quiet room or space in the hallway to shoot a few videos. This will add to the urgency of those taped interviews, too, so it gives them good energy." If the video doesn't come out YouTube-worthy, it can be transcribed and turned into a blog post when the show is over.

"Man on the street" interviews work well for trade show video content, Browne adds. Ask people who walk by what their favorite part of the show was and create a video montage of all of the answers. "Montages of attendees are great because everyone in the video will be excited and share it with their whole network. The show organizer might want to use it to promote the show the next year, so it gives you a lot of exposure."

4 Prepare for post-show. Trade show attendees have lots of questions and they don't all get answered in a day or two of networking. Write a blog post answering the most common questions that you heard from attendees and potential clients or a summary of a particularly interesting session, Browne suggests.

"Two days at a trade show can give you four to six months' worth of content that's of benefit to all of your customers," she says. "It's not just about adding people to your mailing list, which you should do only if they request it, by the way. You actually have something really valuable to share with them." **■**