

## 21 Ways to Improve Your Exhibit Effectiveness

### 1. EXHIBIT PRESENTATION

Your exhibit plays a critical role in your exhibiting success. Visually it must first attract attention and quickly and effectively communicate who you are, what you do and why the attendees should stop and enter. The exhibit should communicate and reinforce your corporate branding and convey top level messages. Since the booth is a defined space where your staff and attendees interact, it must be effectively designed to facilitate traffic flow, ensure visitors quickly find what they are looking for, support interaction with your staff, and help meet the information needs of visitors. To evaluate exhibit effectiveness, evaluation questions included:

- a. ***Does the overall exhibit grab attention?*** Step back and look at your exhibit through the eyes of an attendee in the aisles. Consider how you are using exhibit architectural shape, design, size and scale, color, lighting, graphic images, copy, motions and content to help grab the attention of an attendee.
- b. ***Is it quickly/easily discernable what the company does/offers?*** Make sure a graphic narrative, an image, and your placement of physical products is prominently displayed and easily visible from all angles in the aisles.
- c. ***Is it quickly/easily discernable who the company is?*** Make sure your company logo is properly placed at various levels so attendees can see it from a distance walking down the aisle and at eye level in and around the exhibit. Remember, corporate ID needs to be visible from many perspectives to sufficiently reinforce the brand.
- d. ***Are there sufficient graphics/are they well placed/legible?*** Sometimes less is more graphically. Graphics must be placed at or slightly above eye level. Consider placement height, viewing distance and legibility to improve this rating. Detailed informational graphics should be used in the exhibit in conjunction with products and services, and identification and promotional graphics that attract attendees into the booth should be simple, pictorial and positioned on the periphery of the space.
- e. ***Do the graphics communicate clear, concise, specific message(s)?*** Attendees move quickly through the exhibit hall and won't take much time to read a lot of copy. They scan a booth very quickly and need both images and text that communicate clear, concise and specific messages. Provide consistency within your message throughout the exhibit so that at a glance people can quickly understand the main message and then can drill down to specific areas to gather more details about that message. (Some booths had too many messages all competing for the same visual demand.)
- f. ***Do the message(s) inform/educate/give attendee a reason to stop?*** Use bulleted feature and benefit messages to inform and educate. And remember, you will attract more attendees to your booth by showcasing new products and services and placing these messages in highly visible areas of the booth.
- g. ***Is the exhibit easy to enter?*** Avoid obstacles that block entrance to your exhibit. This can include but are not limited to booth architecture, tables, information counters and/or display cases that limit or prevent attendees from crossing the carpet line and entering your booth. Sometimes positioning a table or display case a few feet off the carpet line can make a difference whether or not attendees decide to walk in.

- h. **Can visitors quickly discern what is being displayed and where?** Use large visible directional signage to help attendees get around and major categories to label product areas in the exhibit so prospects can find what they need fast. When display tables are used, it helps to group products into categories first and in turn identify the product name, features and benefits. For example; products that support “knees” or “hips” can be categorized as such rather than using a brand name as a category header. This makes it much easier for surgeons to efficiently find the solutions they are looking for. Think about the placement of the display/information areas next to each other and how those areas support each other to tell a story or relationship. You might find an attendee focused on one product area but did not see a related product that they might not know you provide.
- i. **Is there enough open space for attendees?** You must have sufficient open space for attendees to enter and easily navigate your exhibit and for attendees and your staff to interact. When the booth is overcrowded and hard to navigate it detracts from the visitors experience and does not win you any points with your prospects.
- j. **Is the corporate identity effectively integrated in exhibit design?** Make sure your corporate colors and images are effectively integrated into the exhibit architecture, signage, kiosks, furnishings, and even down to the color of the carpet. Try to display your corporate identity at tiered viewing levels so these can be seen from a distance, as you approach the booth and at eye level throughout the exhibit. Corporate colors provide continuity throughout the space as well as make the space feel larger with the use of same color and brand message. Unifying your exhibit using consistent corporate colors repetitively throughout the space will also help you achieve enhanced brand awareness and improve retention for your participation.

## 2. PRODUCT/SERVICE PRESENTATION

Attendees visit exhibits for a number of reasons. Surgeons and their staff want to interact with companies, people, and products and services. They want to engage, study and learn, and evaluate devices, instruments, procedures and therapies. To be effective, product presentation/demonstrations require careful planning based on the following considerations: a.) Define your target visitor. Know who your ideal booth visitor is. b.) Create an engaging, interactive experience. Think through what you want them to see, do, experience and remember as result of the visit. Consider how your product fits into the experience. Remember, attendees want hands-on, interactive experiences. They want to be able to efficiently and effectively collect and evaluate product/service information and understand how your devices, instruments or products/services can help them in their practice. To evaluate product/service presentations evaluators observed the following:

- a. **Are products physically displayed or presented?** A display is generally static. A presentation is usually interactive. Surgeons are very tactile people who value hands-on interactive experiences. Displaying products in enclosed display cases limits the surgeons ability to interact with the product and has significantly less impact than making products accessible through a presentation or demonstration.’
- b. **Is the display/presentation thoughtful/creative/unique?** Randomly tossing instruments on a counter or table and asking the surgeon to fish through the pile to find what they are looking for is neither unique nor thoughtful, as it makes the prospect fish for the solutions for which they are looking. The objective in your display is to demonstrate creativity while economizing on the amount of time the surgeon needs to find the solutions for which they are looking. This means your goal is to organize your resources into logical groupings, providing hands-on experiential areas where surgeons can interact with the products. Think about your product or service and try to find a fun, unique and engaging way to recreate an in-clinic or surgical experience for maximum impact.

- c. ***Is the display/presentation engaging and/or interactive?*** Surgeons want to engage by touching, feeling, inspecting, and using products, if at all possible. Long term retention and mindshare is improved when multiple senses are stimulated: auditory, visual and kinesthetic.
- d. ***Is feature/benefit signage integrated into presentation?*** Presenting product information only verbally limits sensory input options and thereby impact, understanding and recall. Supporting key product messages with visible, bulleted, key-point expands sensory input. This can also be achieved by nearby interactive monitors and/or with continuous loop PowerPoint or DVD presentations. These approaches help increase comprehension, retention and post-show recall. If you are presenting a PowerPoint, video or DVD on monitor(s) in the exhibit be sure to identify what's on the monitor. This can be achieved through topper(s) attached to the monitor or an easel sign on the counter. The signs can be very helpful for the audience as nine times out of ten the volume is turned down and attendees are watching a "silent movie." The signage identifies the presentation topic and helps puts the content into context for viewers so they know what they are viewing.
- e. ***Is takeaway product/service information readily available?*** Despite preference for receiving information post-show, there are still a high number of attendees who want detailed information to take with them for more immediate review. Whether you use printed fact sheets and/or provide data on USB Drives or CD ROMs, it is important to have some information readily available for those that request it.

### 3. EXHIBIT STAFF

While your booth and product presentation are important, your exhibit staff may be the most critical factor in the effectiveness of your exhibit. Regardless of the size or attractiveness of your exhibit, your staff's availability and interactions skills can make or break your program. Attendees make judgments about your company and products and services based on their observation of and interactions with your staff. Attendees want visible staff available to acknowledge them quickly. They expect professional, friendly, knowledgeable booth staffers who respect their time and show interest in their needs. They appreciate staffers who take a moment to learn who they are, why they are visiting, and then to address their needs efficiently with personalized information. To evaluate exhibit effectiveness evaluators observed the following:

- a. ***Are there an appropriate number of booth staffers?*** The rule of thumb is one staffer per 50 open square feet of space. Understaffing or overstaffing a booth can be counter-productive and are generally ineffective practices. Consider the size of your exhibit and exhibit hall traffic flow and patterns. Make sure you have enough staff available to engage visitors. But not too many! Too many people can block your booth graphics and main message. This is critical in the smaller booths so it is best to stand a step inside the booth's edge so that your messaging can be visible and the graphic message can draw people in. If you wonder if you have too many staff, take a photo with your staff standing in the booth without attendees before the show begins. If it already looks crowded without attendees, you probably have too many staffers.

- b. ***Does their dress quickly/visibly identify them as booth staffers?*** This is a bigger problem in the larger exhibits because like the surgeons, many exhibit staffers wear suits and ties. While this is professional and entirely appropriate for this audience, it presents a challenge for the attendees (and the evaluators) in determining who exhibit staffers are. To address this, consider a uniform, color coded dress policy, or an accessory strategy such as a large badge to make it easier for attendees to quickly identify your staff. For example, you can consider matching ties and jackets with scarves for the female reps, or boutonnieres for all. You can also try corporate shirts with embroidered logos worn with the same color sports jackets and matching slacks or skirts. Not only will this make it easier for attendees to find a staffer in the booth but you will look professional and consistent as well.
- c. ***Do they keep body language open to visitors/attendees in aisles?*** Over half of an attendee's decision to notice and pay attention to a specific exhibit is based on what the booth staff is doing or not doing. Staffers should be positioned a couple feet off the carpet line – not in the aisles. They should maintain an open body posture with their eyes directed toward attendees in the aisles and upon visitors who enter the exhibit.
- d. ***Are they quickly responsive to booth visitors?*** Surgeon's time on the exhibit floor is limited and they will not wait much more than one minute or two to be engaged by a staffer. You should have sufficient staff available at any given time whether it is the first day or the last day to manage traffic flow. To engage attendees who are passing or considering entering your booth requires a little proactive behavior on your staff's part. It also makes sense to assign specific meet and greet staff and position them near entrances to your exhibit. This can be an excellent support mechanism to help product demonstration and sales staffers that may be engaged with visitors.
- e. ***Any inappropriate booth behaviors?*** Behaviors like eating, drinking, sitting down, leaning, clustering in groups, looking or acting disinterested, talking to other staffers and using cell phones and/or texting in the booth create an undesirable image of your company in the minds of target attendees. Texting was near epidemic proportion at this year's meeting. These behaviors decrease booth traffic by discouraging potential visitors from stopping.