



Having a clipboard makes order writing easy.  
Photos courtesy of Las Vegas Market

# Maximize Your Trade Show Investment

By Diane Sulg

**E**xhibiting at a trade show is exhilarating! Although it is multiple days, when it is over, it will seem like it went speeding by.

Therefore, you want to make sure you take advantage of every showtime minute. Here are ways to maximize your time at the show.

Plan to do excellent pre-show marketing. Let people know you are going to be there, both by email to select retailers and on social media.

Highlight some of your newest and best products and feature a special available only at the show. Let your promotions exude excitement so potential buyers will want to see your work.

Be sure to read all the material the show provides for exhibitors. If they have any exhibitor meetings, get-togethers, or panels, plan to attend. If you are truly stumped by a problem, particularly with your booth or its location, do not hesitate to contact a show official.

In addition to your products and display pieces, make a detailed list of

items you will need during the show.

For your business, make sure you have line sheets or brochures, pens, a stapler, clipboard, scissors, and lots of business cards. For your comfort, pack a sweater, comfy shoes, water, and healthy munchies you can eat on the sly.

Arrive at your booth at least 15 minutes before the show opens. Check your signage and get your materials ready for action. Make sure the price of each item is clear — retailers are seeing hundreds of items and price is an important consideration.

Stay in your booth. You may be tempted to wander the show, but it is part of Murphy's Law that when you do, you are guaranteed to miss a good customer. Put your phone away. Instead, say hello to the people passing by and look for ways to start a conversation.

When buyers walk into your booth, have a brief welcome statement prepared. In a short sentence, tell them what they are seeing like, "This is all sterling silver and 14K gold jewelry handmade in my Savannah studio."

Ask them a brief question about the kind of store they have or where it is located. This is also a suitable time to highlight a show special, such as free shipping with a minimum order.

Direct their attention to something specific, such as a bestselling item or a brand-new design. Then let them look around for a few minutes.

If they seem really interested, ask if you can group some items together, so they can get an idea of what their order would look like. If they have been looking for quite a while, ask if they "would like to write an order." Sometimes that suggestion is all it takes.

When writing the order, ask them if they want you to total it. Be sure you have all their information on your order copy and all your information on their copy.

Stapling each business card to the appropriate copy is the best way to be accurate. Make sure you have noted a shipping date and verified the shipping address.

If buyers have been in your booth for a while, but are leaving without ordering, make sure you do a couple of things. First, see that they have your line sheet or brochure with your booth number on it, so they can come back later. Also, make sure you have their business card. They were clearly interested in your products, so you will want to follow up with them after the show.

During the show, be prepared to answer lots of questions. Have a line sheet or brochure that lists all your products and their wholesale price. On that sheet, add your "terms of sale," which include minimum orders, payment methods, return and damage policies, and shipping information. These are your policies, so you can certainly



Give your customers permission to touch and enjoy your products. That is the major advantage of an in-person trade show.

change them if that helps to make a sale, but be aware, it is good not to make too many exceptions.

You might have a buyer ask if you "have a better price." In that situation, be prepared to tell them how seriously you worked to achieve the absolute best pricing, and offer them some other incentive, like free shipping.

Or you might consider a small percentage discount if they order two times the minimum order, but on regular orders, keep your pricing firm. The same

is true if a buyer asks if you "do consignment." The answer is no.

However, you can reserve the right to offer one expensive piece of your work on consignment if the buyer has ordered a large amount of your other pieces and is paying in advance of shipping. All these decisions are yours to make, and keeping the integrity of your brand should be a high priority when you are dealing with savvy store owners.

Now what if buyers from a famous store, gallery, museum, or hotel chain look at your product offerings and show



Be personable and enjoy meeting your new customers.

a great deal of interest? They ask you a lot of questions and seem pleased with your answers. They talk among themselves and spend a lot of time in your booth. And then they leave without ordering. Dang!

This would be a dream order for you and a perfect showcase for your work. Hopefully, you have their business card, and there is nothing wrong with messaging them the next day and telling them you were thrilled they visited your booth, and you would love to have your work in their store.

Ask, “How can WE make this happen?” I know of instances where this has worked, so do not be shy in asking for an order!

One inevitable situation is having too many buyers in your booth at one time. If you are busy with a customer and another buyer enters your booth, pause, and at least say, “Hi. Please look around.”

If you are close to finishing with your customer, tell the new ones you will be with them shortly. If it is going to be a bit longer, you can offer the new folks your line sheet and tell them you will be with them in five minutes or so. If they leave your booth, thank them for coming and say you hope they will return.

You should try to get business cards from everyone who enters your booth. If they do not have one, ask if you can snap a photo of their badge, which usually has their name and that of their business.

Just the fact they visited your booth is reason to believe your product might be a good fit for their store. Use their information to follow up with them after the trade show by email or with a short phone call. One of the benefits of exhibiting at a trade show is collecting a large potential customer base, so use this to your advantage.

There is always an ebb and flow of business at a show. You will find the days at the beginning of a show are usually busier than the very last day. You will see more customers in the morning and at midday than late in the afternoon.

Use your downtime to organize your materials and freshen your booth. Also use it to meet your nearby exhibitors. You have joined a community that is very welcoming and where you can learn a lot.

If they are experienced at the show, they know good places to eat, park, and stay. Ask questions and exchange information — not only about the show, but about business in general. You can

learn and make lifelong friends at a trade show.

On a final note, have fun! Yes, a trade show is an exceptional highlight for your business, and you have worked diligently to put your brand in the perfect spotlight.

However, keep in mind you are selling to human beings, and people always want to have a fun time. Be personable and friendly. Smile — a lot!

One of my favorite business quotes is from author and entrepreneur, Seth Godin: “People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories, and magic.” Remember that, and bring along your friendliest manners, good stories, and a bit of your best magic. ⚙️

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