

Maximizing returns on investment in exhibitions for governments



Around the globe, governments, government agencies and public corporations recognise the high value of special events as a communication tool. This is because well-planned and -executed events are able to create substantial impact for limited cost, and help marketers achieve a number of different goals simultaneously.



These goals may include media coverage, information provision, stakeholder involvement/management and more. Further, carefully orchestrated events can also accomplish the important task of creating a more human 'face' for the government or government agency in question.

"Among the most powerful types of special events available to marketers in government are exhibitions," says Conrad Kullmann of the 3D Group, a company specialising in turnkey solutions for the exhibition and trade show industry. "As a marketing platform," he notes, "exhibitions can produce exceptional results in terms of branding and visual impact as well as one-to-one interaction with visitors in a very short time."

"Of course, one of the keys to success in this arena is to identify the specific exhibitions which will provide the best return on money spent. As a rule, marketers should seek out exhibitions which closely match their products and services to the target audience, and which are structured to fulfil the exhibitor's objectives. Other factors to consider when assessing the suitability of an exhibition is whether or not the organiser is able/willing to furnish previous exhibitor lists, so the marketer can determine which other exhibitors to expect. The organiser should also provide audited visitor attendance figures to demonstrate the size and draw of the exhibition. The organiser should also line up media and sponsorship opportunities to enhance the exhibitor profile."

Once the decision to exhibit has been taken, it then becomes necessary to plan for the event. The very first steps to take are to book the space, appoint an exhibition manager and determine the budget. You then need to decide whether you want to be close to the door, in the centre of an established industry 'themed' section or near to a vulnerable competitor.

The budget you are allocated will determine the size of your stand, its design and construction. In addition the budget will need to cover build-up and knock-down, transport to/from the exhibition centre, accommodation and travel for staff members elected to man the stand, giveaways, promotional literature and so on. This done, you need to book hotel accommodation and travel, select an exhibition contractor and plan your exhibit.

Most governments and government agencies do not have in-house capabilities to design, build, transport, erect and complete an exhibition stand on time and to a suitable quality standard. The answer is to investigate which specialist stand designers and builders are the most reliable and ask them to quote on the job.

"Work with your preferred stand designer and your marketing team to plan your exhibition stand and

exhibits," Kullmann advises. "As ask yourself questions such as will specific exhibits be reused for future exhibitions or for in-house applications such as reception or training areas? What new products or services can be launched at the exhibition? Is there a parallel conference, and can someone present a suitable paper? Will the exhibits require electric power, water supply or other logistical input?"

"A few months before the exhibition," Kullmann advises, "plan your press release schedule and presence the show catalogue, and begin setting up appointments and issuing complementary tickets. Most importantly, decide exactly what your staff will achieve and brief them thoroughly."

"You should also start advising people what you will be exhibiting in pre-show press releases. The exhibition organisers themselves may offer you the opportunity to take part in their pre-exhibition publicity. However, you should add the exhibition date to your website and perhaps mails to your key attendee mailing list."

During the show, it is important to hold daily briefings with stand staff to emphasise your goals and report on the progress. Invite the media to visit your stand for publicity, and have well-presented literature and knowledgeable staff on hand for interviews.

Capturing data at the show is a key consideration. You do need to capture data on people who visit your exhibition stand and make an enquiry. Standard enquiry forms are a good idea and perhaps a computer database on the exhibition stand into which these forms can be typed.

Each day, one person must have overall responsibility for the stand, its contents and personnel. Responsibility is often shared between a number of senior people, but the exhibition manager may need to be present for the whole show.

After the event, all contacts should receive a letter of some kind within a week of their visit to maintain top-of-mind awareness. This letter should answer their enquiry or explain who will answer it and when. Staff members responsible for that account or territory must be informed and should take responsibility for further contact with the enquirers where appropriate.