

The Inbound Marketing Trade Show Planning Guide



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Introduction

For manufacturers, exhibiting at a trade show represents one of the most valuable marketing opportunities they have all year.

It better be. Producing a trade show event is one of the most expensive, resource-intensive initiatives in any marketer's budget.

Renting exhibition floor space, staffing the booth, getting staff to and from the event, hotel accommodations, meals, entertainment, designing and outfitting the booth, and marketing your presence at the show make this a costly endeavor.

With your competitors just down – or even across – the aisle from you, getting the biggest bang for your marketing buck demands nothing less than an all-out effort to drive traffic to your booth and capture top-quality leads by the bucketful .



Still, many, maybe most, are not taking advantage of all that social media and inbound marketing have to offer in the context of a trade show. “The business value of Facebook and the other social media is still largely untapped at trade shows,” says Scott Wherley, vice president global customer insights with [Reed Expositions](#), one of the world's largest event organizers. “Some companies are doing it well, but many are not making the most of this opportunity.”

Making use of all the inbound marketing and social media tools at your disposal helps you solidify the connection from your real world presence to your online marketing channels. It ensures you create buzz leading up to the event, maximizes the traffic to your booth, and keeps the relationship going as the event luster fades away and your prospects move down the funnel from leads to closed sales.

But, an effective trade show-social media connection begins long before the event. You must have an established social media presence before the show and know which sites to use, and when, and what content you'll be posting.

Pick the Right Tools for the Job

It may be obvious, but all social media are not alike. Each has different parameters and capabilities and thus, some are better-suited to the varying stages of your trade show inbound marketing campaign plans.

Twitter, with its 140-character limitation and smartphone distribution, creates a sense of immediacy. Tweeting is most effective just before or during a show to remind prospects of upcoming events or special promotions, or to drive traffic with special offers for a limited time.

Facebook offers more characters (420), more room for feedback and leverages the social network throughout the event cycle.

LinkedIn, with its professional bent, provides a more work-like environment and offers the ability to form unique interest groups tailored to each event.

Your company's blog offers unlimited space for content, letting you explore topics in as much or as little depth as you like, and where subscribers can chime in with their comments (or not, your choice). Include the right keywords and you boost your SEO in the bargain. Don't forget to reach out to industry bloggers with news of your upcoming plans for the show and provide them URLs that can be embedded in their posts directing them to your website, Facebook page, or LinkedIn group for more information.

YouTube videos naturally lend themselves to explaining complex concepts while creating a more personal bond with viewers. These videos can serve as ambassadors for your products and services long after the last visitor has left your booth.

5 Trade Show Tips from the Pros

Trade show consultants routinely find that marketers are stymied when it comes to preparing for a trade show. Here's what they recommend to make the most of your trade show investment:

1. Pick the show that best aligns with your marketing strategy
2. Plan marketing strategies for pre-show, show, and post-show
3. Reach out to every visitor to your booth post-show via email or phone.
4. Analyze which strategies worked and which didn't
5. Calculate your ROI on the event once the sales cycle has closed.

[Source: The Secret to Achieving Brilliant Returns at Your Next Event, Joyce

Dash It All — Use Your Marketing Dashboard to Track ROI

With all these moving parts in an inbound marketing campaign and everything else to which the campaign is attached in your sales and marketing cycles, keeping track of each piece, how successfully it contributes to the overall strategy, what works and what doesn't, and where the biggest ROIs are reaped, is essential.

A marketing automation tool, such as [HubSpot](#) provides, makes sure nothing gets missed before, during, and after a trade show. It helps you bridge the gap from real world to virtual world and strengthen relationships from lead to sale and beyond—for the next sale, the upsell and the cross-sell.

Traffic & Leads



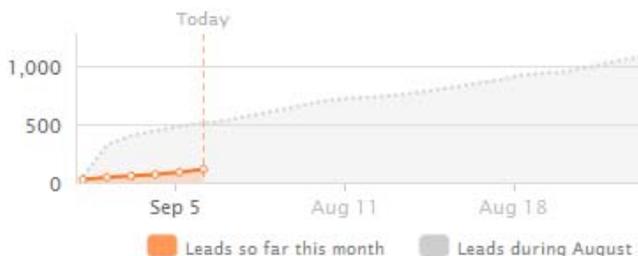
1,510 ↑ 1.9%
since this time
last month



↓ 0.1%



397 ↑ 77.8%
since this time
last month



This type of automation lets you connect your efforts from start to finish. A trade show is never a standalone event; it's part of a contiguous set of initiatives designed to generate leads and move them along the marketing funnel until Sales can close the deal.

Too Much Information? Not at a Trade Show

From the customer's perspective, they are seeking information at a trade show—the information they need to have enough confidence in doing business with your company. They want to understand how your products work and how you can help them achieve their own goals; they want reference points from existing customers who can provide testament to your trustworthiness, and when appropriate, access to the right people in your management organization who can help them get what they need to succeed. A trade show is the perfect venue for this information and social media and inbound marketing are the ideal tools to facilitate the process and the relationship.



The most effective marketing automation tools are flexible and comprehensive. By choosing a software-as-a-service (SaaS) software application, you're assured of having state-of-the-art tools that adapt to the ever-changing landscape that is social media. They reach all the critical touchpoints of SEO, email, and the social media darlings *du jour*, whatever they are.

The best marketing automation tools also provide solid integration to your CRM applications. A 360-degree view of the process and how someone progressed from lead to prospect to customer is at the heart of the analytics every marketer needs to succeed. From the time someone pokes their head into your Facebook page and all the stops they make along the way to a purchase, from subscribing to your blog, to downloading a whitepaper or ebook, attending a webinar, or stopping by your trade show booth, you've got to have the information about what brought them there to be able to replicate that success day in and day out.

Before the Show

Just like you have to book your trade show space well in advance of the event, you have to build your social media presence and its connection to the show months before you're welcoming people to your booth. A carefully planned, trade show inbound marketing campaign cannot be a last-minute venture if it's to succeed.

Building buzz in advance of your event is important to drive traffic to your booth, but knowing what your customers and prospects would like to learn about during the show is even more important. Use Facebook, LinkedIn, and your company blog to solicit information about what people would like to see and learn about at the show. Then, deliver!

Prepare Quick Response (QR) tags and have them set up next to the corresponding products in your booth. If you're doing a demo, video record it and link to it via a QR tag, recommends PJ Naughton of Fusion Tech Marketing. Creating QR tags is easy and it quickly moves customers and prospects from your show booth to your online presence. A QR tag puts a link to your online marketing initiatives in the palms of prospects hands via their smartphones. From there, they can share it with co-workers, colleagues, and their friends in their social networks. Scott McFadden of CSW suggests including the QR code on your business cards too. One click with their smartphone and customers and prospects are drawn to your online presence, ready to learn about your company and share it with those in their network.

Naughton also suggests you create a show page to add to your website, as much as six months in advance of the event. Naming and tagging the page with your website and the show name and year, such as [mycompany.com/ManuCON2012](#), not only provides your customers and prospects a place to go for information on the upcoming show, but as the show date approaches, people Googling the show will hopefully get your page in their search results, improving your SEO with every click.

Color Me Sold

Color is one of the most powerful subconscious influencers on our mood. Here's what each color says to a visitor to your booth.

Red—connotes love, warmth, excitement, passion

Blue—conjures up thoughts of power, professionalism, trustworthiness, and calm

Green—means money, life, and nature

Orange—suggests creativity, fun, youth, and affordability

Purple—stands for luxury, royalty, fantasy, and dreams

[Source: Suzanne Roman, "Colors That Sell"]

Linda Musgove, the [Trade Show Teacher](#), and author of [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Trade Shows](#), recommends creating special groups on LinkedIn ahead of your trade show. This way, you can post relevant information about the show and your customers and prospects can weigh in with their thoughts both during and after the event.

By creating LinkedIn groups prior to the show that include keywords for your show and/or type of show, such as “manufacturing conferences” they become searchable within LinkedIn. This will help people find you as the show date approaches and adds to your SEO as people search for upcoming events to attend.

Find some industry experts and get them to do a guest blog post or two in the weeks leading up to the show. It helps create interest in your blog, develops credibility, and if you can link to their own blog or website, extends the reach of your marketing messages even further than you would on your own.

Create a landing page specifically for show attendees. You can use it gather valuable information while setting appointments to meet with customers and prospects.

There's something about a free T-shirt. You would think they could be pawned for gold, but people will do almost anything, it seems, to get their hands on a free T-shirt, especially one from a time-limited offer, such as an annual trade show. Tweet, post on your Facebook page, and blog that the first 25 (50, pick your number) people to visit your booth at the trade show get a free T-shirt. Then, be prepared to be amazed as people beat a path to your booth for the bragging rights having that cool T-shirt brings with it.

If It's Tuesday, It Must Be Tweet Day

There are so many things to coordinate and so many balls to keep in the air before and during a trade show that having a plan, an editorial calendar for your social media messaging, goes a long way toward ensuring your messages go out in a timely manner and have the effect you're hoping and counting on them to have.

Plan and write your messages in advance. Keep a certain amount of flexibility in your plans as things always change before and during a trade show that require you tweak your Tweets or reposition your messaging in a Facebook or blog post. Then, use social media management tools, such as [HootSuite](#) or [SpredFast](#), to schedule your posts going live and track them along with the returns they generate.

Every business and every trade show is different, so plan your calendar, your content, and how and which social media tools you use, accordingly. Here is a plan to get you started, modify it to fit your needs:

SAMPLE TRADE SHOW INBOUND MARKETING EDITORIAL CALENDAR

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8 WEEKS OUT	Facebook Post Create a Landing Page to Set Show Appointments	Tweet	LinkedIn		Blog Post
7 WEEKS OUT	Tweet			YouTube Video	
6 WEEKS OUT		LinkedIn		Facebook Post	
5 WEEKS OUT	Tweet		Blog Post		
4 WEEKS OUT		Facebook Post	Guest Blog Post		Tweet
3 WEEKS OUT	LinkedIn			Tweet	
2 WEEKS OUT	Facebook Post	Tweet	Blog Post	YouTube Video	Tweet
1 WEEK OUT	LinkedIn	Guest Blog Post	Facebook		Tweet
SHOW WEEK	Tweet every 2 hours AM Facebook post PM Facebook post	Tweet every 2 hours YouTube Video AM Facebook post PM Facebook post	Tweet every 2 hours Blog Post AM Facebook post PM Facebook post	Tweet every 2 hours AM Facebook post PM Facebook post	Tweet every 2 hours LinkedIn post PM Facebook post
POST-SHOW WEEK	Tweet Facebook post	Tweet Guest Blog Post	Tweet YouTube Video	Tweet Facebook post	Tweet Blog post

Your Trade Show Goal? Set Goals for Your Trade Show!

No matter what you plan to do in terms of inbound marketing for your upcoming trade show, don't ignore the fundamentals. Susan Friedmann, AKA [The Trade Show Coach](#), believes social media can be an invaluable weapon in a marketer's trade show arsenal, but she emphasizes that, while the means and media to reach trade show attendees is constantly evolving, the fundamentals of producing a successful trade show event remain largely unchanged. "The biggest mistake I see companies, large and small, make when approaching their trade shows," Friedmann says, "is not setting quantifiable goals for the show." And that applies to your booth marketing as much as it does your social media marketing, she says.

You say you want to pick up leads at the show? Great. How many leads? How many demos will those leads generate? How many sales will those demos close? How many dollars will those sales generate and by when? A quantifiable goal might be something like: "We want to pick up 100 leads, which generate 50 demos, leading to 10 sales with a combined value of \$5 million within six months of the show."

**Go Ahead—Make My Day.
Give Me What I Came For.**

76% of trade show attendees go there with an agenda in mind.

66% rate their booth visits as very or extremely valuable in evaluating or comparing offerings for future purchases.

[Source: Skip Cox, Exhibit Surveys, Inc.]

During the Show

The event itself is, well, the Main Event, right? This is what you've been planning for as much as a year in advance, what you've been priming your staff and customers for, so make every minute count and use the live event to literally connect people from your booth to your online social media platforms so you can build on the relationship throughout the year.

Display something unique, funny, interesting—whatever it takes to get people into your booth as they walk by. Make it oversized so they can't miss it. Make it something they'll want to share with the folks back at the office and offer to take a digital picture of them with your 6-foot tall pipe wrench or the 4-foot tall sculpture of a smartphone you made entirely out of the grommets you manufacture for smartphones. Offer to email the photo to them and tweet the pictures and a "Thanks for stopping by our booth #XXX" to your followers during the show. The more people see the photo, the more people who will want one of their very own and will stop by your booth.

Follow through on a Twitter giveaway you set up before the show. Set a start date, from the time you launch the giveaway through the end of the show, and anyone who becomes a follower on Twitter gets entered into a prize drawing. Make the prize worthwhile and milk the promotion beyond the drawing and the end of the show with a few extra tweets from the winner, how they feel about winning the prize, what they'll do with it, and maybe one more showing them enjoying their prize. Do a series of small daily giveaways, tweeting out the winners at the end of each day and one grand prize. Give people an additional entry for every person they bring to the booth who also signs up to follow you on Twitter.

Build a Better Booth

1. **Presentation** — Include your company logo, arrange product groups logically, be genuinely welcoming. Have comfortable, attractive flooring.
2. **Sensory Outreach** — Put your merchandise where people can touch it, hold it, make a real sensory connection. Don't forget the QR tags!
3. **Free Food** — Nothing says "I love you," like something sweet—a small piece of chocolate, a hard candy, anything that will entice hungry show attendees to reach in for a quick nutrition boost.
4. **Scents and Sensibility** — Smell is perhaps our most subtle sense. Anything with a hint of vanilla is likely to draw visitors in.
5. **Sounds Good** — Add a little background music to your booth to fill the "dead air" before enough people have gathered there to give your space some life.

[Source: Center for Exhibition Industry Research]

Another strategy to drive awareness of your trade show presence and increase traffic to your booth is to tweet time-sensitive discounts. “Visit us in the next 30 minutes and take 10 percent off your order.”

You already know that a trade show is a great place to launch a new product or service. Lots of customers and prospects have come to the show for just that purpose—to see what’s new and exciting in your industry. Now, add a video to that launch and upload it to Facebook, your website, and YouTube. The uptake (or downloads, in this case) of people who couldn’t attend the show may be even higher than those who attended the launch in person. Be sure to actively solicit comments, especially from those who couldn’t attend so you can leverage the social network for leads and product enhancements you might not have thought of pre-launch.

Post “Special Reports” to your blog or tweet several times a day during the show. You can use these to update attendees about upcoming presentations and special sessions. This keeps show attendees updated but also keeps your blog subscribers, who were unable to attend, apprised of what they’re missing—all while creating content that boosts your SEO.

After the Show

Although trade shows are a hub of activity, for many companies, the leads that come from a trade show are just the beginning of a long selling cycle. Depending on the nature of the product or service you sell, prospects can take weeks, often months, to finally mature into a customer that has signed on the dotted line.

This is where social media and inbound marketing, properly done, can make all the difference in the world between losing a lead and turning it into a customer. Social media allow you to extend the conversation—and thus the relationship—long after you’ve torn down the booth and settled back into your normal day-to-day routine back at the office.

Use Facebook to keep the conversation going between you and your customers and prospects. In the days immediately following the show, recap the highlights of the show for attendees and those who couldn’t make it. Remind those who couldn’t attend what they missed by not being on-site, everything from that coveted T-shirt to opportunities to meet senior management or special show discounts.

Use your company blog in the weeks after the event to dig deeper into the issues your customers and prospects prodded you most about at the show; turn their questions into answers addressed in-depth in blog posts. Remember, your customers turn to you to solve their problems. Use your blog to show them exactly how that’s done. If you can turn a question or several questions into a continuing series of blog posts, you will ensure subscribers click on the blog link for weeks at a time to learn how to address complex business challenges. Have a guest, maybe one of your customers or an industry expert, do a post-show guest post on your blog too.

With their permission, tweet thanks to those customers who attended your show and leverage their name value as references future prospects will associate with your business.

Trade Show Bargain: Save 45%

\$308 Average cost to contact a prospect in the field.

\$212 Average cost to contact prospect who visited your trade show booth - **about 45 percent less** than field sales.

[Source: Skip Cox, Exhibit Surveys, Inc.]

Promote the videos you shot at the show of your presentations, demos, and product launches on YouTube and via links your website, LinkedIn profile, and Facebook. Do an email blast to all those who indicated interest in attending the show but couldn't attend for one reason or another.

Create post-show LinkedIn groups that address specific topics raised by your customer base at the show or around the new products or services you launched there. Include the show name and date in the group name to help prospects and search engines find the group easily.

Provide post-show incentives to get your Twitter followers and Facebook fans to recommend you to their colleagues and join the social networks you maintain.

Study your successes and your failures at the show and from the inbound marketing campaign you created for it. This is where marketing automation applications like HubSpot really shine. The analytics they provide will help you to understand which Tweets rocked and which sunk like a stone. They will reveal which topics hit a nerve with Facebook followers and which fell flat of your expectations. Track your SERP rankings relative to each of your endeavors and strategize how to improve the messaging, the timing, and the follow-through for the next show.

There's No Business Like Show Business

Many marketers struggle with bridging the divide between their real world marketing efforts and their online efforts.

Part of the problem is the geographic chasm that separates prospects and customers from the company's facilities. Manufacturers may have just one or two plants, but their customers are stretched out from coast to coast, so the real world connection is difficult, if not impossible, to facilitate. That is, until the trade show comes along.



Photo by: [vancouverfilmschool](#)

By picking the right show or shows to attend, you will never have a better opportunity to connect face to face with customers and prospects all year. That makes it the most opportune time, bar none, to make the connection between show attendees and your social media hubs. All you have to do is set out a solid plan using all the social media tools in your arsenal, implement it, execute it with precision before, during, and after the show, and follow up to solidify the links you forged during the event.

Next Steps

If you are a company that is interested in growing your business and generating leads, [use HubSpot's free 30-day trial to learn how HubSpot's software can help you.](#)

