

Play to Win

Checklist for Staffing Your Law Firm's Trade Show Booth

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Oct.25.17 | [Business Development](#), [Checklist](#), [Daily Dispatch](#), [Legal Marketing](#), [Play to Win](#)



Not so long ago, suggesting that lawyers would stand behind a table at a trade show would have been deemed heretical. Times have changed. Recently, I've heard a number of people discuss their firms' participation in the Association of Corporate Counsel conference, specifically having a booth in the exhibit hall. I know law firms that send lawyers to staff booths at association meetings representing everyone from HR managers to shopping centers to insurance carriers.

While exhibiting at conferences may have become a mainstream activity, many lawyers are uncomfortable with their roles in these forums. But there is a lot you can do to make your participation more effective and less stressful.

Preparing for the Trade Show

As with all marketing activities, execution becomes easier with preparation. Here are some things you should do before showing up at the booth:

- **Prepare your elevator speech.** Be ready to explain, in a brief and understandable way, the kinds of clients you represent and how you help them. Tailor this to the attendees or industry that the conference represents.
- **Research the association.** What is its mission? What member benefits does it offer? You should know how your firm fits in.
- **Research the attendees.** Who are they? What are their job titles? Do you have any clients or other contacts who will be in attendance? Create a target list of people you'd like to see and, if possible, contact them directly to set up times to meet.
- **Note the sponsors, board members and conference planners.** It's always good to know who is responsible for making the program successful.
- **Note your competitors.** Are other law firms exhibiting or presenting? If so, who are they and how will you differentiate yourself from them?
- **Develop a pre-conference activity.** If you are a sponsor or exhibitor, many organizations will give you an opportunity to reach out to the attendees beforehand. Think about something you can do to engage them or make them interested in seeking out your booth, like offering the

results of a survey or a useful giveaway. At a minimum, create some takeaway or cool swag so you have something of perceived value in the booth.

- **Read the conference materials.** Familiarize yourself with the program sessions and activities. Who is the keynote speaker, for example? Plan your days so you maximize your time at the exhibit hall, during the conference and after hours (e.g., social events).
- **Announce your activity.** Use social media or direct contact to let people know you'll be there.

During the Event

Once you're in the exhibit hall, keep the following in mind:

- **Engage people as they walk by.** Make eye contact, smile and say hello. Everyone likes seeing a friendly face.
- **Shake hands.** When people stop in your booth, introduce yourself with a firm handshake. Wear your nametag on your right side. Be ready with your elevator speech when people ask about you or your firm.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Try to qualify whether the visitors are good targets. For example: What is your role at XYZ Company? What are the company's biggest issues related to [your practice area]? What are you looking for in the exhibit hall?
- **Use open and engaging body language.** Smile, nod your head and maintain eye contact. Don't look around, cross your arms, put your hands in your pockets or turn sideways.
- **Make interacting with visitors your only activity.** Don't eat, drink, sit down, talk to your colleagues or use your phone while in the booth.
- **Be enthusiastic when talking with people.** Demonstrate that you want to learn more about the industry or profession of the attendees. Show passion about what you do.
- **Announce your presentations.** If you or one of your colleagues is speaking at the conference, have a sign at the booth indicating the date, time and topic.
- **Keep conference information handy.** Just being able to answer questions about what sessions are coming up, when and where, will make you helpful.
- **Use visitors' names.** And thank people for stopping by.
- **Thank the organizers.** Look for board members, conference planners and the association management to thank them for the opportunity and congratulate them on the meeting.

Follow-up Checklist

As is true with nearly every marketing activity, the return on your investment will go up with diligent follow-up. Here are some suggestions:

- When a visitor leaves the booth, immediately make notes. You can use the backs of business cards or the attendee list to record details about the person, what you talked about and the follow-up you should undertake.
- Add visitors to appropriate lists. This could be your own prospect list or firm databases for things like webinars and alerts.
- Send a personal note with some value-added information. Examples include a substantive article, a contact name or a copy of a case. It might also be something of a more personal nature, like a review of a restaurant you discussed.
- Connect on LinkedIn. Send a personal invitation reminding the person that you met at the trade show. Look for contacts you have in common.
- Set up alerts. If you met some good prospects, set up Google or other alerts to notify you of developments. These can identify opportunities for you to get back in touch.

- Target people who didn't attend. You can use your presence at the conference as a value-add for people who couldn't make it by sending out a summary of some of your favorite sessions or sharing materials.
- Conduct a post-mortem. Whether you do this individually or as a firm, you should take some time while the trade show is still fresh in your mind to review your activities and performance. What could you have done better? What should you note for the next time around?

Still Uncomfortable? Keep Attendees' Goals in Mind

Remember, people who visit an exhibit hall are there to see products and services that will make their job easier or their business more successful; you should never feel uncomfortable talking about how you and your firm relate to the attendees' market or industry. The key is to do it in a way that helps them understand what you, and your firm, can do to help.

Sally J. Schmidt is President of [Schmidt Marketing, Inc.](#), which offers marketing services to law firms. Sally was a founder and the first President of the Legal Marketing Association. She is a Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management and was one of the first inductees into the LMA's Hall of Fame. She is the author of "[Marketing the Law Firm: Business Development Techniques](#)" and "[Business Development for Lawyers: Strategies for Getting and Keeping Clients](#)." Sally writes Attorney at Work's "Play to Win" column. Follow her on Twitter [@SallySchmidt](#).