



STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO TRADE SHOW PLANNING

Perfect timing is critical for effective trade shows. When you're planning for a show of any size, the logistical details can seem overwhelming. That's why we've developed a step-by-step guide that will help you stay ahead. Think of it as your "to-do" list. The outline provides you with a basic list of details you will need to consider, but each show is unique. Keep in mind that the suggested time frames are only suggestions and that your timetable may differ, depending on the complexity of the project. Use this as a starting point to develop your own ideal show planning time line.

LONG RANGE PLANNING: ONE YEAR OR MORE BEFORE A SHOW

1. Determine the purpose for participating in the show: Does the show meet your objectives? Does it fit within your overall marketing plan and budget? Are the attendees within your target audiences? How much traffic is expected?
2. Select your space: Study the floor plans, traffic patterns, services, and audience makeup to determine the best location for your booth. The larger and more prominent locations are most expensive and are quickly reserved ahead of time by the main sponsors.
3. Prepare your budget: Anticipate all aspects of the show and determine how much can be spent - cost for attending, transportation costs, sponsorship fees, booth graphics, advertising & marketing including promotional items, etc.

NINE TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE A SHOW

1. Determine your exhibit objectives: Are you participating for brand awareness, lead generation, and/or to close anticipated sales leads?
2. Select primary vendors if necessary (graphic design, promotions, exhibit house, transportation company, installation/dismantle supplier, etc.).
3. Determine exhibit space requirements: Decide if a new exhibit is needed. If so, begin the design process. (If using a portable, the design process may not require this much lead time.) Rough out an exhibit plan with promotional, graphic and staffing needs.
4. Review all additional marketing and advertising opportunities including sponsorships. The more exposure you can achieve at a trade show, the better. Depending on your budget and the audience makeup, consider sponsoring pre-, during or post-show events, advertising in any printed materials, and contributing to co-branded promotional items that will feature your logo.

FIVE TO FOUR MONTHS BEFORE A SHOW

1. Refine the projected size, design and staffing needs of your exhibit.
2. Make airline, hotel and car reservations.
3. Determine exhibit needs (if using existing properties): refurbishments, additions, changes.
4. Plan inquiry processing procedures.
5. Communicate with primary vendors (exhibit house, shipping, installation/dismantle) regarding services needed and dates.
6. Develop floor plan for exhibit.
7. Finalize new exhibit design.
8. Start production on any show-specific printed materials. Execute show-related advertising.



THREE MONTHS BEFORE A SHOW

1. Carefully read and review exhibitor manual.
2. Select portable exhibit supplier.
3. Review exhibit floor plan and note target dates and restrictions.
4. Plan any in-booth presentations/demonstrations including PowerPoint presentations and demos.
5. Plan a pre-show meeting for selected staff and distribute the show plan. Determine attire for show and order logo-ed apparel if needed (polo shirts, button downs, etc.)
6. Reserve any additional meeting rooms (hospitality events, press conferences, etc.) and select catering menus.
7. Meet deadlines for free publicity in the exhibitor guide/preview.

TWO MONTHS BEFORE A SHOW

1. Preview new custom exhibit.
2. Confirm progress and delivery dates for graphics.
3. Create or order staff badges.
4. Create and order lead forms.
5. Finalize inquiry processing procedures.
6. Prepare orders for: drayage, electrical, cleaning, floral, etc. Take advantage of any pre-pay discounts.
7. Follow up on all promotions, making sure everything is ready to ship by target date.
8. Prepare press kits.
9. Check with staff on airline and hotel reservations and travel dates. Make needed changes.
10. Send reminder to upper management about briefing meetings (in office and at show); include agenda.
11. Launch pre-show promotional efforts (postcards, mailers, email blasts, etc.)

ONE MONTH BEFORE A SHOW

1. Follow up on shipping orders.
2. Follow up on installation/dismantle schedule; get an estimate on costs.
3. Follow up on target dates with all vendors.
4. Confirm availability of display products/literature.
5. Finalize all travel arrangements.
6. Preview your physical show exhibit.
7. Send all needed materials by target shipping date to avoid express mail shipments.
8. Distribute briefing packet and any training materials, to all booth staffers.
9. Set up and hold pre-show briefing meeting in office.
10. Set up in-booth conference room schedule for pre-arranged meetings at show.
11. Send follow-up reminder to upper management about briefing meeting, include agenda.
12. Determine date and time for briefing staff at the exhibit.
13. Review agenda, purpose of show, demonstrations, rehearsals, show specials, etc.
14. Ensure that you have the following items before leaving for the show: traveler's checks, credit cards, copies of all orders and checks for services paid in advance, phone numbers and addresses of all vendors, engineering certificate for exhibit, shipping manifest, return shipping labels, and additional badge forms.
15. Review progress of all pre-show promotional efforts.



ONE WEEK BEFORE A SHOW

1. Check that all exhibit supplies and materials have been packed or shipped.
2. Arrange for company checks or credit cards to cover at-the-show payments.
3. Meet with exhibit staff for a final review of your plan of action.

UPON ARRIVAL

1. Confirm the arrival of your exhibit and all materials.
2. Check with hotel about reservations for staff, as well as any meeting rooms and catering orders.
3. Find service area.
4. Meet electrician and confirm date and time for electrical installation.
5. Supervise booth setup.
6. Hold pre-show briefing and training for staff the day before the show.

DURING SHOW

1. Reserve next year's space.
2. During the show, conduct daily meetings to assess your performance.
3. Make arrangements for booth dismantle and shipping.
4. Arrange for lead forms to be shipped back to office daily for processing.

AFTER SHOW

1. Supervise booth dismantle.
2. Handle leads - don't let more than two weeks pass before responding to all of the leads you collected.
3. Debrief your staff and send a follow-up report or email to the company.

Let the professionals at VLS STUDIOS help you with some of your tradeshow planning details. We will be happy to assist you with any or all of the following:

- Exhibit graphics - new displays or refurbishing existing ones
- Marketing materials - brochures, pocket folders, hand outs
- Promotional items - give-aways to get you noticed!
- Logo-ed apparel - present your company in a polished and professional way
- Pre-show mailers and email blasts - let your customers know where they can find you
- Pre- and during show advertising

VLS STUDIOS

1215 Honeysuckle Lane • Annapolis, MD 21401 • 410.849.2655 • 410.849.2688 fax • www.vlsstudios.com