No Sale Left Unturned:
Clean Up At Trade Shows with 3 Overlooked Sales Strategies

By: Caryn Kopp, Chief Door Opener®

Over the last year I've heard several stories about lost sales opportunities. Many occurred as a direct result of post-trade show oversights that could have been avoided. It happens too often. Join me by shaking your head as you read the story below. Then, vow to follow the strategies provided so you can clean up on trade show sales opportunities!

A company I know sent 3 people to a trade show in January. All 3 people flew, stayed 3 nights, went to nice meals and entertained prospective clients. They uncovered several high volume prospect opportunities, one of which included a large potential program with Disney. Upon their return to the office they were faced with the typical backlog of work, urgent client requests and calls which needed to be returned…yesterday. Digging out from under took priority over follow up. You can guess what happened. The first follow up…a group of letters (snail mail)… went out in April (3 months later). The second follow up, a group of phone calls occurred in July. The seller finally reached the Disney decision maker live in August and the conversation went like this:

Decision Maker: *Oh, I do remember you. Too bad we didn't connect sooner. We decided to move forward with the program. We chose a vendor and are finalizing the contract now. We plan to roll out within the next 6 weeks.*

Salesperson (also now known as Sad Person): *There are many benefits we provide, we would still appreciate the opportunity to come in and talk with you. Can we set a time for that?*

Decision Maker: *I'm sorry but as I said we are finalizing the contract now. I'll call you if something changes.*

You may think following up is obvious. You may think this story is a fluke. But the reality is this occurs commonly enough that I had a hard time choosing *which* story like this to include in the article. To ensure it doesn't happen to you, follow these strategies:

1. Schedule Post-Trade Show Follow Up On Your Calendar.

- Make immediate contact your HIGHEST priority when you return to the office.
- Use your calendar to block out the morning you return to the office to complete sales follow up. Think of new contacts like really good French baguettes. By tomorrow they're stale.
- Before going through the mountain of mail, the volumes of voicemail or the never ending email, tackle all of your trade show follow up. You may need to hang a sign on your office door saying you are unavailable (just as you would be if you were out at a meeting).
- Hire a temp (or have an assistant on hand) to help you handle the extra workload. Sound expensive? Compare it against the lost Disney opportunity…enough said.

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There is a flow to new business development and new business relationships. Keeping the momentum going and delivering what you promised, when you promised it, is a critical component to successfully adding new clients to your roster. If, for some reason, you cannot send the information, the samples or execute the phone call when you promised, make sure to COMMUNICATE. A simple email letting someone know *when* you will fulfill your promise fills the bill. Then, be sure to adhere to your promised timeline.

Some people tell me they think following up quickly is a sign of desperation. Not true! There's a difference between *Please meet with me…please, please, please!!!!* (desperation) and *I am calling to follow up on our conversation this past Monday. Here is an example of how we can help you to achieve your goals* (buttoned up). Prompt response and follow up is respected by decision makers. It conveys that you are interested in their businesses and lays the foundation for relationships of trust. In a detail oriented business, demonstrating your ability to deliver the details matters. This is not the time to play hard to get.

Some sellers want to wait for a few days to give the decision maker time to "dig out from under". Why? Isn't that one of the best times to catch the prospect at his/her desk? The long discussion may need to wait for a few days but you can certainly ask for a time on the calendar for a meeting or conference call.

Other sellers tell me they strategically lump trade show contacts with other prospects they are pursuing and then call in priority order. With this line of thinking it could take weeks to follow up with a new contact. Revisit the French baguette analogy. What will it look like weeks later?

In the course of your many conversations at a trade show, you may uncover an opportunity for another person in your company. Apply the Golden Rule. Treat this as you would want a co-worker to treat an opportunity of yours. Immediately communicate all details to your colleague, as if it were a job share. Include information about the opportunity, the level of priority and when the prospect is expecting follow up to occur.

2. **Constant, Continuous Contact**

Your prospect may not be ready to buy when you make the initial contact. That's ok! Stay in touch! Someone I know spent $5,000 to attend an industry retreat; $2,500 on the attendance fee and $2,500 on airfare/hotel/rental car/expenses. While there she met a decision maker for a company who was 3 months away from beginning a project needing the services she had to offer. They exchanged cards. The person I know returned to her office and called to follow up. The call was well received and they discussed timing for the project. At the appropriate time she called and was told by the decision maker that the project had been placed on hold. The following year, the same person I know spent another $5,000 to attend the same function. She ran into the same person. The decision maker said to her, "*It's great to see you! You know, I looked all over for your card a few months back. The project finally came off hold and we did it. Unfortunately, I couldn't find your contact information and we hired another firm to do the work. We spent $3MM on the project. Sorry*."

A structured system of follow up will ensure that no opportunity will ever fall through the cracks. Stay in touch, stay top of mind. So when the prospect is ready to lay the money on the table, you will be there to collect.

3. **Next Step to "Yes"**

Asking for a next step (at every step) will shorten the sales cycle and keep the process moving forward. When the prospect initially requests information, samples, a proposal, etc. ask for a date and time on his/her calendar to meet or have a conference call to discuss next steps. It is at that moment, the moment of the request, when connecting with you is **MOST** important to your prospect. At that moment, securing a next step is easy. Trying to get someone on the phone to discuss it later can be time-consuming and sometimes futile.

Implementing these strategies can lead to a huge payoff. Can you really afford to forego this opportunity to develop new business? Blocking time for post-trade show follow up, structured continuous contact and requesting next steps every step of the way will help you maximize sales results, maintain a full pipeline and keep you from having a "lost sales story".

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