EYE ON EXHIBITIONS

exhibition & event association of australasia

Four points to success

Many regular exhibitors have learned the hard way – from their mistakes – before being able to reap the benefits of marketing products and services at exhibitions.

There are four simple rules to plan for success…

1 Clutter v. clarity: Be sure your message is concise and your graphics clear. Crowding your stand with products, graphics and logos has the potential to overwhelm visitors and detract from your stand's appearance and your brand's image, leaving them confused and frustrated. A stand crowded with too much product risks appearing as unprofessional as a flea-market stall.

2 Professionalism: Many exhibitors make the mistake of having ill-informed and unprofessional staff on their stand. This reflects negatively on the brand as a whole. At a trade show, everything contributes to the overall impression, particularly the treatment visitors receive from staff.

3 Lack of preparation: Having enough time to effectively prepare beforehand is paramount to the success of an exhibition stand. Preparation should involve reaching out to potential clients through tools like media releases and direct marketing, and through social networking sites like Twitter, Foursquare and Facebook.

4 Going too big, too fast: Companies exhibiting at a show for the first time commonly make the mistake of diving head-first into a large and extravagant stand without considering smaller objectives that would help them achieve a larger goal. Many book too big a space or hold too high expectations when they should be concentrating on learning the dynamics, the atmosphere and getting a feel for the exhibition. Slow down and make realistic decisions and goals. Starting small helps to prevent failure and offers the chance to gain a feel for the industry before aiming too high.

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CENTRE POINTS

Facing the challenges of the future

One of the most interesting yet challenging conclusions from the AIPC annual conference was the idea that the expansion, redevelopment and updating of convention centres may be moving from an occasional undertaking to something continuous and ongoing.

by Edgar Hirt, AIPC president.
AIPC, www.aipc.org

Why this should be and the consequences, both for centres themselves and their suppliers and clients, are interesting.

For centres, the essential challenge is that they are basically long-term investments in an industry that is changing rapidly, and they need to stay relevant and competitive for many years albeit constrained by the fact that once built they have limited flexibility structurally. Changing market expectations in recent years even have included the size and arrangements of spaces – something not easy to address when dealing with something as solid as a building.

There are also a host of other new demands, ranging from new technology to sustainability. Sometimes these can be satisfied with changes in working practices, but often much more is required. Even if new demands can be satisfied in an existing structure, they can be expensive and demanding to implement.

A big issue is the fact there is a great deal of convention centre product available. In fact, supply in many areas has increased faster than the demand, which means lots of competition. And it is not just a matter of the business just spreading itself around – there are many reasons why organisers choose to go to a particular destination, and if a centre has good clients it must do all it can to avoid driving them away through lack of appropriate amenities. That's why the upgrading of convention centres is continuous.

This means a lot more work for many managers. They need to become ongoing project managers as well, and for the client this presents an opportunity to shape the venues they use. The greatest imperative in convention centre design today is flexibility, in the knowledge that future demands can never be predicted precisely.

Multi-purpose spaces and moveable walls can go a long way toward helping centres respond to changing meeting requirements.

But it helps to have the best possible idea of possible future demands, and this is where the clients come in. Event organisers are in the best position to anticipate new directions, and taking time to communicate this to centre managers helps not just the centres, but themselves as well. If managers have an idea about future trends, they can communicate them to designers and others involved in the development process.

There are many ways to encourage better dialogue. For their part, centres should be designing post-event surveys to better capture the information and insights clients have about how to create better meeting environments. Clients should look on the input process as an investment in their own future, and take time to think through what changes would make most sense for their needs.

Similarly, convention centre suppliers, be they be food and beverage, security, housekeeping or AV, could contribute to decision making as they often know the limitations of a centre and the expectations of clients.

Regular updates are a chance for everyone to contribute to designing the convention centre of the future.

You said it...

Time for more transparency

I challenge similar publications to follow the lead set by CINZ in having its 2011 planner audited so advertisers can be sure it goes where promised.

The industry needs to be more demanding about where it spends its money on advertising and exhibiting, and at the very least demand audited circulation figures in the case of publications as well as independent assessment of the actual buyers attending an exhibition.

Organisers of business events exhibitions should also be able to delineate between genuine buyers and industry attendees and trade suppliers. If exhibition organisers are unable or unwilling to differentiate between genuine qualified buyers and industry and trade attendees, they should not be in the business.

It is high time the industry at large demanded more scrutiny and transparency from these entities.

Alan Trotter (Auckland), chief executive, CINZ.

NB: CIM NewsMagazine has its circulation audited by CAB and its readership by Nielsen Media Research.

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