

Exhibiting can be extremely rewarding. This is the second of a series of articles exploring what it takes to make “shows” really work for you.

# Exhibiting at the Right Show(s)...

In our last article we considered the importance of focusing closely on appropriate objectives and your target market when exhibiting. Having determined exactly what you want to achieve and who you want to attract, it's important to be sure that you're at the right show, *writes Colin Green.*

The following is far from exhaustive but is helpful in determining if a particular show is right for you.

Will your audience be there?

Of course! The brochure said so! But how does the Organiser know who will come? How can you be sure? Organisers can tell you who they plan to attract and what the demographics of past shows have been. It's your exhibiting dollar, so verify the audience.

## Trade v Consumer Exhibitions

Exhibitions fall into two broad categories - Trade Shows and Consumer Shows (also called Public Shows). Virtually all shows are Trade or Consumer or variations.

One well-known corporate exhibitor exhibited at a show for four years before determining that it didn't fit the company's demographic needs. It was an easy error to make — although simple enough to spot when their objectives and target market became clear. The company was a large photocopier manufacturer. Their primary objective was to win corporate and government customers and the exhibition was a trade event. It became clear that they required a corporate consumer event.

Trade show buyers buy to trade. Consumer show buyers consume. Trade shows have a lower buyer-to-exhibitor ratio and buyers have a far greater “potential worth” than their consumer show counterparts. That's not to say that consumer shows don't generate very large revenues. Figures from consumer shows are often staggering!

Because the photo copier company was selling to businesses, (trading organisations), the distinction was blurred but still potent. Although they were promoting to traders those organisations were consumers of the equipment. It's an important



Colin Green, managing director and principal trainer of Best of Show, is a popular speaker and trainer working with businesses, corporations and government departments across Australia and New Zealand.

He can be reached at [colin.green@bestofshow.com.au](mailto:colin.green@bestofshow.com.au) and training sessions seen at [www.bestofshow.com.au](http://www.bestofshow.com.au)

distinction.

Many shows are both trade and consumer, perhaps with separate trade days and public days — or they may mix the daily audience. You need to identify and “switch hats” for the different audiences.

Trade exhibitions usually “badge” buyers. Consumer shows don't — buyers simply buy their tickets and walk into the show. While that's not iron-clad, it's an excellent “quick clue” as to the nature of the show.

## Question the Database...

Organisers often use a database of past attendees to draw the audience. While a wonderful tool, it's only part of the solution. Commercial databases age at least 20 per cent per annum — that is, buyers last five years or less at a position.

## Request Audit Verification

Have previous shows been audited? It's not an automatic death knell if they haven't — until recently many exhibitions were not audited. But good organisers — the ones that sincerely want to deliver results you'll be delighted with — are increasingly having their shows independently audited. Ask for the audit report to verify the demographics. Is your target market there?

The Australian Circulations Audit Board ([www.auditbureau.org.au](http://www.auditbureau.org.au)) audits exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand's Audit Bureau of Circulations ([www.abc.org.nz](http://www.abc.org.nz)) does not audit exhibitions and have no plans to do so at this point. The UK's

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Audit Bureau of Circulation's web is [www.abc.org.uk](http://www.abc.org.uk) and in the USA the Trade Show Exhibitors Assn (TSEA) is [www.tsea.org](http://www.tsea.org)

### Verify Promotion

Where are the organisers advertising and/or placing editorial? Request the media list (print, radio, TV) where promotion is planned. Every editor knows their audience as they must publish news and articles for that market — or they won't sell their publications! Do enough of those publications match your target market to satisfy your Objectives? This is a powerful and easy test to apply. (It's especially potent for the next article in this series, too which will address some powerful and cost-effective marketing opportunities). DO verify that the publications and media ARE being utilised. If the Organisers can't give you the list, be afraid. Be VERY afraid... Conversely if details are cheerfully supplied that is a very big "plus" for that show - assuming your demographic is attracted!

### Education and Entertainment

At trade — and increasingly at consumer events too — the audience seeks to be educated. They seek to learn "what's new" and to compare technologies, ideas and opportunities. Everyone likes to be entertained too. So what is offered at the show that will draw your target audience? What special reasons make the show irresistible?

This may be your own special opportunity. What could you supply that would draw your Target Market? Could you supply an educational experience or entertainment that you could "sell" to the organisers? Good organisers are receptive to great ideas — if contacted early enough to include in their promotions.

### Calculate your Potential Audience

How many of YOUR Target Audi-

ence will be at the show? Exhibit Surveys Inc in the USA ([www.exhibitsurveys.com](http://www.exhibitsurveys.com)) developed a clever method to calculate your Potential Audience.

1. Obtain the net attendees of the show from the Organisers — don't include exhibitors, organisers or journalists. Audited figures are helpful here.

2. Multiply net attendees by a factor between 35 per cent and 57 per cent. The more focused the show the higher the factor. General events would be around 35 per cent. Focused "niche" events would be nearer 57 per cent. Make a judgement within that range. The result is the Audience Interest Factor in the diagram — how "interested" delegates are in the show in general.

3. After considering the demographics (again, audited figures are most helpful), "guesstimate" the percentage of the show genuinely interested in what YOU provide. Be realistic. It may be as low as five per cent or as high as 30 per cent or even higher! If you're not sure, select 16 per cent — the average. This is your audience Product Interest.

4. Multiply the Audience Interest with the Product Interest. The result is your Potential Audience — the number of your hot prospects you should find at the show.

Test the formula. It's almost magical thought provoking and extremely helpful in show selection, performance review and many other measures.

### Financial Stability

Consider the financial stability of the Organiser. Most are stable, but there

have been instances of organisers "going bust" and exhibitors left as unsecured creditors. It pays to be prudent. Is the show growing in terms of audience, exhibitor numbers and space sold? If not, why? It may be deliberate to improve results — or maybe something else... Consider doing a credit check. If the Organisers are listed on the ASX, NYSE etc, how are they tracking?

### Special Assistance

Are there any "special" factors that might make exhibiting attractive? A "pavilion" you could join? State and federal governments often offer these and they can be excellent value and also help in sharing the load of exhibiting. Having the company of your peers is usually uplifting and encouraging. Sometimes shows have special areas that may be perfect for you.

Are assistance funds available? State governments often target specific shows and offer funding as does the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) ([www.austrade.gov.au](http://www.austrade.gov.au)) and NZ Trade and Enterprise. ([www.nzte.govt.nz](http://www.nzte.govt.nz)).

Be a little cautious of these promotions. If the show does not "fit" your needs, don't do it! Even government officers have quotas to fill at show-time!

### Who Else is There?

Are your competitors exhibiting? Did they exhibit in earlier years? Their presence — or lack of it — is not necessarily a reason to exhibit — or not to either — but it's certainly a consideration. If you're not there buyers can't compare you!

Are complementary companies exhibiting? Organisations that will draw your Target Audience and that you may be able to form alliances with? Refer to your objectives — a single new alliance might make it very much worth while exhibiting.

### Keep Notes

While you're exhibiting, continually monitor what you're feeling, what opportunities you may have missed, what others seem to be achieving. Save your thoughts and re-read them very carefully when deciding on your participation next time. Time blurs insights and you'll find this extremely helpful.

