

Show Booth – Etiquette, Body Language & Mistakes

Give yourself enough time to set up the booth before the show begins. Setting up a booth carefully takes time. Be sure you allot enough time to finish before the clients arrive. Boxes blocking aisles keep clients from visiting booths. Even if you are not in the aisles, setting up a display while the show is open distracts clients and can potential hurt.

Too many negative happenings can make enemies of your fellow exhibitors, or even get you banned from a show. By getting along with others, you can sometimes make important contacts and better yet, friends for life! To ensure that you present a professional, approachable image, review the following rules of trade show booth etiquette, body language, and popular mistakes.

BOOTH ETIQUETTE

While in the booth, do NOT:

- **Eat, Drink or Smoke** - These activities ward off the press and potential customers.
- **Sit down.** - Sitting down makes it look as though you are not interested in talking. However, if your booth has bar-stool-height chairs behind a draped table then, because of the higher seat, you are at the same eye level as people passing the booth. Acceptance of stools is increasing since the public is sympathetic to the effects of standing on a hard floor for long periods.
- **Have idle chatter with other booth personnel.** -The sight of two people in conversation looks like a meeting. No one will interrupt a meeting.
- **Do not disrupt other exhibitors or visitors.** - Disruptions such as loud music or announcements, shining lights at other trade show exhibit booths, using laser pointers across aisles and the like are annoying. If you engage in disruptive behaviors, attendees will perceive you and our company not as professionals, but as people to avoid.

While not in the booth:

- **Do not solicit in the aisles (known as “suitcasing”).** - Show management usually has rules against solicitation in the aisles for good reason. Companies that choose not to pay for trade show exhibit booths sometimes attempt to solicit in the aisles. They are taking advantage of the money our company spends to make the exhibition happen. They are, in effect, letting legitimate exhibitors pick up their show costs. Exhibitions are designed to encourage a free flow of traffic through the aisles. And, they are designed to enable exhibitors to do business in their trade show booths.
- **Stay out of other companies’ trade show exhibit booths.** - Not only is your presence needed in our company’s trade show booth to serve our clients and prospects, you help set an example for others. Wandering into other trade show booths disrupts exhibitors who are with their prospects. If you do this, you can expect others to do the same to you. Be friendly to fellow exhibitors, but don’t be a pest.
- **Stay out of your competitors’ trade show exhibit booths.** - Even worse than wandering into “friendly territory” is going into a competitor’s trade show booth to crowd out legitimate clients. This is unprofessional and reflects badly on our company and on you personally.

BODY LANGUAGE

Many books have been written about body language; here are the most important points to remember, from a trade show perspective:

- **Talk to the person**, not to a piece of equipment or charts that you are presenting. Maintain eye contact with the attendee and avoid getting “caught up” with the demonstration or presentation.
- **Raise your voice appropriately** or you might be drowned out by other people near the booth or other sounds of the show.
- **Present an open posture.** Folded arms and crossed legs are a message that you’re not very open and will keep prospects from approaching your booth. To create intimacy and trust, let your arms hang at your sides and position your feet about six to eight inches apart.
- **Do have and use some kind of breath freshener!**

MISTAKES

Some of the most common mistakes made by booth staffers are:

- **Weak opening lines.** The best "hooks" are open-ended questions that keep the conversation going. Avoid yes-and-no openers such as "May I help you?" What’s next if the answer is "no"?
- **Turning on the "pitch" too soon.** There’s nothing prospects hate more than pushy booth staffers. Give them a minute to warm up to you before you start sizing them up for a potential sale.
- **Pitching instead of qualifying.** Don’t launch into a sales pitch before you assess a prospect’s situation -- product interests, buying time line, familiarity with your company’s products. Tailor your presentation to the prospect’s needs.
- **Rushing too fast into the demonstration.** Qualifying prospects for the demonstration. You’re not there to just show off your product. Strive to connect with people and help them solve their needs.
- **Poor body language.** Stand up straight toward the edge of the booth with your hands at your side. Look alert and ready to serve.
- **Long-winded product presentations.** Attendee’s can’t afford to be tied to your booth for 20 minutes. Remember, they have a lot of ground to cover at a show. So, keep it to 10 minutes maximum.
- **Writing off prospects too soon.** Don’t just read badges; talk to booth visitors to find out what they want. Badges don’t always tell the whole story. Also, do not dismiss prospects just because their current buying conditions aren’t right. Their situation could change and you want them to think of your company first when this happens.