Booth Staff Behaviour

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People-at-the-booth skills is an area of exhibition management which has been seriously neglected both in theory and in practice. Research by Susan Friedman (2004: 23) shows that half of all companies say they provide training only immediately prior to an exhibition. At the same time, there are significant differences among companies' lists of dos and don'ts (Pitta et al. 2006: 162). Research also suggests (Tanner 1994) that booth staff training is inefficient. Another finding suggests that current training leaves a great deal to be desired, which comes to much the same. In other words, this is an area with great potential for improvement.

Research also show that much current formal training functions so as to reduce contact time between booth staff and visitors, but does not lead to higher sales. That could be because training often focuses mainly on technical aspects of products rather than on relational aspects. Booth staff are often unable to distinguish between visitors who are seeking to buy the product and those who have come to the booth for other reasons. Or, putting it another way, the trainers themselves do not always understand the complexity of booth staff behaviour.

Ordinary sales training does not offer much help to those who staff exhibition booths. Booth staff have to practise two kinds of behaviour, selling and non-selling/promotional, and they need to be able to distinguish between a number of different types of agent with different needs. These are things that ordinary sales training does not cover. They imply that the company should have at least two sets of objectives: one for its selling and one for its non-selling activities.

A trade show is a performance. And, as in show business, many performers, especially the less well-prepared, tend to forget what they have learned once the stage lights are switched on. Putting it differently, a problem for exhibitors is that booth staff do not always seem to behave as they are trained to behave. This type of *boothmanship failure* has been confirmed by research (Tanner 1995: 257–264). A leading reason for this failure is that booth staff are seldom allowed time for practice. Instead, they are put in the position of actors who are asked to read a script at home and then go straight on stage to perform. There is another major difference between the two situations. In a theatre there is only one stage; at a trade show there are multiple stages, each requiring the playing of a specific role.

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Table 2.1 The five different stages on which trade-show staff perform

Location	Behaviour	Dress code	Identity and description
In booth	Active verbally	High profile, professional	Employee, sincere
In aisles	Active physically	Low-profile marketing promotion	A “fan”, informative, humorous
In others’ booths	Passive, observing	Blend in	A stranger or a representative of your own company, neutral
Social event (either at show or hotel)	Active physically and verbally	Dress up	A possible partner, congenial and trustworthy
Outside	Active verbally	High profile, professional	Serious, performing a survey, engaging in events marketing, etc.

There is the in-booth role, and a number of out-of-booth roles. When we are out of the booth, sometimes we are working in the aisles, or we may be at a conference or an oral presentation, or carrying out a survey, or we may be busy away from the trade fair arena, for instance at the hotel. Each individual location represents a different project with a different environment demanding different roles. In view of this complexity, it is no wonder that things do not always go as planned (Table 2.1).

Each location is associated with particular objectives, and these require the appropriate behaviour and dress code.

Visitors to a trade show, otherwise known as *attendees*, are often divided into *qualified attendees*, describing people who have a real business reason to be at the trade show, and *non-qualified attendees*. There will always be some attendees who are there as husbands, wives, friends, or children of *qualified attendees*.

Most of the contents of this book concerns behaviour within the booth, but we will also talk about the other “stages” here. Walking up and down the aisles, you have plenty of opportunity to do some discreet marketing on your employer’s behalf. However, if you overdo promotional activity in the aisles, this is likely to create negative reactions on the part of organizers and/or other exhibitors. It might also conflict with exhibition policies, and end up in negative publicity for your company. That said, you might want to use the opportunity to attract attention to your booth and your products in a tactful way. For instance, while walking around the aisles, you could wear a T-shirt with a joky message saying “Visit *XYZ* and get this T-shirt for free”, or “Find me at *XYZ* when I’ve finished lunch”. Humour is in short supply at trade shows. Everyone is too busy being serious, to the point of being constantly on edge. So humour offers a form of relief. And in that way it becomes good marketing too.

Do not enter other companies’ booths while wearing your promotional clothing. If you enter a competitor’s booth, make sure you have taken off any kit that explicitly advertises your own company. Not to do that is considered bad form, and may offend both your fellow exhibitors and attendees. We do not market ourselves inside others' booths, at least not overtly. Wearing a company pin is OK. So is carrying a company bag with a discreet logo.

This does not mean that you cannot visit your competitors' booths. When you are asked where you come from, it is considered good form to be open. Frankness may give you a benefit, perhaps a chance to make new friends, or at least get a smile and break the ice that goes with being a competitor. In general we tend to think that we are always in competition, yet research shows that this mentality is not advantageous for business. Co-operation is often the best strategy for a long-term competitive advantage between competing organizations.[1] This fact is often neglected. The best competitors, like the best winners, make non-enemies (as Chinese military strategists reminded us long ago).

Others, admittedly, will prefer to be strangers when they visit competitors' booths; they will claim that they are from somewhere else, in order to avoid embarrassing questions or just in order to be left alone. This is as much a cultural as a personal question.

At social events, work to make sure that your visitors have a good time. You do not have to be selling the whole time, at least not directly. Sometimes the best way of selling a product is not to seem to be selling at all. Some of the best salespeople are those who are able to show genuine empathy and understanding, who know the art of listening. We buy from them because we like them, because we want to do them a favour, as it were. This is not an attitude or ability that can easily be faked, especially not over a period. Rather, by selling the social event, you are also selling your products. At the social event, you are showing your visitors that you are just like everyone else, that you know how to enjoy yourself and that you are a sociable and likeable person. That is a good way of building relationships. It is also a good way to do business, both in the East and in the West.

The focus on relationship building has been reinvented and theorized within what is sometimes called the Nordic school of marketing. There may be said to be two approaches to marketing, the first being the *instrumental approach*, associated with Philip Kotler and the Anglo-Saxon school of marketing. The second is the *relational approach*, associated with Evert Gummesson and the Nordic school. The first sees marketing as a function of a number of objective variables, notably product, price, place, and promotion. According to this view, a marketing initiative is a question of finding the right mix among these factors, the "Four P's". The second approach sees marketing first of all as relationship building. The logic is that by building relationships, you develop trust. Where there is trust, the product will be of good quality and the price will be competitive, because you do not want to break the trust. In other words, you are not going to sell a poor product at a high price to someone you have built a relationship with.

How, then, do we ensure good relationships at a trade show? One model, suggested by Li (2006: 168), specifies the "relationship properties", going into

[1] The flipside of this is formation of cartels. This term refers to cases where competitors collude to fix prices to the disadvantage of their customers, which is illegal.

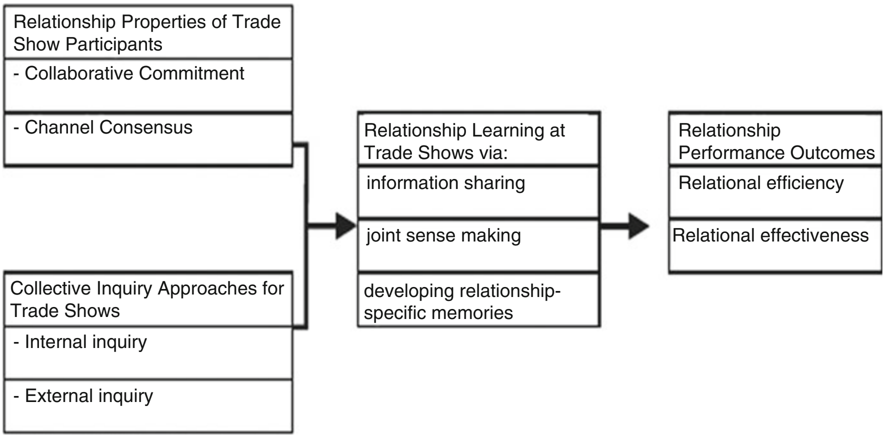

Fig. 2.1 Developing relationship learning outcomes

the show, and "relationship learning", at the show, to give the relationship learning outcomes (Fig. 2.1):

The initial properties include collaborative commitment and channel consensus. There are two approaches to information gathering at this stage: internal enquiries and external enquiries. Learning at the trade show consists of information sharing, joint sense making, and investment in the development of relationships. The final outcome can be defined in terms of relational efficiency and relational effectiveness.

At trade shows, there are a number of types of social event to choose from; at most, such as cocktail parties or buffets, participants stand rather than sit. Stand-up get-togethers enable people to circulate more easily and get to know more people. But do bear in mind that, if you have a stand-up buffet, you also need stand-up food and tableware, for instance holders for a glass that attach to a plate with a clip (and don't fall off). When you plan catering, you may need to reckon on providing staff to serve food and other staff to clear plates. The former help visitors so that they do not have to abandon a conversation in order to serve themselves more food. The latter help to keep the place tidy, and they support the logistics involved in the whole process from ordering the food to taking everything away.

If you serve elaborate food for a stand-up buffet, then your guests have to find a place to sit down to eat. The practical reality is that it can be quite difficult just to balance a plate and glass at the same time, especially late in the evening of a long day. Therefore, if you are going to have stand-up food, the best solution (if you can afford it) is to have waiters walking round serving items from separate serving-dishes. Then you need only hold whatever you are eating at the moment (and your glass, if it is not clipped to your plate). By employing waiters, you avoid breaking up interesting conversations when visitors go to fetch more to drink or eat. Of course, ultimately the solution you choose will often be dictated by budget.

You may want to hire a suite in a hotel or at a conference centre for these activities. People expect social events to be held in locations with a certain style, since they come primarily for the ambiance, rather than for the food and drink. Also remember, social events are not parties: they are less about drinking than about mingling. If you want to arrange a party, do so afterwards. Also, social events do not actually have to take place during the trade show period. They can take place earlier or later, too. Some of the more expensive social events involve cruises or trips abroad. These are best held after a show, perhaps as a prize for a competition run during the days of the show.

A word about dress code: make certain that your dress code is specific. That is, all staff should wear the same easily-recognizable clothing. It must be possible for visitors to see who is working in the booth and who is just visiting. In other words, visitors ought not to have to spend time puzzling out who the staff are. Too often during a show we hear people at a booth asking “Do you work here?”, or feeling surprised when someone comes up to them saying “Can I help you?”. If the staff had worn easily-recognizable clothing, these problems would be eliminated. We would have known who was who in advance. If you need to turn round and search for some identifying feature on staff clothing in order to confirm that a person is actually working for the company you are trying to contact, then you are wasting time and getting entangled in unnecessary confusion. If a visitor looks round and cannot find any staff (whether because there are none there or because they are not immediately recognizable), the chances are that he or she either will not come into the booth in the first place, or else will leave the booth after walking around for a while without getting his or her questions answered – which is even more frustrating. Many visitors will look for the booth staff first, before walking in. If they cannot see the staff, the chances are that they will walk on past. To avoid this happening, all staff should be readily identifiable – even from outside the booth, if possible (sometimes walls make it impossible). If we can see, from outside a booth, the things we want to examine and the people we could talk to about them, the likelihood is that we will enter more booths, with more determination and confidence.

You ought to look professional. That means different things in different industries. As a general rule, if you dress too formally you are likely to scare people off (unless it is a bankers’ exhibition). If you dress too casually, people will probably not take you seriously (unless it is an exhibition for surfers). The specific dress code will depend on the type of exhibition and on the clothing norms in vogue at the time.

Dress according to current fashion, or simply wear classic clothes. Dressing fashionably shows people that you are up to date and understand your own generation and era, but don’t overdo it. Dressing fashionably tends to inspire confidence. If you overdo it, it makes you look as if you spend more time on your clothing and appearance than on your work and your products – which will be more of a problem in some industries than others. Don’t dress in a style associated with some earlier period (unless you are at an art exhibition). Exhibitions are not nostalgia parties. You are not there to draw attention to your clothing. Many people recommend a

Table 2.2 Dress codes

Location	Low profile	High profile
In booth	Shirt (and jacket)	Suit and tie
In the aisles	Casual	Formal shirt
At a social event	Shirt and jacket	Dinner jacket

two-piece suit for men and a suit or a dress for women. It is commonly said that most colours are acceptable so long as they are not too striking. On the whole people aim to wear relatively neutral or low-key colours. It goes without saying, of course, that clothing should be clean and tidy. At the same time, you may want to have something which clearly identifies you as an exhibitor while at your booth. In some cases, a clearly displayed badge will do, but you could also consider dressing alike, as discussed earlier (Table 2.2).

Dress codes at exhibitions are not a matter of individual choice, but rather a collective decision, in the same way that your booth staff are a team, which will be judged as a unit. At all sites, the principles of uniformity and simplicity should be respected.

Visitors gain their first impressions not only from your clothes, but also your facial expression. Be the first to smile. A smile is the best invitation to a conversation. When someone looks friendly, we want to walk up to that person and exchange a few words. Don't wait for the other person to make the first move, and above all, don't look unapproachable.

Eating is of course taboo within the booth. It not only looks unprofessional and messy, but it also suggests that you have more important things to do than talk to visitors.

If you sit eating in an adjacent room, close the door. All doors to private areas should be kept closed. Seeing "behind the scenes" gives a passer-by a strange peeping-tom feeling, and it is seldom positive. It is not that, as visitors, we walk round trying to peer in everywhere, but an open door is an automatic invitation to curiosity and we cannot help looking. By keeping doors closed, we help passers-by to avoid distractions. If there is a meeting behind closed doors, put something on the door to say so. A clock is also a good thing to put on the door, something to show when the meeting will be over. Or one could use, for instance, a sign with a timetable of vacant slots. That way you avoid having people knocking on doors and opening them when you are busy.

When staff are not working there is an excellent opportunity to do some *discreet marketing*. Rather than lunching behind closed doors, staff could walk around, or sit somewhere where visitors are passing, in promotional costume. If your clothing shows what booth you belong to, that will draw attention to your booth. Thus, you might have a T-shirt saying "I belong to the *XYZ* booth" and featuring a humorous design or cartoon. That way you might even get one of those rare smiles we need so badly at a place like a trade show. Don't make promotional clothing too complicated. Passers-by do not have the time, or the energy, to figure out what you are all about. Trade shows are not the place for quizzes.

Avoid filling the booth with too many company representatives and friends.[2] A show is not your own private social event. Don't tell friends that they can stop by. The same rules apply here as in the office. You don't invite friends to drop in. If necessary, you meet away from the booth, and preferably away from the conference halls. As trade shows are events which are very compressed in terms of time, you will probably have very little free time available to see friends or to walk far. It is best to think of trade shows as 24-h working days. And if they are seen in that light, then the work should be remunerated accordingly, with the appropriate number of overtime hours allocated in the budget.

The stress involved in trade-show activities can be overwhelming. That stress arises from several factors, which include working at *hyper-speed* and in an *uncontrolled area* over an extended period of time. Steve Miller (1999: xi) may have expressed this best, when he chose to start his book with the following story:

> I worked my first trade show 30 years ago. I hated it. I was surrounded by thousands of attendees, exhibit staffers, media, and guests – all of them strangers. I was out of my comfort zone and needless to say, didn't do a good job of working the show. I developed a negative attitude about the show, which, happily for me, was shared by almost every other salesperson I met.

And there is something of a paradox here. Because the environment is stressful, companies and exhibitors often present their worst side to the public when they are in the presence of their best sales opportunities. The professional approach here is not to deny the stressful situation, but to find ways of dealing with it. As the reader will have gathered by now, the solution offered in this book is planning. Planning is also, often, what separates a salesperson from a marketing professional, and it is what we expect from someone who has studied marketing at university or at a business school. Successful planning is a combination of marketing education and experience, since it will take more than one show to get it right.

Trade shows are almost always overwhelming, especially if we are there for the first time. Consequently there is a real need to understand how to cope with them. The best way to do this is to prepare ourselves in advance, by finding out as much as we can before we travel to the show and by a debriefing after the show. Part of what we gain from all this is gathering of experience and developing techniques that will stand us in good stead next time round.

One of these techniques is to find time to relax in between meetings and activities. Make sure that you find a quiet place to stay overnight, well away from traffic noise and excessive social events. Bring earplugs and a blindfold. You don't want to ruin your next day through poor sleep. One team member's failure to get a good night's sleep represents a planning failure for the entire team. To maintain mental and physical tone there need to be occasional chances to at least get some fresh air during the day, and to get out of the conference hall if only for a few minutes. If you can do some physical exercise, so much the better. Some larger

[2] Luckily, the number of entrance passes for staff is often rationed by the show organizers.

booths will have a small couch in the private room where staff can lie down for a few minutes. A weary exhibitor is less helpful and valuable as a conversational partner representing his or her company.

To be a valuable member of booth staff, we also need to practise how to recognize and handle the various kinds of visitor who come to our booth. This is the next topic to discuss.

2.1 Various Participants at a Trade Show

Exhibition attendees can be divided into a number of categories. Thus, we have:

- Exhibitors (sellers)
- Visitors (buyers and people of influence)
- Suppliers
- Show organizers
- People of influence (including industry analysts, representatives of industry associations, and policy makers/regulators)

The exhibitor must make sure he has the personnel to fulfil the needs of all the various expected attendees. *Visitors* are there to buy, gather information, or assess products. *Suppliers* are there to see if they can sell you something. *Show organizers* may be there to make sure everything is running properly, *industry analysts* may be there to gather information for a report, *industry associates* to see what they can do for you as a member, and *policy makers* to listen to your opinion about an issue. To approach all of them in the role of a salesperson will be directly counterproductive, and may risk offending some of them. Therefore, begin the encounter by finding out what category of person you have in front of you. Then try to understand what they need and what they may bring to your organization.

To make the picture even more complicated buyers are not all alike. There are:

- Current buyers
- Potential buyers
- Non-buyers

Each of them has his own particular motives and needs. Even more complicated: there is often not just a single buyer, but a whole group of people – sometimes referred to as the "buying centre" – whose members all have influence on the purchasing decision, though to different extents. This is particularly relevant in a business-to-business context. Identifying this group, its members, and their *relative weight* in the purchasing decision is a major challenge for the selling team. The larger and more expensive the products we are selling, the more effort should be devoted to this identification and mapping task. The problem is that the more influential members of the team will often not disclose who they are. Sometimes they will have job titles which allow you to guess their relative importance, but not always. And you cannot normally phone the company and ask. They will not tell you, because they do not want you to be aware of who decides what. Rather, they want the upper hand in negotiations, and they will be afraid that if you knew these things, you might be less than frank, or too well prepared (which in some cases may actually amount to the same thing).

So you have to guess, by listening to what the visitors say and how they react to one another's comments and behave towards each other (if they arrive as a group). Sometimes they will arrive individually, or only two at a time.

If there are many potential suppliers, a purchasing team can decide to begin by splitting up and sending a few people to their various booths, mostly to save time. Then they will consult with each other in a neutral location. If some particular supplier is interesting, they may come back to that supplier, often with different members of the same team. On the whole, the larger the size of potential orders, the larger the buying team is likely to be. If the same members of a large team come back, that may be in order to confirm details, or check information. If different members of the team come back, this can be to get a second opinion about something that the first group found interesting. This means that as a member of the booth staff it is not worth your while to speculate too much (situations like these can test your patience to a mind-blowing extent). It is normally OK to ask discreet questions about the purchasing centre. "When are they looking to make a decision, do you know?"; "When are the goods for, or to be delivered?"; "How does a purchasing process typically run in your company?". Visitors who are too secretive and do not want to answer any questions normally arouse justifiable suspicion.

During a conversation with a potential buyer – who is saying all the right things to encourage you to think he could be a strong lead – you might ask how many people from his company or organization there are at the show. What departments are they from? Who would be making the purchasing decision? As we become better acquainted, we can ask more. Sometimes we find that the person in question has just come along for the trip. That does not mean that we should treat him or her with any less politeness, but it does limit the time we can spend with that person. Note also that, even in such a case, we do not know what influence the person may have on the actual decision-maker. He may be her husband. Husbands and wives, who sometimes go along on trips like these, can have a great deal of indirect influence on purchasing decisions, if they are knowledgeable about the business. To bring the conversation to an end politely and move on to other visitors, we might say "Have a look round, if you'd like to", or "Let me know if I can be any more help".

At every trade show, there will be booths that are packed with visitors and other booths with hardly any visitors at all. If your booth is in the latter category, you do not have any problem with time scarcity. In that case, you might rather want to try to keep each visitor as long as possible, simply to make your organization or products look popular. No one likes going into an empty booth. It makes us feel a bit uncertain: "maybe there is something wrong with this booth or the people in it". Or, "this company must be a failure if there is no one there". To avoid this, we might even ask a staff member to change clothes and play the role of a visitor for a while, even though that is not an easy thing to carry off. Unfortunately, many members of booth teams fall for the temptation of using the time to talk among themselves while there are no visitors in the booth. That is a serious mistake.

Table 2.3 Types of leads

	Strong	Average
Direct	Strong direct	Average direct
Indirect	Strong indirect	Average indirect

It makes us look not just inaccessible, but unprofessional. In a well-organized booth, all important questions and discussions among staff are sorted out in advance or behind closed doors. For minor messages, booth staff can send or leave brief messages behind the main reception desk at the booth – preferably not via text message, because that again risks making us look unavailable (switch the sound off, at least). Set up a system of sticky notes or a notebook lying somewhere accessible, out of sight of visitors, but visible to the booth staff. That way, visitors are not aware of the communications at all, but the problems and issues that are bound to come up can be resolved nevertheless.

A few words on leads are needed, too. Leads are not all the same, and they must be distinguished with respect to quality. For one thing there are *non-leads*, *leads*, and *strong leads*. Secondly there are *direct leads* and *indirect leads*. An indirect lead means that the person is a member of the buying centre, but not the actual decision-maker (Table 2.3).

A strong indirect lead will guide you directly to the decision-maker. At the next stage this decision-maker may turn out to be either a strong or an ordinary lead. An *average indirect lead* will need to be worked on before you can hope to know if a sale is on the cards.

The classification of leads will help you prioritize once you are back from the show. It will also help you select who among your staff should make contact with whom. As a general rule, the one who made the initial contact should also be the one following up the lead once back from the show, but there are various exceptions to that. These include examples of situations when it became clear during the initial conversation that the personal chemistry with a particular visitor was poor, or that the staff member was not able to answer all (technical or other) questions. In these cases it would be advisable to change contact person for the follow-up.

Trade shows are not only about selling, they are also about building and maintaining networks. A large share of visitors to your booth are likely to be non-buyers. As we have seen, this does not mean that they are unimportant. As one example, *suppliers* are non-buyers who may give you a good price on future deliveries, for instance if invited to social events. *Show organizers* could be potential buyers of a number of products, and they are in a position to make your future trade-show arrangements smoother. *People of influence* may write articles or change market conditions for you in a way that enables you to increase your sales figures in the long run. A potential sponsor may walk past and decide to support your efforts. By classifying each visitor you are able to optimize all your trade-show efforts and adapt your communications accordingly.

Sales are important here and now, but good public relations will influence your sales in the future. Thus, we must distinguish between the *short-term "tactical"* *goals* for the trade show, and the *long-term "strategic" goals* of our company. Unfortunately, tactical goals tend to dominate our thinking as managers. As competition increases, the pressure on short-term results is also bound to increase, especially in smaller and some medium-size companies which have to struggle just to survive, but also in larger companies, particularly public ones whose management are forced to prioritize quarterly results in order to satisfy shareholders' requests for immediate or short-term return on investment. Companies that are trapped in short-term thinking rarely survive for more than a decade. They are reactive, simply running the line out, squeezing the market for maximum profit here and now. As such, they will not be able to adapt to change for long, whether changes consist of new technology (*inventions*), or just better, cleverer ways of satisfying existing needs (*innovations*).

Screening visitors is an unavoidable process at any show, in view of the limited resources and time at our disposal. At the same time, it is one of the most significant and potentially most damaging activities we carry out at the show. Ultimately, screening will depend on a combination of constraints: numbers of visitors, their relative interest in our products, the number of our staff and the size of our booth, and our capacity to handle the visitors who arrive. If we have a popular product but do not allocate the resources needed to meet our potential customers, then we are going to damage ourselves. Failure to interact with our visitors, or interacting with them poorly, will turn potential customers away.

Many salespeople believe that they can spot a customer a long way off, just by sight. For instance, some exhibitors will think that because a given person is introverted in personality, he cannot be a major decision-maker. Such prejudices are potentially very dangerous. The introverted person, especially in a B2B context, might be a leading technical engineer who has most of the say within his buying centre. Many chief executives of high-tech companies dress extra-casually, in part because this may be the norm in their industry, in part because they have nothing to prove by dressing up, and perhaps also because they enjoy the contrast as a personal trademark. Hence we would do well to allow for the few minutes of active conversation it takes to detect what a visitor's real motives are, before we jump to conclusions.

Motives can also change during the conversation, or they may be mixed or confusing; for instance, a visitor may discover that he has a need for a product he was not thinking about before he entered our booth. Thus, what was a rather uninteresting customer at first glance could turn out to be a strong lead, without any of us including the visitor himself knowing that in advance. A savvy exhibitor therefore will be one who not only knows how to classify different motives, but also how to awaken them. That is particularly true in the B2C context, where emotions play a larger role.

When we have found a strong lead, we shall want to take our visitor to a suitable quiet area in the booth so as to be able to focus better on that person and avoid interruptions. Therefore, be sure always to have a quiet corner in your booth. A noisy booth environment can lose you your customer simply because he or she does not feel comfortable. It could be that you both suppose you will be able to talk to each other later, at some other point during the show; but the opportunity may never arise a second time, since there are so many other distractions at the show and the time goes by so fast. We may also find it difficult to remember all the contacts we need to follow up, unless they were ones of which we made a special note. Or the visitor will forget about contacting us.

Simply filling the booth with experienced salespeople will not do, either. If we are a major player, we shall need people with different skill-sets in our booth at all times, so that we can answer any type of question at any time; for instance, if we have a technical product, we shall need someone who can answer technical questions. It is a sign of lack of professionalism if, as a visitor, we are told to come back later because the person we need to talk to is not present (and that is quite a common scenario). After all, this trade show is important for everyone, including the visitors. Visitors often plan what they want to see, what booths they want to visit, which people they would like to talk to. It is not just the exhibitors who plan. What could possibly be more important than to have the booth staffed with the right people? If we are a major player, we have no good excuses for failing to ensure that our booth staff have the right mix of competences. Ultimately this is a question of budget, but if money must be saved it will be better to cut down on the cost of the actual booth itself, or as a last resort you should make sure there is someone you can contact by phone or online, who will at least be able to talk to the visitor while he or she is standing in your booth.

Because staff need to take breaks and because they need to do other things, such as doing interviews, gathering marketing research, and so forth, we have to plan the staffing of the booth in such a way that on each shift we have a suitable range of people present, or at least available by phone. If you are a small or even medium-sized company, regard the advice given here more as an ideal to progress towards than as a set of absolute requirements. What is most important is that we make progress for each trade show, not that we have everything in place first time. (No one manages that.)

We need to understand the difference between an ordinary sales job, and selling at a trade show or conference. Exhibition buyers come to see sellers, not vice versa. To be turned away because no one can answer our questions, or to be overlooked or abandoned too soon during a conversation because the staff member does not see us as a good lead, will leave us with a feeling of disappointment, and in some countries and cultures possibly even of dishonour. Thus, in many Asian cultures there is a fear of losing face, that is of feeling inferior and neglected by the person we are talking to. Many Western exhibitors are not sensitive enough to such factors. With the Asian economies growing in importance, cultural factors will need to be taken more seriously. As booth staff we need to show greater sensitivity in our conversations.

The single most common mistake made by salespeople at trade shows is that they fail to appreciate the importance of the class of visitors we call *people of influence*, one subset of which can be identified as *sponsors*. People of influence may be:

- Journalists, contributors to industry publications
- Trade association members

- Trade union officials
- Representatives of independent companies who sponsor and operate trade shows
- Members of special interest groups of all kinds

These people fall into three categories. There are those who want to take up our time for free, for instance trade union officials; those who are willing to pay for it, such as sponsors; and those who want us to pay for it, as in some cases journalists who would like us to pay the costs of their trip in return for a write-up. This last is not considered ethical in all cultures, but nevertheless seems to be the way things are done in most countries. (The journalist's article will not usually mention such payment, as would be required nowadays for an article in a scientific publication, under the "conflict of interest" rubric;[3] and as readers most of us will not suspect the existence of the payment.) There are also many other journalists who are willing to come and write about our company at their own expense, but for that we need to be talking about a major trade show and a company well known to the public.

People of influence, such as trade-association members or industry-publication journalists, will operate and behave quite differently from our sales leads. If we expect to encounter only sales leads we will look surprised, even puzzled, and through our reaction we might lose an opportunity. We need to be able to identify who we have in front of us and what their interest is in attending the trade show. Only then can we begin to act in our own best interest.

People of influence will want to talk about things other than our products, such as what suppliers we use and how we organize production, or they may aim to get us to do things differently, to modify our values or opinions. This type of encounter can be quite a shock, especially if we are not prepared for it. Hence, many sales staff see people of influence as a nuisance. But steering clear of them is based on a misconception, namely that because they are not there to buy they are no use to us. We should instead consider them for what they are, people who influence others to buy.

We are in fact giving up on an opportunity to cultivate our public relations, an opportunity for co-operation, co-branding, or sponsorship. Instead, we need to develop a system allowing us rapidly to identify and channel the different types of visitor to our booth. If we do not have time to talk to a person of influence there and then, we should set up a meeting later when things are calmer. In many industries, the people of influence can be more important than the customers. One example of that is in the fashion industry. When the representatives of *Vogue*, *Elle*, or *Marie Claire* arrive, they are treated as royalty. What they write will decide what people buy. So in this industry they are much more important than the actual customers at the show, because they have such a large influence on consumers' choices.

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[3] For the record it should be stated that the author of this book has received no financial support from any source in exchange for favouring or disfavouring particular organizations or industries. The book has been made possible through a number of standard annual Swedish government research grants to the University of Halmstad, a special grant by the Knowledge Foundation, and in particular through the patience of my family.

People of influence do not want to be treated as buyers. Most often they are there for information and want to be given facts, or they may simply want to be recognized and acknowledged as important people. In these situations we are often best advised to play along with their game of vanity. Sales pitches only risk irritating them. People of influence do not take it lightly if they feel they are being misled. Rather, give them the feeling that they are discovering the truth. If we do not have any truly new products at the show, they will want to hear about that. They do not want to hear lies, and they do not want to find out, for themselves or via others, that the information we gave was wrong or misleading: that would only destroy whatever trust we may have managed to build up. Many people of influence are rather full of themselves. If that is so, then so be it.

If we are a larger company and can afford it we should invite our *non-buying customers* to a *non-commercial night out* or to a social event. If you have a large number of different visitors attending your social event, don't make this a sales event. If potential buyers have questions they will come to you. Also remember that there is usually a working day following the party, even if it is the day for packing up. To be prepared and fit for the next day is usually more important than trawling for sales at any one social occasion, unless you are in B2B and rely on a few customers. Social events are not drinking parties, but opportunities to mingle.

All this relates to an ideal world of trade-show experts. In reality, sales forces continue to distinguish sharply between buyers and non-buyers. When non-buyers are recognized as such, they are too often given the cold shoulder. It is commonly thought that they are just wasting the time of the booth staff. That way of thinking belongs to the old school of trade-show marketing (cf. Bello 1992: 59–80; Bello and Lothia 1993). The newer approach is to classify our visitors according to their visitor type, and adjust our communication accordingly. It makes our task of analysis much more complicated, but also potentially much more rewarding. Over the past decade we have seen increasing sensitivity to these issues building up, so that staff are now trained to identify a broader selection of visitors and visitors' needs. Thus there is every reason to believe that the professionalism of booth staff will continue to improve. This is a very positive and welcome development.

Some may ask, why should I keep in contact with a non-buyer if he or she does not belong to any of the other categories of visitor on my checklist? Well, in the first place, the sales process in real life is not so black-and-white. Non-buyers may become potential buyers later on, or they may be or may become important people of influence. By allowing certain categories of visitor to become aware that we are less interested in their presence, we can generate *ill will*, the opposite of *goodwill*. Instead of that, we might prefer to see all our visitors as potential ambassadors. It is just a question of finding out where they fit in and what they can do. We find that out through a series of tactful questions.

The cold shoulder is not necessary at all; rather, it is a sign of weak character on our part. Common courtesy and a general interest in the condition of other human beings costs us nothing in terms of time or money. In that respect a trade show should be seen as no different from life in society at large, and our duty is at least to "do the right thing" (as Spike Lee reminded us in his 1989 film with that title), that is to do what is proper and courteous. Anyone who comes to our booth is a potential ambassador and should ideally be given something, even if it is only a smile or an inexpensive giveaway. For this purpose we will also need to develop a detailed, ranked selection of giveaways.

2.1.1 Product Lifecycles and Giveaways

There are two main kinds of giveaways, *reminder giveaways* and *inexpensive giveaways*. Visitors can be divided into three groups with respect to giveaways. One group are given nothing, which means that you think that their actions will have no bearing on the company. That is, they are not going to buy anything or write anything or talk to anyone who may be influenced to buy our products. Reminder giveaways, such as a baseball cap, a good-quality mug, or a T-shirt, are given to strong people of influence, potential buyers, or returning customers. Inexpensive giveaways, such as a pen, a plastic mug, or sweets with our logo on, can be given to anyone else who wants them.

We will not know in advance how many we will get of each category of visitor to our booth. Nevertheless, we have to make some estimate, in order to decide what quantities of the different types of giveaways to stock. Also, we cannot always know what category of visitor we are talking to, and it can be difficult to find out from them. So sometimes we will give a reminder giveaway to a non-buyer. When that happens it is no great disaster. We have to see what information we can obtain from the conversation, and beyond that we just have to guess. In some cases, we can even ask straight out – but politely – "Are you a potential buyer, or are just looking round?" (in a tone which gives the visitor the feeling that it is OK to be looking round, not a criticism). The answer we get may not be clear either, but normally we will at least know a little more than we did at the outset. Of course, in some cases a person who is actually a potential buyer may say he is just looking round, in which case we are in the same situation, unless we can detect something in the way the person acts that suggests differently. In any case, we are now moving into the area of rather sophisticated psychology. As human beings, we are all born psychologists, not formally of course, but by nature and through experience. In most cases that psychological ability will be good enough for the tasks we face at the show. In all cases, we shall need to rely on a whole lot of guessing about people's real intentions. But then, that is not so very different from what we do in life in general.

When we begin our training scheme, staff will need to be given some simple rules to go by. Then, when these are well-rehearsed, we can elaborate them. Ultimately a great deal will revolve round psychology. A simple set of rules for what to do, depending on visitor category, might look like this (Table 2.4):

One group that many exhibitors are surprised to find in their booth is *current buyers*, people who have already bought what we are selling, and who are not looking to make any additional purchases in the immediate future. Their visits

Table 2.4 Buyers' motives for show attendance

	Short term	Long term
Current buyer	Confirm decision	Reinforce contact
Potential buyer	Become advocate	Develop contact
Non-buyer	Receive reward	Support industry

A modified version of the table presented by Godar and O'Connor (2001: 79)

should not be surprising. Current buyers often go round to seek confirmation that they made the right decision. This is what is sometime called *buyers' remorse*. They may also be there just to gain recognition for who they are, for being good customers. When they notice your booth they will run over as if to say "Hi, I'm a buyer, make me feel important". This is all part of human nature and ought not to surprise anyone. Our response may be to say "Yes, you are", and then encourage them to leave without feeling pushed out, perhaps by giving them a small gift. We may even provide a special gift for this category of visitors, something that is understood as *existing-customer gift*.

Potential buyers go about seeking data to inform the decision they are going to make. Current and potential buyers both treat the trade show pretty much like a shopping precinct, wandering from store to store. In fact a trade show is much better than a shopping precinct. It is a *mega shopping precinct*. If you are looking for, say, a watch it is like walking through a precinct full of watchmakers. There are conferences and speeches on watches, people who represent watch organizations, and people who write about watches. In other words it is rather like an Eldorado for whatever business or industry you happen to be in. You will never find a better selection than at a trade show, and you are less likely to make impulse purchases than in a shopping precinct because the focus is principally on information, distribution, and image building.

From our first-year course on Marketing, we will remember being taught that potential buyers are diverse depending on where they are in the product lifecycle. Different visitors are located at different stages in the product lifecycle, as stated in the theory of diffusion of innovations.[4]

In phase *A*, the potential customer is unaware that our product may fulfil his company or personal needs. In phase *B*, he or she discovers this and starts gathering information about our product, maybe even assessing it at the booth. In phase *C*, he is actively engaged in discussing the conditions of sale with booth staff. Only in phase *D* does he make the actual decision to purchase the item. That means that before this point we have had only outgoings, no income, as there has been no sale. Rather, phases *A–D* (period 1) are part of the investment we as producers and sellers make in the effort to gain a future sale. This is only a model, of course, but still it

[4] See Everett M. Rogers (1962). His theory was built on those of German scholars like Friedrich Ratzel and Leo Frobenius. The same basic ideas in macroeconomics were used by Raymond Vernon as a response to the failure of the Heckscher–Ohlin model to describe changes in sales from international trade.

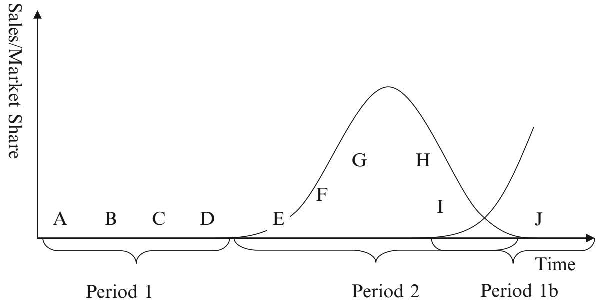


Fig. 2.2 The purchasing process in the product lifecycle

corresponds to a process which most buyers go through in one form or the other. For all the buyers as a group, economic theory suggests that aggregate sales follow a bell curve. The marketing logic is familiar: in the beginning, there will be only a few buyers. We call this group *innovators* (*E*), representing here some 2.5 % of market share in the general model. The next phase is that of *early adopters* (*F*), comprising 13.5 %. At a certain point the curve will start to rise. We call this the *early majority* (*G*), at 34 %. Then follows *late majority* (*H*) at 34 %, and the final group which we call *laggers* (*I*), comprising 16 % of total sales. Of course, all this is according to a standard model for the industry as a whole and does not reflect actual sales for an individual company. Phase *J* is defined by no sales. For any company, it is important to have another product on the market before we reach this point, represented in Fig. 2.2 by the start of a new period (period 1b). Put differently, it is the product sold in the previous period which finances the phase of non-sales in the next period. That is why the two curves are shown as overlapping. If they overlap, this means that we have no period without income. For most companies, that will not be feasible in reality. New models and innovations cannot be sequenced in this exact fashion. In reality, most companies will rather have a range of different products selling at the same time. What is lost on one product is financed by profits made on another, and so forth. The same *evolutionary model* is used to explain the rise and decline of different technologies and of whole industries.

There may be numerous people involved in phases *A* and *B*. It is only in phase *C* that we discover who has a genuine purchasing intention. Phase *D* may be conducted by the same person as phase *C*, but this is not necessarily so. The purchasing company or customer may well have a special negotiator and someone else who is the purchasing decision-maker. That is, it may send one person to the trade show to look and ask questions, and another, often more senior person to negotiate the deal.[5] This largely depends on the size and organization of the potential buyer and the size of the order. In general, the more expensive the product, the longer the *buying decision process* takes and the more resources are allocated to it.

[5] This book does not contain chapters on negotiation techniques, beyond some simple advice about the actual face-to-face meeting, since they are considered a separate area of study with their own expertise and corresponding literature.

Most companies focus on the actual sales history of a product – the sales period (period 2). They pay less attention to the processes of the pre-sales period (period 1). The sales history of a product starts at the moment when the product is released and the first potential customers are becoming aware of it. This often occurs at or just before a trade show. Thus very often the trade show will be the first chance for a customer (or a competitor) to see the new product. The trade show then corresponds to period 1. As a company, we want to come up with something that is brand new or just about to be launched on the market, in order to create a buzz in the mass media or at least in trade journals. At the same time, we also want to show products that are already selling well (period 2).

In period 1, the focus is on information gathering. In period 2, the focus is on negotiations. That does not mean, of course, that we cannot purchase and negotiate in period 1. In many cases it will be convenient to do that, but it is not our primary intention. Period 1 is an excellent opportunity for the whole membership of the purchasing centre to go around and shift from one phase of the purchasing process to another with a minimum of resources. We may, for example, conduct phase *B* over the first 2 days of the trade show and phases *C* and *D* at the end of the show. The actual purchase decision will sometimes occur immediately after the trade show. The customer needs to move quickly, but also needs some time to think and evaluate different options. Normally there is too little time for that during the show. It may also be that all members of the purchasing centre are not present at the trade show.

Booth staff need to be trained in the complexity of purchase decisions. If they suppose that every visit is a sale/non-sale situation, they are not going to perform effectively, maybe jeopardizing a future sale though their behaviour at the booth. A phase-*B* visit needs to be recognized and respected as such. Salespeople must acknowledge the need for potential customers to gather information before making any decision. A phase *A* or *B* visitor should be met with the same service and goodwill as an actual buyer.

If we as a company are giving out a lot of information in phase *B*, but are not able to get a sufficient percentage of people to return in phase *C*, that could mean that our product fills a genuine need but that our particular version is not competitive enough. It is an indication that serious marketing research is needed to identify our shortcomings. The same goes if we are able to attract many visitors in phase *C*, but not in phase *D*. This is an indication that our product fulfils the company's needs, but that our price and/or conditions for delivery and service are not sufficiently competitive. This is less of a problem than the first one, since it does not require any modification of the actual product, but it is serious enough, since the consequence will still be no sales.

Depending on what phase of the purchasing process a visitor has reached, he will have different needs which may be fulfilled by different people in your booth or by different forms of technology. A person at phase *B*, who requires specific and detailed information, may be best served by meeting staff who are technically trained. Sometimes the person is just looking for a brochure or a QR code. In phase *D* the need may be more for a salesperson who can negotiate a price.

International visitors deserve special attention. A visitor who flies across continents to see our product or negotiate with us will normally be serious. His costs for attending the show will be much higher than those for other visitors. That means that he is investing more, and stands to lose more if he cannot find a product that fulfils his needs. In general, the greater the distance that a potential buyer has travelled, the more serious his or her interest is likely to be – though this rule is not without exceptions. The long-distance visitor is also more likely to be a bigger customer, placing larger orders. Someone from the same region may just be there because he or she is curious – maybe he or she just happened to be in town, and saw the show chiefly as an amusement.

2.1.2 Technological Aids

Nowadays, most exhibitions provide colour-coded badges to allow for immediate role-recognition: exhibitors in one colour, suppliers in another, "international" in a third, etc. Many companies have access to computer systems allowing immediate scanning of badges, so-called *Lead Retrieval Systems* (LRS). This does not mean that business cards are no longer used. They are still standard, and an engraved card on high-quality paper is still appreciated in many circles, especially in relation to luxury goods and among high earners and highly-educated visitors.

Manual systems require more time for analysis before a contact is made. Some companies enter data from badges directly into their own *customer relationship management* (CRM) applications with space for additional comments. That allows the company to contact potential customers the same week (cf. Tynan 2004: 27). Their system also enables them to add quotations from the actual conversation – possibly even a sound bite, with the visitor's approval. LRSs are frequently hired out by show organizers. The critics of these systems often complain that they are difficult to personalize and that data is often erroneous or scarce. Consequently, until you know for sure just how good such a system is, use your own PC-based solutions, preferably with a smart phone for easier mobile use. Beyond this, it is difficult to give long-lasting advice on technology in this area, since the pace of change is so rapid. As an example, a company called iZettle was thought to be a sure thing with the service it offered for paying via credit or debit card over a mobile phone, using a small device attached to the smartphone. A few months later came SEQR, which allows one to pay with a QR code. Also, many banks are now collaborating to build their own systems based on mobile-phone apps, thus disintermediating the card companies. All these developments are affecting the trade-show industry on an ongoing basis.

QR codes are becoming popular in more than one respect. Many visitors will have a QR application on their smartphones and will expect to be able to scan different codes at your booth rather than picking up brochures, which they would have to lug along with them all day. Thus you may want to provide QR codes at your booth to cover different kinds of information. QR codes can also make up for time wasted in a booth which is crowded. Rather than waiting their turn for personal attention, many visitors will just scan your code and move on to the next booth. As well as written documentation you can also link to sound files and video material. It is therefore important that the codes are easily visible and that they actually work. Do not link directly to websites from your QR codes, but make sure that the information is clearly and easily visible and readable on a smartphone. Technology that does not work is a common problem, but its frequency does not make it any more excusable at a trade show.

Mobile apps are now rapidly changing the opportunities for information exchange in society, including at trade shows. Many shows already have their own apps developed by the organizers, and the functionality of these apps will be increasing significantly in the years to come. With new apps visitors can not merely acquire information about the show, the participants, hotels, flights, and so forth, but they can also make purchases, and see where other people they want to meet are located and exchange information with them. With a built-in GPS function you can even find the way to the toilet all by yourself without having to ask anyone.

As the importance of internet solutions increases the demand for free, or at least straightforward, access, Wi-Fi is becoming ever more important. There are no excuses for poor internet connections at trade shows any longer. As a trade-show organizer you will need to test your internet infrastructure and plan for eventualities. As an exhibitor you will want to check the internet speed at the place where your booth is located. To ensure that the technology works we need to include *technical support* personnel among our staff. Categorizing staff by groups of roles may make this easier (Table 2.5):

In the model above, the exhibitor staff are classified into three main groups: *administrative personnel*, *sales*, and *technical support*. Administrative personnel and sales are divided into *junior* and *senior* levels. They are used not only in contacts with the exhibition organizers, but also to inform visitors about the product. They also have the special role of handling complaints.

2.1.3 Complaints and Stress at Trade Shows

Complaints are a delicate matter, for several reasons. First**,** the matter is delicate because you are dealing with a dissatisfied customer who may already be showing signs of anger or at least frustration. Second, it is delicate because of the location. The last thing you want in your booth is a customer loudly venting his anger. Third, it is delicate because of the restricted space and the limited time you have available to solve the problem.

First, you do not want the complaining customer to get any more upset or angry than he or she already is. Showing understanding and listening take special training, which few sales or technical staff tend to have. Hence these situations may be better handled by administrative personnel or by a specially designated person, as are often used when customers complain to companies in general. Whatever your view may be of the merits of the complaint, you need to show respect for the person standing before you. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to make a distinction

Table 2.5 Exhibitor response by buyer motive type (From Godar and O'Connor 2001: 84)

	Exhibitor responses		
Visitor's motive	Personnel	Location at booth	Promotional mix
Seek information:			
Actively	Sales + technical support	Inside	Information kit, commercial social event
Passively	Technical support	Inside	Inexpensive giveaway, commercial social event
Purchase	Sales, senior	Inside, seated	Commercial social event
Receive reward (old customer)	Any	By aisles	Reminder giveaway, commercial social event
Support	Any	By aisles	Inexpensive giveaway
Complain	Administrative	Inside, standing, isolate from others	Inexpensive giveaway
Inform	Administrative, senior	Inside, seated/standing, isolate from others	Inexpensive giveaway, non-commercial social

between the person and his or her complaint. Secondly, however bad the situation may be with regard to the specifics of the complaint, you can always try to build a better relationship with the complainant than what you started with. In other words it is not an either/or situation. If you cannot see any immediate solution, or if further information is required, suggest that you meet at a later date, after the trade show is over. Assure the person that you take his complaint seriously. The faster you can come to a mutual agreement the better – preferably without the visitor feeling that he has been chased out of the booth. Of course, sometimes the demands will be utterly unreasonable and no mutual agreement can be found. Sometimes complaints are about finding a solution; sometimes they are more about limiting damage.

With the exception of complaints, which are preferably handled in the administrative room away from other visitors, all other *short-term contacts* are handled close to the aisles. *Lengthy contacts* are handled inside the booth. If it is practical, you might consider two locations for assessing the product, one close to the aisles for short-term contacts, and one inside for longer contacts. As a rule, all contact by the aisles should be made standing. Contact inside may be seated. Remember that visitors who come to you are often weary – their legs will be tired, naturally, but they will also very likely be mentally weary, depending how much time they had already spent walking around the trade-show halls before they reached you. The further away from the exits you are located, the more likely your visitors are to be weary. Weary people are glad of a chance to rest and will appreciate a glass of water. A place to sit down is then often preferred. Certainly our booth is not a nursing home, but if our leads are given a seat and a drink of water then we will already have made some progress in building a relationship.

Putting it differently, when people walk into your booth they are going to have several needs, and these may or may not be linked to your products. By easing the needs that are not related to the actual purchase – rest, thirst – we increase the likelihood of a successful visit, always assuming that they are interested in what we have to offer.

The point is so easy to understand, and yet it is so often ignored: people at trade shows are weary.

Here is a brief example to illustrate this theme:

Minicase 1: Booths That Make Vistors Even More Weary

Company: Samsung, South Korea
Trade show: CES, Central Hall

Samsung is the world's largest conglomerate by revenue and the single most important South Korean company. Their exports account for more than 20 % of that country's total exports. Even though the Samsung Group is involved in a large variety of industries, in heavy machinery, in construction, in chemicals, financial, and entertainment, it is Samsung Electronics (SEC), started in 1967, which is best known. In the 1990s SEC became a truly international company. Today it is among other things the world's largest manufacturer of dynamic random access memory, refrigerators, flash memory, and DVD players.

Samsung usually takes one of the largest booth spaces of any participant when it attends trade shows today, reflecting who they are and how they want to be perceived. At the CES the booth was divided into a number of departments spread over a large area. The booth had TV screens everywhere, outer walls were well used, and so was the height below the ceiling of the hall. One part of the booth area was made to look like a high-class jewellery store (for mobile phones).

On the downside, the booth made a rather confusing impression with too many different colours, and despite the large booth area there was no place to rest (visitors were resting in the booth next door). A thick carpet made the visiting experience even more tiring. When you are dragging tired feet along, you do not want to have to make extra effort to lift your feet. Moreover, there was no clear tour or track to follow once inside the booth. That is very tiring in itself, because you are then forcing people to use additional energy to work out which is the best path to take round the booth. Indeed, many visitors will not enter a booth if they cannot see from outside where to go once they are inside. For larger booths, like the Samsung booth, this was difficult. You simply could not see where the path was taking you before you went in. If you are going to have a large and complex stand, you might have an overview map by the entrance (making sure not to place it in the middle of the entrance, since that will hinder the free flow of pedestrian traffic).

When you consider how much money is spent on these booths, it is surprising that the solutions adopted are not thought through better than they are.

Conclusion: less effective use of resources than might be expected from this large company; on a scale of 1–10, score 6.

When we walk through rows and rows of booths, they all seem to look more or less the same. In fact the more of them we see, the more similar they look. In addition to which, after a while we get tired of walking round. It is astonishing how few exhibitors think about the state their visitors are in after a few hectic hours in the exhibition hall. The chances are that he or she will be more interested in sitting down than in examining your products. Here are some suggestions for a trade show that takes place in an environment which is both warm and hectic:

- A bench to sit on (tired feet)
- A glass of water (thirst)
- A complimentary neck message in one corner of your booth (stiff muscles)
- A jar filled with sweets, or some inexpensive food (hunger, energy)
- A fan or air conditioner (heat, stale air, lack of oxygen)
- A darker corner (against the intense lightening)

The value of such facilities can be enormous at certain trade shows and for certain visitors subject to deprivation of a series of *physiological needs*. This all matches Maslow's "hierarchy of needs". Your booth should not be seen a division of the Red Cross, certainly, that would attract the wrong kind of visitors; but you can make things easier for those visitors who are actually interested in what you have to offer once they have reached you. Who knows, if a visitor is only slightly interested in your product initially, he may feel compelled to become more interested just because of the supportive facilities you offer. Thus the facilities can be seen as resembling sales arguments in a negotiation.

Another problem at booths is stress. Trade shows are highly stressful environments. And research tells us that perceived time pressure leads to fewer purchases (Tafesse and Korneliussen 2012). This makes the trade-show environment a paradoxical one. It is an environment that people have made a stressful one, yet where we know that people under stress will be less inclined to buy. One of your concerns as a staff member should therefore be to know how to adapt to and reduce the visitor's *stress level*, in the first place by your manner of speaking and your body language. The best way to relieve a visitor's stress can be to let him or her talk. If you are stressed yourself as a staff member, the chances are that this will be transmitted to everyone who walks into your booth. Another way to reduce stress among your visitors might be by playing calming music, or no music at all (trade show halls tend to be too noisy anyway).

What is it, then, that causes all this stress? There are a number of factors. One is the awkward way we walk at a show, not in a straight line and at a steady pace as we do when outdoors, but twisting round while we are walking and standing still. (You might recall encountering the same kind of weariness when walking round a museum.) Another is the heat. A third is the poor air quality. Then there are the harsh lighting; the noise, including loud music; the limited time available; and the thought of everything you need to get done or to see before everything closes down (*mental stress*). Add to these the company's expectations for sales, and all the unresolved problems you left at home. Most likely several of these factors will come into play together, creating a mixture of physical and mental stress. And we could probably think of many further stress factors. The point is that they all emerge here together at the trade show, as a consequence of the very nature of this environment, so compressed and intense.

It sometimes makes you wonder why they set things up in this way. Would it not be better if everything were quiet and people moved around slowly? Perhaps so, but bazaars are by their nature hectic, and they always have been. If we move around slowly everything will take longer and we will probably get less done. If we speak slowly and quietly we are afraid of being perceived as passive, non-salesman like, unengaged. This last fear is not justified; confidence is often won through being calm and not too talkative. We are not selling our products at a fish market, where those who scream loudest sell most. Indeed, many individual booths even succeed in keeping their sound levels down; but the halls are filled with loud voices nevertheless. To some extent this is inevitable. There are just too many people under the same roof talking at the same time. Ultimately this is in the very nature of trade shows.

We occasionally see people at trade shows sitting with their head in their hands. You can imagine what this means: how much stress and how many failures it takes to lead someone to act like that in public. Yet it is not uncommon. When a few things start to go wrong at the show, it does not take long before we feel like complete failures. Expectations are often too high, so the fall is all the harder.

We are just bombarded with too many impressions at trade shows, without sufficient time to digest them. Besides, we do not act naturally at a show. Too often we are not truly ourselves. There is too much pressure. We may also be affected by more complex psychological problems, like existential questions, the one-dimensional nature of it all; the monotonous landscape, a feeling (especially after Day 3) that we are losing touch with reality and normal life outside. Trade shows can feel so unnatural as an environment. The problem may largely be the lack of any real personal contacts; that is, it may arise because we have too many business contacts there and too few contacts with people we would choose to have around us. While at the show we do not see our families and perhaps do not see any people we truly care about. At work, at least we can go home at the end of the day to recharge our batteries. In short, all this may leave us with a feeling of emptiness: a feeling of lack of real purpose and general fatigue. Mankind is not made for trade shows; they do not suit our nature or conform to what we consider a normal environment. This may be the underlying reason why we tend to become so stressed. On the other hand, there are those, especially among the younger generation, who seldom get stressed and think that trade shows are great fun. In any case, we cannot do much to change this environment, so it is important that we prepare ourselves for it, physically and mentally. Preparing for it doesn't have to be a big deal. It might be enough to arrange a few sessions where we sit in a circle and discuss these issues. That ought to be part of the pre-show training. Then when we encounter the negative feelings, we are better prepared to deal with them.

It is important to know about all of these problems. A truly competent exhibition manager will know how to lead a dialogue with his staff about these topics. The way exhibition managers react is very different. One common point of view is that staff who are stressed just do not have the stomach for it, so that they would probably be better off working somewhere else. In reality we react differently to the same stress symptoms regardless of how good we are as salespeople or employees. Our first concern should not be to fill the booth with people who can "stand the pressure". On the other hand, these issues should not be overlooked, simply because they are real problems.

If you have time during the show, do some anti-stress activities, for instance give one another shoulder massages when you are together in the evening. Set up an *anti-stress discussion circle*, a follow-up to the one you started in the pre-show period. Or go for long silent walks together in the evenings. You could also phone home and talk to your loved ones. Tell them about your day, what your good and bad experiences were, as a means of relieving stress and exchanging empathy. This form of *conversation therapy* can be a great help to lift weight from your shoulders. During the day, you should drink plenty of fresh water, and you should eat well at breakfast and lunch. If you have two teams of people, you should consider going outside the premises, leaving the trade show area for lunch, just in order to get away from it all for an hour.

Do not try carrying out any kind of anti-stress activities while you are in the booth. It might look as though you were trying to sell yoga lessons or some other alternative therapy. Such activities will only draw attention away from your products and core activities – away from the reasons why you are there. What you can do, if you like, is to offer your visitors complimentary massages at another location. Sometimes such services are provided inside the trade-show arena, alongside the popular shoe-shine stands.

In general, trade shows have large unexploited possibilities for other services, catering to our physiological and more basic, practical needs while there: places to eat, drink, lie down for a few minutes, take a shower, a place to change or repair our clothes, or get a haircut. It is surprising that more organizers are not bundling these service facilities into their shows. Most trade shows display a lack of overall analysis on the part of the organizers and owners. Instead, we frequently see too many food stands together in one place, with no places to sit down. Or the toilets will be too far away from the food stands. There is also often a problem of toilet capacity. In this respect trade shows have much to learn from rock festivals, another form of event with its own particular features.[6] (Trade shows and concerts are both studied under the heading of event marketing.) Food areas, restaurants, and stands are often arranged in an uninspiring fashion at most exhibition halls. At most sites

[6] The author was a consultant for the Sweden Rock Festival at a time when it was still relatively unknown outside of Sweden. Much of the success of the festival came after the organizers decided to take event marketing more seriously, continuously improving their logistics, studying traffic flows, and developing new catering facilities and larger-scale toilet capacity.

they are just somewhere you go when you need to eat. These are missed opportunities for trade-show organizers. But there are also admirable exceptions. At the Gothenburg Book Fair a restaurant was sited on a higher level than the exhibitions, so that it could serve as a sightseeing platform. Visitors could go up there not only to eat and relax, but to plan what to see next. As an *easily-visible landmark* it also becomes a natural *rendezvous point*.

Some marketing experts seem to think there are few limits to how much entertainment and fun there should be within their booths. Others think that all people want is a lifestyle, and that their main task is to link their products to a particular concept by deploying entertainment or associated products. These lines of thinking lead to the creation of quite different types of booth. Some will be all about products; others will hardly contain any products at all. On the question as to the value of such diverse *exhibition strategies*, opinions differ. There are no major empirical studies from which to draw conclusions as yet, but personally I believe that the *concept-booths* overplay the attraction of lifestyles. Opinions about this will also differ greatly depending on what industry and what consumer segments we are dealing with. It is clear that entertainment-oriented booths are a current trend, in other words we are doing much more with our booths nowadays that is not directly related to displaying our products. Disagreements relate more to the extent of entertainment at the booth, rather than to whether it should exist at all.

Younger people tend to want more entertainment, in the same way that young professionals are more interested in lifestyle. An exhibition strategy which tries to adapt to these wants can be very successful or a complete failure, depending on how the strategy is executed. But we must at least say that it is a risky strategy, as illustrated in the Motorola case below:

Minicase 2: How Too Much Lifestyle Diverts Attention Away from Your Products

Company: Motorola, USA
Trade show: CES, Central Hall

MOTOROLA

Motorola, Inc. was an American telecommunications company based in Illinois. It was a provider of analogue and digital two-way voice and data radio products and systems for wireless and broadband communications. The company was best known for its mobile phones. After failing to keep up with competition in the consumer market for mobile phones, the company was split in two: today, Motorola Mobility is owned by Google, and the rest is now Motorola Solutions.

At the CES the company had a well-ordered display of its products in a line along the central wall, easy to see and get at. Amphitheatre seating offered an opportunity to rest, and plenty of staff were on hand.

On the downside, they were trying to do too much. Colours were too many and unclear – orange, blue, green. The company logo was not clearly displayed, but tended to be lost in the midst of all the other graphic messages. From a distance it looked as though they were selling glasses/eyewear (because of an advertising campaign involving fancy spectacles and associated products). The specs were a part of their lifestyle strategy, evidently aiming to look cool. This diverted attention away from the company's core business and away from its products.

Also, too many exhibition staff were talking to one another, without paying attention to passers-by. Their uniforms were cold-looking and hard to identify.

A large dividing wall in the middle of the exhibition created a confusing impression, as if the booth contained two different exhibitions. There was a high chance of visitors to one side missing what was on the other side. The passage between the two booth areas was too narrow for visitors to pass one another.

On top of that, Motorola had fallen for the most obvious trend-gadgets of that year, such as the Hummer car. Everyone wanted a car in the exhibition, but unfortunately the link with Motorola products was vague and unclear, to the point of amounting to a form of involuntary co-branding.

The complexity of messages in their booth made it unclear what the company was actually selling. The company was trying to do and to be too many things to different visitors. This lack of clarity was reflected in the slogans displayed in the booth.

Conclusion: far less effective use of resources than might be expected from this company, low visibility of core products: score 3 out of 10.

2.1.4 International Boothmanship

Boothmanship at the larger shows today is the same thing as *international boothmanship*, since business has become truly global. This means that cultures are becoming similar to one another; but each culture is still individual enough to require special attention. Trade shows are organized all over the world, and it is expected that company representatives will travel to wherever the best and most popular trade shows are held. That means that our booth staff are going to encounter increasing numbers of visitors from other countries and cultures, and they themselves must be willing to travel to trade shows in other countries and on other continents. These cultural encounters impose specific demands on us.

A good way to begin confronting cultural differences in marketing is to use whatever is common to us all. Thus, if we have an advertisement for chocolate and it could work in another country, we will not create an entirely new advert. Instead, we might just change the text. The reason for that is that culture for the most part means difference, and differences in business normally mean increased costs. Ideally we would like to broadcast the same commercials in all countries, since that would be the least expensive alternative, but doing that seldom works. What is funny or popular in one culture can be unfunny and unpopular in another. When it comes to advertising, it is important to be spot on. Anything else looks at best odd, and odd is not a good basis for advertising. Television is full of such examples, of dubbed commercials from other countries. Only seldom will they be any great success, and frequently they will do more harm than good. To know why, we need culturally-specific competence: meaning that if we are selling our products in Sweden, we need to know enough about the culture to know what Swedes like. This is often a problem even as between neighbouring countries. For example, German humour, as represented in commercials, seldom works in Sweden. Still, some German companies will go on broadcasting the commercials they have made for their home market, simply because that is less expensive, and they see it as better than nothing. Well, sometimes nothing is better. We see the same logic at trade shows. The reason we start with what is common to everyone is because those elements do not cost anything extra, in training and planning. International marketing, hence also international boothmanship, is largely about how to change what we are doing at home so that it will succeed in the other country. Changing nothing will be very risky; changing too much will be expensive.

So what do we have that is universally shared? The first rule is to be polite. Politeness is appreciated in all cultures. The second rule is to use plain English; preferably no dialects, metaphors, sports analogies, slang, or the like (cf. Hill 1996). The third rule is to try to adapt to what the other person is saying, which often means trying to imitate their style. This is of course a difficult task, and can go frightfully wrong. So, if you do not know how to connect to a particular culture, you should avoid trying to do so.

To speak several languages is an advantage for successful trade-show staff. When attending international trade shows, mastery of more than English is greatly appreciated. For example, if you are in France you will know that the French prefer to speak their own language. A German or Japanese will appreciate it if you can say a few words in their language, as they too regard themselves as leading nations. The Chinese are thrilled if you can say just a few words in Chinese, in part because they do not expect it even though they are become increasingly aware of their new role as a rising superpower.

Learn at least the most basic words in the country you are visiting, such as “thank you”, “good morning”, and “how are you?” Attempting to use these phrases correctly is seen as a sign of general politeness in most cultures. It is true that the international business language is English – just as the international language for scholars in the Middle Ages was Latin, and just as diplomats used to use French – but English-speaking visitors are also sometimes seen as arrogant when they insist that everyone should speak their language while refusing to learn those of others. If you are attending an international trade show and speak a less-used language – such as Norwegian, in my own case – keep it to yourself while you are at the trade show unless it should happen to be useful in some special circumstance (such as when there is someone else who speaks it). We do not make our visitors listen in to us and guess where we come from if we speak a minority language. If they hear an accent when we speak English and ask where we are from, that is a different thing. Talking about nationality can then become a way into a good conversation: “Ah, you went to see the Norwegian fjords . . .”, and so the conversation gets off to a good start.

If you are an exhibitor and hear another language, do not go on about your visits to that person's country unless you are invited to engage with such a topic. Do not say "I love your country" just because you have been there or know where it is on the map. Comments like that often sound superficial. Another thing to bear in mind is that it is our voices, the way we say things, that build relationships, often more than the actual words we use. So, speak from the heart.

The third rule is to respect a certain *comfort distance* between you and your visitor. Let the visitor decide what that will be. In some cultures the atmosphere becomes uncomfortable if you try to reach a hand out to the other person or if you move too close to them. A fourth rule, which applies to Asian countries in particular, is to think about how to build a relationship before attempting any sales pitch. Westerners often think they have to be pushy to get a sale. In most cases the visitor already knows what you want to sell; and he certainly knows *that* you want to sell. To be too eager can be seen as a sign of desperation. If we like a seller very much it may in fact be us who eventually feel we have to say "So, you probably want to sell me this item . . .?" If the visitor gets to that point, you have probably already made your sale.

According to Gesteland (2005: 17–18), there are two iron laws to follow in the relationship between different cultures at trade shows, or in any other selling situation: first, the seller adapts to the buyer, and secondly, the visitor is expected to observe local customs. Most people prefer to do business with people they know. This means that they will take time to get to know you as a human being first, before deciding to enter into any business transactions. The only exception is the Western culture, which accepts doing business with strangers. Another way to say this is that Westerners are *transaction focused*, whereas Asians are *relationship focused*. This difference can hardly be overstated. Westerners in Asia will be taken out to dinner and invited on various outings, asking themselves all the while when things are going to get started – when you will be getting down to business, as the saying goes. Well, by then they probably already have started. All this does not imply that the other party will necessarily like you and end up doing business with you. Sometimes things will end with a series of mutual thank-yous, and that will be that.

At the end of each day, there should be a short staff debriefing. What went right during the day, and what went wrong or less well? How can we change what worked less well? This part of the staff training may be built around some sort of reward system, whereby the best staff member gets something, if only a pat on the back in the presence of his or her colleagues. A reward can also be linked to future trade shows. It might, for instance, be a guarantee of a place among the booth staff for the next trade show. It could also be a new set of responsibilities within the booth staff, perhaps as trainer for certain aspects at the next pre-show seminar. It might also be a trip together with spouse and children to participate in an external booth staff training seminar at some pleasant holiday resort; but the reward does not need to cost much. Often it is the recognition that really counts. Appraisals can cost so little that it is a wonder that they are so seldom given.

In the following sections, we will go into more detail on the functions of each category of trade-show participant. We begin with the exhibitor.

2.2 The Exhibitor

An exhibition is a salesman's microcosm. Within this microcosm he has little time to work out who the valuable customers and visitors are and what to do next. It is rather like playing chess against a clock: in order not to lose on time penalties, you need to know a set of good moves in advance. Thus success is something that comes over time, through having attended many shows.

The exhibitor is there to meet as many hard prospects as possible. To know who is just floating by and who is out to buy your product takes training. Until we have learned the basics and developed that skill and instinct, we should avoid taking a chance by showing less interest in particular groups of visitors. The initial trick is often to find the right balance. An exhibitor should not spend too much or too little time with any one group of visitors before knowing better how to distinguish among them. The rules of communication are pretty straightforward. Be polite, speak to the point, but do not talk too much, especially not about things other than what we are all there for. Doing that takes up too much time which we have not got, and it is considered unprofessional. Note also that this is more true in certain cultures than in others, for instance silence and pauses are more appreciated in Europe than in the USA.

The exhibition or booth staff is headed by an *exhibition manager,* the company's or the organization's representative at the trade show. It is his responsibility to see to it that all marketing activities are carried out as described in the exhibition plan, and to report back about the outcome of the exhibition to *senior management*, if it is a larger company. In smaller companies, the owners or chief executives often go to the trade show themselves. They will also be working in the booth. That makes reporting unnecessary, but it does not mean that we have nothing to gain by jotting down notes about our experiences for the day, or for the show. How well did we do, relative to what we expected before coming to the show? What was different or unexpected, and what can we do about it next time? Unless we pose these questions clearly to ourselves on the way home, they will probably be forgotten. They will not completely evaporate, of course, and we will accumulate experiences even if we do not write things down; but, unless we have a remarkable memory, we will forget many important lessons, and in consequence our future performance will be less efficient than it might be.

There are a number of initial questions to be answered before a trade show:

1. How many people should I employ in the booth?
2. How big should my booth be?
3. How many people or visitors should it be able to hold?

Many of these decisions may already have been made for us by the rules and regulations laid down for the show. Booth sizes may be limited to a small range of options, say small, medium, and large. The average size of booths organized by AUMA members is between 50 and 100 m^2. The average size of a booth in Europe in 2010 was 36 m^2, according to UFI. If there are no restrictions and we are free to choose, as a rule of thumb our booth should reflect the economic size of our company and our aspirations. Another answer is to say that it should be large enough to enable us and our staff to fulfil our marketing objectives. So we need to ask ourselves what we will be doing in our booth? How many visitors do we expect at a time?

You do not need a *mega-booth* for your products to be noticed, even if you are a multinational; but on the other hand it is somewhat expected. There is a great deal of psychology about this. If your booth is smaller and less expensive this year than last year, some industry experts and people of influence may infer that your company is facing difficulties. "Ah, so they have a smaller booth this year, well that is interesting . . ." If you have a marvellous booth 1 year, visitors will remember that. If your booth is less spectacular, less inventive or creative or what have you, in the following year, then some people will notice and comment on that – probably the experts, the people of influence, those writing for trade magazines. They will say "Yes, they had a great booth 3 years ago, I don't know what happened after that", and some of these reflections will end up in print, but in another tone. Thus, to demonstrate that you are doing well it is often thought wise to make each new booth somewhat bigger or better, or at least no smaller than last year's – but not too different, either, because that will only create greater expectations in future. It is a little like when people buy new sailing boats. There is something called the three-foot disease among enthusiasts: many of them want a boat that is 3 ft longer than the old one. There is a certain parallel in the logic of trade shows, though I cannot tell you just how many square feet or how much larger the budget would need to be. There is no research demonstrating a specific relationship between booth size and number of visitors, but people tend to gather around the larger booths, as they become landmarks in the exhibition halls. Surveys have tended to confirm this (Table 2.6).

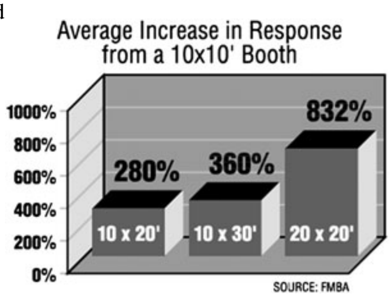
Thus, according to a survey in the *Trade Show Marketing Manual* (2006), a 200 sq. ft (18.5 m^2) space will average 280 % more responses than a 100 sq. ft space, and a 300 sq. ft space will average 360 % more responses than a 100 sq. ft (9.3 m^2) space. By the same token, a 400 sq. ft (37 m^2) space will average 832 % more responses than a 100 sq. ft space.

To exploit the ability of a large booth to function as a landmark, it is important to build it as high as possible also (within the limits set by the show organizers), so as to be clearly visible from a distance. Larger booths tend to offer more entertainment too, since they can afford the space, and that again draws more people. In general larger booths give greater opportunities to use colour and design, and these things again make a booth better remembered by visitors.

Once we have determined the floorspace area and the heights, we should staff the booth with enough people to cover all parts of it. Some prefer as a rule of thumb to assign 1 person per 9 m^2, depending how many products and obstacles you have in the booth. Others work on a basis of 5 m^2 per staff member. With 1 person per 9 m^2, if each person covers a reach of 3 m in any direction then that will be enough to meet visitors over the entire area of the booth.

In our pre-show training we ought to have the staff practise moving around within 9-m^2 patches, without intruding on one another's patches unless a customer's demands require that. This exercise may feel a bit odd at first – like a

Table 2.6 Increase in response with different sized booths[7]



stiff, robot-like game – but it is well worth undertaking. It helps us learn how to move around in relation to one another. It teaches us to cover all open spots and to co-ordinate movements. Have one set of people play staff and another set take the role of visitors. The visitors should stand in difficult locations in the booth, such as close to other visitors, so that the staff member will need to move them to one side without disrupting the conversation. If you are spread out at fixed stations, perhaps represented by tall round standing tables, then you could simply say "Let me show you an example over here" and the problem might be solved.

Many of the tips and advice given here really depend on just how much effort you want to put into the trade show. For some, it will be enough to lay out a basic plan, show up, and hope that all goes well. You might also use the tips in this book to guide a series of small incremental developments year by year. You do not need to undertake everything at once. You may also have other well-founded ideas about what works best for you. In many situations there will be more than one correct answer.

Being more professional does not mean being more mechanical, stiffer or more robot-like. But that often is the first result of implementing too many rules and regulations at a single time. We should never forget to be fellow human beings. We ought to know the basics of the trade-show profession sufficiently well to stop having to think about all the plans and rules and to focus rather on the people we are meeting. But that often means learning the basics well enough before we can concentrate on other issues. Research shows that the best salespeople are those who can show most empathy – real empathy, not the fake version of a stiff smile, which is so often the outcome of too much pressure. To have that confidence means that we not only need to have basic trade-show knowledge, but also need to have resolved our own personal problems so as to be able to give the other person our full attention. Full attention does not mean that we are looking the other person in the face the whole time – that is often perceived as too aggressive, especially in many Asian cultures – but it does mean that we listen to everything he says, and that we

[7] *Trade Show Marketing Manual*, 2006, MFV Expositions.

react quickly when there are matters that need to be clarified. Empathy in conversations means that we follow and try to tune our emotions to what is being said, feeling what the other person is feeling. It is not, of course, the same as flirting, which can be rather dangerous at trade shows. Flirting not only risks taking your mind off what you are supposed to be doing at the show, but also wastes too much of your time and distorts your judgments about visitors' intentions. If you happen to meet the love of your life at a trade show, ask him to phone you when you get home. He will understand. If he does not, then you will have avoided wasting time.

Remember that your staff need a break every 3–4 h to function effectively. Without it they will under-perform, no matter how much training they have received.

Minicase 3: Excellent Boothmanship

Company: Case DirecTV, USA
Trade show: CES, South Hall

DirecTV offers a direct broadcast satellite (DBS) service. The company, controlled by Liberty Media, reports that it has 20 million subscribers in 2011. Its major competitors are dish and cable providers.

The booth was well thought out and designed in white. The main entrance was formed as a thick white arch which visitors could walk under. Products were well placed, and well spread out over the entire booth area, with a clear separation between different products. Information was placed in large letters high up on the wall for all to see. The company made excellent use of the height with square white cubes hanging from the ceiling. These hanging cubes matched the square cubes that weary visitors could sit on. The company had also provided comfortable areas for groups to sit together, these also in a squared white design.

The exhibitor staff were evenly spread out across the booth area, and all were busy talking to visitors. Exhibitor staff never got near to one another, other than at the counter. The company showed some of the best boothmanship at the trade show. It all looked so simple, but everyone who works on this knows that it takes a great deal of planning. There are very few companies who succeed at this level.

On the downside, white carpets easily become dirty. A different floor covering would have been better. Besides, it is questionable whether the choice of white makes a suitable association for television. For many visitors it will be associated with the pharmaceutical industry and with laboratories, not consumer electronics. The feeling was rather like walking into a dentist's office.

Conclusion: Effective use of resources by this company, a well-prepared staff: score 8 out of 10.

Professional staff is key. If you can afford it, have two teams, one on and one off the set. The *off-set team* can be used to carry out a number of crucial tasks, as well as eating and resting; their assignments can include:

1. Exhibition intelligence
2. Market surveys
3. Attending talks

We have more on exhibition intelligence towards the end of this book. Market surveys, or marketing research, is a topic well covered in other literature, but we shall say a few words here nevertheless.

Many conferences at trade shows leave a great deal to be desired. For example, it can often look as though a show has been organized just because it is expected of the companies to be there. Speakers are often poorly selected and poorly remunerated, two factors which no doubt are linked. It is rather like the case of trade-show food. Because this is not the main attraction at a trade show, the quality tends to be a secondary consideration. It should not have to be that way, but that is how it goes. Having said that, there are usually some talks that are worth attending at any show. Pick them out, have at least one person attend, and make sure that the others are briefed about the content of the conference or the convention.

In the box below we explain the difference between conferences and conventions.

Special Topic 1: Marketing of Conferences and Conventions

► We talk about a *conference* when the focus of the *event* is on the talks and the speakers. Exhibitions and trade shows sometimes overlap with *conferences* and *conventions* as forms of events. Conferences are normally of two kinds, or a combination of two kinds: they are either *academic* or *professional*. Academic conferences are normally peer-reviewed, meaning that participants have submitted a scientific paper and had it accepted before attending. These papers can be anything from *full-length scientific papers* to *poster papers*, which are more like sketches of papers covering a few pages.

Professional conferences are normally without any commitment on the part of participants, after they have paid their fees for attending. Both conferences and conventions are places where we listen to experts and mingle. A *convention* may not be all that different from a conference in reality. However, they are often intended for a particular profession, and admission to them is often free but by invitation only, for delegates; they will be organized by a common-interest organization. Examples are a *medical convention* and a *political convention*, for a particular party. Nowadays there are also *fan conventions*, bringing together people with the same hobbies. Examples are *science fiction conventions* and *gaming conventions*. These normally cost money to attend and are designed more as social events for people sharing the same interests.

The marketing of conferences and conventions is quite different from the marketing of exhibitions, and indeed there are differences between conference marketing and convention marketing. Accordingly this topic merits a separate book, under its own title, as another aspect of *event marketing*. Our decision to say a few words here is based simply on the fact that trade shows often have a conference component built in.

The key to the marketing of international professional conferences today, what we call *key success factors* (KSF), can be summed up as follows:

1. Inviting well-known speakers. The speakers are the main attraction. Speakers from well-known companies or speakers who have written successful books are preferred. To attract them you will either have to pay handsomely, or convince them that the conference will attract a large crowd so that they will sell more books or other services through you.
2. Well-targeted marketing to company employees. For example, if it is a marketing conference we want to contact staff in marketing departments and top management interested in marketing.
3. Holding the meeting in an attractive location. People go to conferences when they are held in attractive towns or resorts. The idea is often that family and even friends can come along. Sometimes companies will even cover their expenses. Frequently-used places in Europe include, in the case of France for example, Cannes, Nice, and Deauville.

KSFs for marketing of international academic conferences are somewhat different:

1. Organizers need scientific credibility to attract visitors, meaning that they need to be established and recognized in their field.
2. Visitors need a minimum of 3–6 months' notice, to plan for articles/research and financing.
3. The conference should be held in an attractive location, because academics too like to use these occasions to take a few days off for sightseeing. For the same reason, it can be a good idea to time the conference immediately before or after a weekend.
4. The conference needs to be able to attract major researchers in the field. There is often a sort of "wait and see who comes first" attitude at conferences. Consequently the bulk of attendees often register for the conference at the last moment. For the same reason it may be a good idea to have *early bird prices*, that is discounts during an initial period long before the date for the start of the conference.

There are a number of ways for booth staff to attend conferences during a trade show. The person designated to go to the conference can take notes and present a summary to the rest of the staff: this will be a few pages only – title, speaker's name, and the main points and arguments. Perhaps also a short critique of what was said, for others to respond to and to be used as a background for further discussion. Such discussions can be held later in the evening or after we come home, as part of the follow-up process. You might also want to consider printing the critique in a company newsletter, for your customers and potential customers to read.

Newsletters can be a stroke of marketing genius for companies. Instead of pushing products and too much information about your own company, in a newsletter you have a chance to cover a broader range of topics, to show that you are on top of what is happening in your industry. This can potentially give your company much credibility if it is done right, that is if you are able to select truly interesting stories and can write well and to the point. With today's internet technology you can even publish the story soon after the presentation is given, noting down your ideas on a laptop or electronic notebook as you listen in. If you are allowed to record the whole conference on audio tape, the chances are that more people will hear the content. Podcasts are still popular. If you can get permission to film the event, then even better.

Summaries from conferences can also be e-mailed to potential readers after the trade show is over for the day (together with all the other things you have to do before you can go to bed). Mentioning a talk by a well-respected specialist during a conversation with booth visitors will produce a professional and informed impression when done correctly. "I see you are interested in distance learning tools, did you by any chance get to hear the presentation by *N* yesterday in conference room *XYZ*? No? Well, there will be another chance to hear him tonight at *PQR*, or you can visit our website and download a summary". Trade shows, ultimately, are largely about confidence and trust, and trust is largely about information and communication. Showing that you know what is going on among experts is another great opportunity to demonstrate to visitors and to the world that you are well-informed, that you are up to date in what you are doing and can be a source of useful information. All employees know their own company, far fewer know what is going on in their industry more widely.

Filling the timetables of your staff with various activities which are not all about being at the company booth is seen by the staff concerned as a positive thing, a chance to break free and enjoy a change of pace. Often it will not even be seen as work at all. When well orchestrated, it will sometimes be seen as fun, enriching the trade-show experience and making booth staff better prepared to meet visitors during the day. These are opportunities to build the company's *knowledge management abilities*.

One reason why staff often find trade shows boring is because they have nothing to do during their free time. Another is that there are no visitors to their booth. The latter is normally more annoying than having too much to do. What companies should realize is that dead time is a *knowledge opportunity*. The problem is that these ideas will seldom come from the booth staff themselves. They are opportunities which need to be recognized by top management and planned by middle management. The company should set up an *exhibition schedule* assigning each staff member specific tasks for the entire period of the show, making the experience less dull for staff and more effective for the company.

This does not mean that everyone should be running around outside the booth whenever there are no visitors to it. Sometimes, doing nothing is the best behaviour in the booth, since it invites people to come in and talk to us. It makes us look available. If booth staff are engaged in various other activities or there is no one there to talk to, passers-by will not walk into our booth. They will think we are too busy with other things to answer their questions, and at worst they will see us as unprofessional. It is worth bearing in mind that trade shows are also a place where one can unintentionally create *bad publicity*. That is, it is quite possible for a company to generate more negative than *positive publicity*. In such a case, it would have been better not to have attended at all, but of course that is difficult to foresee in advance. No one plans their own bad publicity. There are some decisions to be made, though. At a certain point in the post-show planning phase, we have to ask ourselves whether we are well enough organized to carry off all the activities. If not, we should consider lowering our sights, perhaps cutting back on some activities, maybe even planning to leave it a while before we are ready to take part in another show.

There are seldom any opportunities to repair things that have broken in the booth during the day, because we will be too busy meeting people, unless the repair is absolutely vital for other and more important activities we have planned. Whatever repair is needed, say laying down more cables to set up extra lighting, or changing wording on the wall of the booth, we should see to it before the show opens or after it closes for the day. Anything else would look unprepared. At every show there will be some booths where alterations or construction are being undertaken during opening hours, and where exhibitors begin by excusing themselves for all the mess. Make sure you do not belong to that group.

Being prepared to talk to visitors means being ready both physically and mentally. You are *physically ready* by standing facing them in a place where they can see you and where they can walk up to you. You are *mentally ready* by showing that you want to talk to them. Moreover, the readiness will often show in your facial expression. As human beings we are specialists in reading people's faces, even though we are not usually conscious of the fact. In consequence, we also disclose much more information about ourselves and what we are thinking than we would sometimes like. This is part of what it means to be human. As we stand facing each other we are delivering ourselves to the other person, communicating before we even get an opportunity to speak.

When we need to talk to a colleague in the booth, we should be discreet about it. If your need to contact a fellow staff member arises from a visitor's question, say to the visitor that you should both go over and ask your colleague. Don't leave your visitor alone or turn your back on him or her. Use the opportunity to introduce the visitor to your colleague formally. "This is Mr So-and-so, he is *PQR* for the *ABC* company and he has some questions about *X*". When done correctly, this verbal interaction can introduce into the relationship some much-needed participation and confidence. What we are doing is raising the degree of commitment in a professional way, by being polite and a little formal. It is not about being excessively courteous, but simply polite. Situations should not feel awkward, but should reflect normal behaviour.

At international trade shows Westerners, in general, should bear in mind that Asians are often more polite in their behaviour, and accordingly they also expect to be treated in a more polite way. When dealing with people of different nationalities, you are therefore recommended to set the standard of politeness and respect not at the lowest common denominator, or at your own norm, but at the higher level of the culture you are in.

If you get a question from a colleague, consider using a notepad instead of talking, if that risks disturbing visitors. Write your questions on a slip of paper or an electronic device and leave it by the counter. For each question, write "From staff member *X* to *Y* at time T1", and then the question. When *Y* comes past, he can write his reply and the time T2. This enables questions to be sorted out in a discreet way without visitors being aware. Bear in mind that texting – grabbing the phone and staring at it at all times – gives the impression that you are busy and unreachable for visitors. Thus the mobile phone, too, should be used very discreetly. The notepad at the desk is not somewhere to spend your time head down for long periods either (think of the irritating experiences you will doubtless have had at hotel reception desks), but rather something for staff to check at regular intervals while coming and going. Don't use the front desk as a place to hang out, where you gaze towards the horizon looking for customers. With respect to inviting visitors in, the desk is a barrier between you. You should only go to the desk when you need to, as a place to demonstrate products, exchange certain kinds of information, or check messages.

Apart from that, there is no strong need for a reception desk at a trade-show booth. Dialogues with visitors more usually nowadays happen face-to-face with nothing in between, either standing in a free area or, if need be, sitting down. In certain cases we may need some kind of station we can take the visitors to, say to look something up on a computer screen. But the station should not be used as a place where we wait to initiate conversations with visitors, let alone a place to hang around or lean on wearily. If we are acting as we should, our movements in the booth support the dynamic of our company, reflecting who we are as people: open, keen, and professional.

Some remarks on *voice volume control*: speak clearly so that the visitor can hear and follow what you are saying, but not so loud that you drown your colleagues' voices. Practice voice volume control during the pre-show training. Have all staff engage in separate conversations simultaneously. Add noise to the exercise using a radio or suchlike, so as to simulate some of the noise which will really be occurring at the show. Walk around and measure the volume at different points in the booth. Can everyone communicate comfortably? What can be done to reduce noise, in terms of where we stand, but also of the way we construct our stands? You will be amazed how basic problems at trade shows can be. Once they have arisen, there is often little we can do about them.

If someone will be using a microphone as a part of a special presentation, that demands extra and special care. If you can discover what kind of booth set-up your neighbour has, that will be helpful. Are they using microphones? Some booths will play loud music even though it is prohibited. You should immediately make a complaint to the exhibition organizers if you suspect or notice this. If music is allowed, a rock group next to your own booth can wreck your whole exhibit, rendering any kind of conversation impossible. In the worst case this can even fill your booth with non-buying music fans. (Yes, that does happen.) If you use microphones yourself, try to design your booth so that the sound is confined within a limited area, or hire an additional facility at another location.

In addition to good music, good-looking staff, male or female, are another way to attract attention at trade shows. Unfortunately trade shows tend to attract more men than women, though this trend has been shifting over the last 20 years. Male dominance can make the environment a bit too one-sided at times, especially at the more technically-oriented fairs. Because trade shows are seen as a male-dominated environment, exhibitors have always been tempted to bring in so-called *booth babes*: women who attract attention primarily because of their good looks. To be even-handed, we could also talk about male *booth gigolos*. Many disapprove of the idea of choosing booth staff for their looks. Where it continues to be done, that is because it often works, meaning that it does attract more people to your booth. However, whether it attracts the right kind of people is another question. That should be a concern for staff managers. It may very well be that the wrong type of visitors are attracted, those who are not interested in our products but merely in meeting someone of the opposite sex, and who can carry on a conversation simulating interest in our products for half an hour just to fit in. There is also a cultural dimension to consider. Some cultures, especially in the Middle East, will be sensitive about booth staff showing too much flesh. That is often seen as inappropriate in the Scandinavian countries too, even at consumer shows, but for political reasons. Half-naked women in trade-show booths are, to many people, a symbol of the inferior value of the female sex. For others it is a matter of social class. In the worst case you might even find a demonstration mounted outside your booth. In Eastern European countries they tend to overdo the use of booth babes at trade shows, which may have something to do with Cold War suppression, economic difficulties, or institutional weaknesses. In Germany it is seen as a less serious matter. In the USA it should be done with tact, but is still a popular gimmick.

It also depends on the particular industry. Motor shows have always featured booth babes and this is still more or less expected for certain types of motor show, while in technically-oriented industries it is a more sensitive issue. In general, we can say that it is much more common in the B2C than in the B2B context.

So, before you run out and pick a bunch of good-looking staff for your booth, consider some of the counter-arguments:

- It may draw attention away from your products
- It may fill your booth with non-buyers, or lead to overcrowding
- It may be offensive to some potential buyers, particularly women buyers
- If you overdo it, it may make your company look less serious

Booth babes tend not to know much about the products and the company, as they have been recruited on other criteria. If asked a question by a visitor they may not be able to give an appropriate answer. If you are going to use booth babes (or gigolos) at all, it should be a question of how you use them. To station a handsome man or a beautiful woman at the entrance to the booth is better than putting him or her on the inside. At the entrance he or she can serve as a come-on, as a way to draw the attention of passers-by to your booth. They can also be used to distribute information or draw attention in the aisles. As the minicase shows, there are even creative ways to use booth babes, even though I do not approve of the term personally. “Models” is probably a better term, also because it is sex-neutral.

Minicase 4: Booth Babes Used with a Twist of Humour

Company: Boynq, The Netherlands
Trade Show: CES, Central Hall

Boynq is a designer of USB gadgets and USB toys, such as travel speakers and stereo iPod speakers with integrated docking stations. The distinctive Boynq design can be described as a clean techno look featuring a narrow orange horizontal. It is this narrow orange line which makes these products immediately recognizable.

The booth at the CES was elegantly integrated with their product design. At the entrance of the booth the company had placed a booth babe, dressed in a white dress, with a shocking orange hair tint. The orange hair colour created a playful association with the company's design. The company succeeded in twisting the typical bimbo association, making it look funny and joky instead. This would probably also have worked with a good-looking male.

The design of the booth as a whole was oval in shape, with counters all along the sides to display the products clearly. It was a pity that the overall size of the booth was small; that made it practically impossible to pass anyone once inside. The claustrophobic feeling made you want to leave the booth sooner than you might have liked, given the interesting miniature products there were to look at.

Conclusion: an effective use of resources by this company, a well-executed design planned down to the smallest details, booth babes mixed with humour, score 7 out of 10.

2.3 The External Co-worker: Exhibitor-Appointed Contractors (EAC)

Exhibitor-appointed contractors (EAC) must in most case be approved by show management. *Co-workers* are here defined as anyone contracted to come in and work on your exhibition for a limited period. The period in question may stretch over the whole duration of the show, and may go beyond that. For example, *booth furniture suppliers* may be consulted on an ongoing basis during the pre-show planning phase.

External co-workers can help with any of various tasks you have outsourced; they may include booth designers, booth builders, hauliers, the person you hire booth furniture from, or the person who comes to clean your carpets once you are finished. In some cases, all these tasks are performed by one company. In other cases, you may want to split them up. Normally, the larger your booth set the more external co-workers you will need to include in your trade-show plan. Hotel personnel, and any activities arranged through the hotel, do not normally count as

EACs since they are not attached directly to the exhibition and are not affected by exhibition rules and regulations. Likewise, the person from whom you buy air tickets is also not included under this heading. Instead we may consider these as *exhibition-related services outsourced*.

Make sure you know all the individuals who are going to be involved in your trade show, preferably face to face. If possible, let everyone meet, so as to see if they can work together happily and to make sure that each individual knows what is required of him or her in relation to everyone else. Once out there you need to work as a team, as a single organism. For most exhibitions, this will feel like a luxury given the limited time available for planning the event, but normally it is well worth while. You may think that you have a good relationship with a carpenter who has agreed to come and install an extra wall for your booth, whether it is wooden or a simple "pipe and drape" (tubing draped with fabric). In reality, he may have made a dozen similar agreements with your competitors, and you may not be the preferred customer when time runs short. If you can, invite them all out for an evening, including the external co-workers. That raises the level of commitment and involvement in the team. Staff and co-workers will see that they are part of a larger effort and feel contractually bound to succeed as a team.

The exhibition or *floor manager* not only has to co-ordinate his own booth staff, but is also in charge of a number of people who perform support roles. You may have the world's best booth staff, but that will not make your computers or lighting work when you encounter a problem about electric supply. Delivering electricity to your booth is the responsibility of the exhibition organizers, but distributing it among your electrical devices and making them all work when they should is your own responsibility. Exhibition staff are often not suitably qualified or prepared to deal with electrical problems. And with other kinds of problem it may be that any small repair will require a carpenter.

You may also need to engage an external co-worker for your transport needs once at the show. Getting to and from airports, hotels, restaurants, and between trade shows at different sites in a town can be a nightmare. Often the nearby car parks will be full, taxis difficult to obtain, and buses overcrowded. You do not have time to queue. Few things are more demoralizing than finding yourself stuck in a traffic jam and watching a clock as time slips past, without being able to do anything to solve the problem. Sometimes you will even see people leaving their taxis and running the last mile. So, try to work out in advance what your transport needs will be. If you comprise a team including guests and so forth, you may want to hire a dedicated driver for the duration of the trade show. If a good customer or a person of influence needs a ride, offer him your services for free. That is guaranteed to give you real brownie points. Your customers will often feel that knowing the trade show means that you know your industry, despite the fact that the one thing does not in fact entail the other.

As travel costs are often the second largest category of costs for a company at a trade show, many companies will try to develop a good relationship with a *travel agency* or similar consultant. Internet technology makes it easier for exhibitors to find prices by themselves, but it can still be worthwhile to hire expertise in this area, especially when travel becomes more complex, including many overnight stays for many people in many locations over a year. Changing rooms and unbooking flights is often seen as a hassle, better left to those who have the patience to do it efficiently. Ultimately this will often be a matter of the level of the agent's fees.

Few things bring more delight to a trade show or an evening reception than a flower arrangement. Flowers are also a good thing to give away, and should be considered along with other giveaways, for example as gifts for special customers. So you might want to make contact well in advance with a *florist* as part of the show arrangements, unless this service is offered by others, such as the hotel. Depending on the size of the trade show and the host city, florists will often be the first services to be fully booked in the run-up to a show. So we need to make contact early.

Sometimes flowers are that final human touch which your booth lacks. Ask yourself which would you rather have: a pen with a logo on it, or a flower with a small company card attached? Admittedly, a flower is difficult to carry around, but it is hard to refuse and throw away. In general we might say that the value of flowers is underestimated at trade shows, and indeed in marketing generally, possibly because the idea is just too simple.

Above all, make sure that you understand exactly where the organizer's responsibility ends and yours begin. Only then will you start to get a true perspective on your overall responsibilities at the trade show.

2.4 The Co-exhibitors

Co-exhibitors may be divided into (i) *direct competitors*, (ii) *indirect competitors*, and (iii) *non-competitors*. Of these, we are most interested in our direct competitors. That is not to say that non-competitors are uninteresting. On the contrary, it may be easier for us to go and spend time at a non-competing booth, especially with a show or industry where most people know one another.

There are not only the products to consider at the show. We can learn a lot from an exhibitor's booth design and booth behaviour. We may pick up an idea for a way to run an event with a speaker, or for how to construct a booth using the third dimension (i.e. height – very often neglected). Somewhere else, we might come across an interesting promotional gadget or giveaway, or we will see clothing which we think looks particularly suitable for the event and which we would like to copy or borrow. Larger booths always have something useful to contribute to our fund of experience. If nothing else, when a booth we visit seems poorly executed, we might learn how to avoid wasting money. In short, trade shows are full of lessons like these, for anyone curious enough to make notes.

Indirect competitors are often easier to make contact with than direct competitors. Many of the same advantages apply here with respect to lessons we can learn. And who is to say that it is not possible to have a close relationship with one's direct competitors? It very much depends on what industry and culture we are in. In the B2B domain, there are often very close relationships between competitors, especially in markets with only a few major players. For instance, in the pharmaceutical industry it is not only common to know the competitor well, many of one's employees will have worked there too. Quite often the companies will even know about one another's research programmes. Thus there is already a shared experience and understanding of the business. In consequence, many booth staff will go to meet ex-colleagues in other booths. In an industry with a few big players, you do not want to play too ruthlessly, simply because if you do it will eventually backfire on you. Your employees will talk when they go to work for your competitor. Better, then, to go about competing in a fair and professional manner. Your competitors will know about it and respect you for it.

Always bring a small notepad with you when you walk round the fair site, like one of those authors used to bring with them when they travelled in to deserted places before, made of moleskin. Or, if you are quick on the keyboard, use a smartphone. Whenever you see something good or bad, make a note of it, turn it into a lesson. Get your staff to do the same. Or better, do a SWOT analysis: make a note of opportunities and threats too. Then, after the trade show is over and you are gathering ideas for next year's show, discuss your findings with colleagues. Or, discuss them over a lunch or at a dinner with your co-exhibitors and with people of influence you know at the trade show. What could have been done differently? "Did you see the . . ..?" "What if we did something like. . .?" Little things can make a difference.

By now there may be one or two readers who feel that all this planning is getting a bit too heavy-handed. Well, is that really so? If you take into account the share of marketing expenses devoted to trade shows, in most cases the answer will be that it isn't so. On the whole the opposite is true: companies do not take trade shows seriously enough. We are walking round the show anyway, so we might as well take notes about things we see that could help improve our performance.

All of this is fairly simple and straightforward. There are no elaborate theories in this profession, but a 1,000 experiences and an ever-changing environment. What is it then that makes trade shows so difficult, leading many companies to underperform or to downright fail? The short answer is that we are happy to do a certain amount of planning, but we don't like spending as much time on planning as trade shows require nowadays. We don't enjoy training to that extent, either. Companies and managers talk a great deal about strategy and planning, but actually doing it, and doing it for weeks on end, is something quite different. That is what makes trade shows difficult.

Much of it is not rocket science either; sometimes the solution can be simple almost to the point of banality. One company was worried about the low numbers of visitors they were receiving in their booth. Then one of them noticed how a competitor had placed a bowl of sweets close to their entrance. The sweets seemed to attract a large number of visitors, and once they were there they also checked out the products. Perhaps that was merely to justify having taken a sweet, and perhaps they were not serious potential customers at all, but then again who knows. In markets where products are very similar, little things can make a big difference. We are not always as rational as we suppose.

There are a number of things to learn from experienced co-exhibitors. Observing them and listening to them is always worthwhile. The very fact that they are there and have not gone bankrupt speaks for itself. Don't treat your competition as enemies; they are also potential partners. Above all, they too are sources of experience. Just as we gather experience about our own performance and try to learn from it, so we can also gather others' experience.

2.5 The Visitors or Attendees

The term "visitor" is a misleading one, since all those who attend an exhibition are visitors by definition. In terms of motives there are (i) *buyers*, (ii) *potential buyers*, and (iii) *people of influence*. People of influence can be media or university or educational staff. There can also be (iv) *non-buying public*, who go to some (consumer) exhibitions more as a form of entertainment, just because they happen to live not too far away or because they think trade shows are fun, which they often are. As an example, many Milanese visit the fairground (Fiera) in the spirit of a Sunday outing.

We can also categorize visitors according to psychological type. Thus, visitors may be divided into (Table 2.7):[8]

The people who come to our booth will be very diverse. Most of us are unsure about how to act when we encounter behaviour that we are not familiar with or which is unexpected. The golden rule is to approach visitors with the same behaviour that we see. That way, we make it easier for us and them to connect. If they are shy, then we will be shy. If they are eager, then we should be eager. Otherwise we risk scaring them away. This *theory of reciprocity* has been observed in nature and in human behaviour, e.g. by Robert Axelrod. It is also a winning strategy in business and shows just to what extent evolutionary theory and biology is the better paradigm for the study of economics and management, not physics.[9]

The exception is aggressive visitors. You will of course not be aggressive in return, but you are allowed to be short in your remarks, and find a way to end the conversation quickly. There is another golden rule and that is to be yourself: that is, you should not put up too much of an act. Doing that, you just risk looking fake. Sincere, natural reactions and conversation have tremendous value in their own right; they promote sympathy and create empathy. Likewise, most of us can be shy or eager, without losing our true self. It is difficult to get away with putting on an act, and it will make us feel out of place. As human beings, we are good at knowing when someone is for real and when not. When we meet people we like personally, we tend to want to do business with them, perhaps believing subconsciously that we

[8] Modified version of Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) (2003). The role and value of face-to-face interaction, Chicago, Ill.: CEIR. CEIR has now merged with the International Association of Exhibition Management; see http://www.iaem.org/

[9] For a longer explanation of the evolutionary approach to the study of economics and management, see my previous book entitled "geoeconomics", available for free on the internet, cf. Solberg Søilen (2012).

Table 2.7 Psychological profiles of visitors

Type	Behaviour	Exhibitor response
Enthusiastic	Truly interested in the products; come into the booth eagerly and expectantly	Engage directly in communication
Curious	Stay on the edge of the carpet, but appear interested	Make room for them to enter the booth
Passive	Aisle walkers, stop and look	A friendly professional greeting/smile

will also be helping them. Some biologists would say that we want to help people who resemble us, because they remind us of ourselves so that we think we are helping our own kind; but that is a topic too deep to delve further into here. Let's just say that there are many theories from the evolutionary sciences which can be applied to economic life.[10]

What makes a good salesperson? As already said, empathy is key. Some years ago I observed a number of car salesmen. I found that the individuals who sold most were those who showed that they truly liked the customers. Research shows that the most successful salespeople are those who are also excellent negotiators and knowledgeable about their company's products and various offers. In sum, the most successful salespeople are those who are patient, caring, responsive, good listeners, and honest. This is often quite opposite to the salespeople we encounter on the phone today, or in the streets. Most of them seem to belong to the school of push marketing. Push marketing may have been a good strategy when products were new, advertising related to established products, and demand was seemingly endless. This is not the case any longer. Instead we have gone back to basics now when it comes to selling, at least in the Western world. Possibly in another generation it will be different again. People today have experienced or are experiencing an economic crisis. Such periods tend to change people, making them more sceptical, but also humbler. Hence, now, you have to try to make a sale by building trust. Customers are not so easily fooled. They have seen most of the tricks. (And that is probably a good thing.)

Salespeople are motivated by three basic factors: the *organizational climate*, the *setting of sales quotas*, and *incentives*. The problem for salespeoples' effectiveness is that they spend too much time not selling. The biggest thieves of selling time are the general downtime in between activities and travels, and administrative time. Unfortunately, trade shows are associated with both of these. But trade shows must be seen and assessed as moments of extraordinary sales activity. They cannot be evaluated on the same basis as ordinary sales activities in one's home territory. The atmosphere is extraordinary, the setting of sales quotas bears no comparison with

[10] In fact, many economists think nowadays that it was a mistake for the study of economics to part company with evolutionary science and biology after the Second World War in order to follow the model of physics (equilibrium theories, neoclassical economics, the marginalist school), but a new superpower was demanding a new social-science paradigm. (Please bear with my digressions!)

other non-trade show activities, and incentives do not really play any role in a normal sense since one is selling more as a team. To have staff compete for sales while participating in a trade show is usually a sign of collective and organizational failure. Companies can and should set norms, but it is best to make results from other trade shows the basis for comparison.

Much of salespeople's time is spent making sure customers and potential customers are enjoying themselves. That is particularly true of B2B shows. Many companies will have a special VIP lounge or room for this purpose at a trade show. The VIP customer is given everything from a hotel reservation, transport, surprise giveaways, access to social events, to a special reception at the show by the CEO or other executives. Some companies give VIP customers special treatment because they believe it will make other categories of customers aspire to the same status, when they see what they could be having. However, there is no research to confirm this; rather the contrary. It may be that other customers, or indeed even the VIPs themselves, will feel that it is all a bit over the top sometimes, that the gifts are undeserved and hence receiving them is uncomfortable. Most people prefer sincerity over a hyped circus. Gifts are fine, but they should be carefully calibrated to the value of the individual customer, so that both buyers and sellers are left with a feeling of fairness.

Furthermore, we do not engage in conversations for the fun of it, but rather in order to gather data and make decisions accordingly. We want to find out why the visitor is there, what her needs are, and then work out whether the person is a potential customer and a decision-maker. In other words, is the visitor (i) a *decision-maker*, (ii) a *person of influence*, (iii) a *specifier* (someone who brings home information, most often technical data, with a view to drafting specs), or (iv) an *initiator*?

To find these things out, we need to take time at the outset to listen, rather than talking ourselves. It is amazing how difficult this can be, but it must nevertheless be attempted. It is probably difficult because we never really learn to do it. Instead we learn to talk. When we can answer the question above by placing the visitor in the correct category, we should return the ball, so to speak, into the visitor's court: "How would you like us to proceed with this?", "What do you want me to do?", "Where do we go from here?"

If a customer needs a lot of time and traffic to the booth is high, timetable a meeting. Most exhibitions today offer conference rooms as an additional service; use them if necessary.

Above all, remember to get all sales representatives at your booth to write their names on name tags in large clear letters. You must have seen the visitor who peers at your tag, trying to work out what it says. And one doesn't want to ask a person one is talking to come closer so that one can read his or her name. It feels a bit silly to have to ask for the name when there is a tag there. All this risks making the visitor feel foolish before the conversation has even begun. These are unnecessary confusions, which only get in the way of communication.

High admission fees at trade shows tend to improve the quality of visitors to the exhibition. If you are just going to look round without buying anything, you are not likely to pay a high entrance fee. If you are going to buy something, the entrance fee is seen as an investment. You then typically think that you will save the entrance fee and more by attending. Psychologically, the entrance fee should not be so high that you risk scaring potential customers away. In that case the admission-fee strategy is counterproductive. On the other hand, you do not want to set it so low that the exhibitions are crowded with *trade-show tourists*.

Analysts, journalists, and people of influence are a specially demanding type of visitor. In their minds they want there to be a clear reason for meeting. When talking to them, booth staff must be frank. If they have something new, then that is good, they should demonstrate it and be up front about it. But if not, then they should be up front about that too. Don't pretend you have a new product if you have just added a few extra buttons to a gadget; they will know this, and they will say so. If you irritate a journalist, receiving no publicity is the best outcome you can hope for. Unfortunately, that is seldom an option on the menu. If you feel that your meeting with the journalist went badly, ask him what his deadline is and try to book a second visit to see if you can convince him to write a different story. Be better prepared on the second visit.

Trade shows provide an excellent opportunity to test new products out on a critical segment of your market. A product which is a success at trade shows often turn into a success in the ordinary market. When done properly the show will function as the big boost that sets the ball rolling, that gets the product off the ground. Consequently we can also say that a trade show may serve as an *indicator of future sales*. It can also be a great opportunity to test out different colour-schemes and new designs. If visitors do not like them, perhaps it is not too late to change some features. Potentially this might give the company a chance to correct any mismatches between the new products and the preferences of potential customers. (In most cases, though, especially with physical objects, it will be too late for that year.)

When I worked for the Twentieth Century Fox marketing department in Beverly Hills as a student intern, I spent most of my time at cinemas in the Greater Los Angeles area listening to people's comments during trailers. If the audience did not like a product, there was time to change parts of it before the film was eventually launched. The logic was much the same as when other companies make prototypes and test them on potential customers. When a film is ready to be launched, this is sometimes done in connection with film festivals or similar events, i.e. as a part of a glamorous party. For most products, trade shows can be the equivalent of those glamorous parties. Once you have shown your product here, there is no turning back. You will be observed by the world and publicized. This is make or break time.

Analysts, journalists, and people of influence see themselves as almost a cut above trade-show activities and the other participants. As a company you need to recognize this and play along. Try to offer them something special, let them in on some secrets; tell them something that may be of value to them. Analysts are looking for more facts and data, journalists are looking for stories, and people of influence are looking for an opportunity to take up some of your time. For analysts and journalists you can tailor-make bespoke kits. For people of influence you can arrange an after-hours invitation where they can be given some of your time in private.

There is a third way to categorize your visitors, namely according to the generation to which they belong. Identifying the generation to which our customers belong is an important aspect of our work with respect to market segmentation. Each new generation grows up with a different range of technology and slightly different values. As companies we need to understand this, and adapt our marketing accordingly. In marketing theory we can see this as another aspect of *market segmentation*. Right now a new generation is appearing as customers at trade shows, named *generation Z* (born in the 1990s). Then there is *generation Y* (born between 1981 and 1989, but sometimes also including those born in the 1990s and later). It sometimes includes and overlaps with the *MTV generation* (1975–1985) and the *internet generation* (1986–1999), referring to a generation who grew up with MTV and cannot remember how the world was before we had the internet. The point is that this variable has a direct effect on the way some people want material to be presented, among other differences. For them, the focus is no longer just on entertainment, but on new media (internet, texting, multimedia messaging). Thus, generation Z and Y customers do not enter competitions using e-mail any more, they send text messages. So you should consider sending texts to your target customers falling into these generations, if you want to attract their interest. If you send them ordinary snail mail, they might assume it is an invoice or some sort of contract. Generation Y is also a highly competitive and pragmatic generation. As such they are less appreciative of wordy phrases and formal language. All these differences will play a role in an effective marketing plan.

Another example: *baby boomers* are often less used to the idea of intensive competition. Their focus is often more on production than on marketing. They are often engineers, whereas generation X (born in the 1960s–1970s) are often economists or marketing people. It was the type of education promoted by society at large when they were young which often decided what the members of a given generation chose to study. We are all to some extent products of our times (Table 2.8).

The more refined a market segmentation we can make, the better our chances will be of adapting our communications appropriately at the trade show. As a rule of thumb, it is often said that 80 % of visitors to a booth fall outside the relevant market segment. Of the remaining 20 %, some are more interesting as customers than others, either because they are likely to place bigger orders or because they may become good repeat customers. It may be useful to define a number of *customer profiles* within the segment. These profiles may be defined according to the expected sales they might generate (Table 2.9).

All these estimates will be guesses until they are confirmed or refuted. It may be that a person who has been seen as a profile 2 actually becomes a 4, or does not become a customer at all.

A booth may be open to all comers, or it may be closed to the general public and open only to selected guests. For some businesses which depend on exclusivity, creating a distinction based on high-quality sales leads may generate higher sales

Table 2.8 Generations

Generation	Period of birth	Characteristics/influenced by
Baby boomers	1946–1964	Economic prosperity
Generation X	1961–1981	Pop culture
Generation Y	1977–2003	New media
Generation Z	1990s	Highly connected

Table 2.9 Detailed market segmentation

Profile market segment	Type	Sales volume
Profile 1	Large orders, repeat customer	Very high
Profile 2	Large order	High
Profile 3	Repeat customer	Fair
Profile 4	Smaller order	Small

than if the booth were thrown open to all. Most examples of this technique of creating exclusivity are found in B2B trade shows, with expensive products, but it can also be relevant with B2C, e.g. for certain clubs and luxury goods. If you sell private jets you will know who your customers are, and you may even know who they are not. Having your booth crowded with members of the general public who have only come to see things they dream about or who are there purely for educational purposes may be a luxury your company cannot afford. It creates a risk of crowding out those who really would like to buy your product. Thus certain restrictions on the types of visitors allowed into the booth may be justified.

2.5.1 The Psychology of Waiting and Meeting in the Booth

Exhibition marketing is a kind of *face-to-face marketing* or *relationship marketing*, and probably the most effective kind you will ever be involved with. Each second while you are at the show is a moment of truth. Much of what we are doing is to create trust, and trust requires personal contact (cf. Tanner 1996: 80).

By the *psychology of waiting*, we refer to the mental processes connected to time, place, and activity within the physical booth before a customer meeting takes place. The reader may wonder why it is even worth mentioning the psychology of waiting. There are two reasons: first, the way you prepare yourself mentally before meeting a visitor affects your chances of gaining his or her attention. In other words, the better prepared you are psychologically for the meeting, the better meeting you are likely to have. Secondly, waiting is a large and often tiresome part of attending an exhibition – particularly if your exhibit is not attracting too many visitors, whether by your choice as mentioned above, or because of your mistakes or unpopularity. In any case, learning to cope with time is essential for your wellbeing and your performance.

So, while waiting, don’t let you mind wander off into all sorts of questions and problems, and especially not your private affairs. A worried or daydreaming expression may arouse sympathy from a bystander, but it is not going to create interest on the part of passers-by in visiting your booth. On the contrary, you probably look as though you don’t want to be disturbed. How we are feeling shows; it is part of our communication. That does not mean that we should act as a form of *thought police* for our staff. That would only add stress to a situation which is stressful enough as it is. But we can discuss the issue with them. How can we try to keep our focus on the people who may come in at any moment, but are not there yet, so as to be mentally ready for them? After all, this readiness will be apparent at a distance, and it will make the communication much smoother, especially at the outset, as we will be better prepared.

2.5.2 Conversation at the Booth (Face-to-Face Marketing)

There is a great deal of psychology in communication, hence we may also say with confidence that there is a great deal of psychology in marketing.[11] Here are some basic points to bear in mind when preparing for face-to-face communication at a trade show:

- The purpose of meeting the visitor is to learn enough about him to be able to contact him again after the show is over and convince him to buy our products
- For that we must gather detailed information about his needs and preferences (getting his name and contact details is *not* enough)
- Focus on what the visitor says, not on what you would like to be said
- Adapt your own messages to his or hers
- A standard selling phrase or formula will be recognized as such and only shows lack of interest. Avoid clichés and stereotypes in your conversation.
- Do not interrupt
- Show interest
- Ask whether something is unclear, if you have reason to think it might be
- Keep the balance and the harmony of the conversation in mind while speaking
- Inject some energy into the conversation when you can, e.g. by displaying a touch of humour. It is too easy to become stale, on both sides. Look at it this way: by adding humour, you are supporting both sides in what is often otherwise an unnatural and difficult communicative situation
- Do not “badmouth” your competitors in talking to visitors. Many people will take this as representing a poor attitude. If a competitor’s name comes up in the

[11] Marketing as it developed after the Second World War, especially after Wroe Alderson, has been lacking in relation to the study of psychology, which has been quite unfortunate for the former discipline. The tendency towards specialization has in this case led marketing further away from the very reality it aims to discover and describe. This is particularly apparent in connection with trade shows.

conversation, acknowledge the fact, and go back to what you have to offer as soon as it feels natural to change the subject again.

The *AID* formula is a good way to start thinking about the actual conversation. *AID* stands for Attention, Interest, and Desire. First we try to gain the visitor's attention. Then we try to get him interested in what we have to offer. Finally we try to leave him with a desire to learn, to come back and ask for more.

When starting the actual conversation, begin with active phrases to which the visitor can give a clear positive response:

- What are you using for ...
- What do you do when ...
- Have you used/are you familiar with ...
- Have you seen our new ...
- Can I show you ...

Do not say:

- Have you got a minute ...
- I guess you are the kind of person ...
- This is a great show, isn't it?
- How important are profits/efficiency/good sales (etc.) to your company?

These questions smack of cheap sales training and a mechanical approach to conversation, which is often the same thing. Don't engage in any verbal marathons, either. Don't treat the visitor like a fool. He will only be annoyed. The people who are sent to trade shows to represent their company or to buy a product are usually the abler ones, intellectually and in other respects. Show that you understand that.

Also, remember why you as a member of booth staff are there: to sell. It is expected that the question of buying will come up: not only your employer expect this, but the visitor too expects this of you. We do not bring the point up too quickly and we do it in a subtle way, but we do not leave it too long, either. One suggestion would be to bring it up at the first moment when you can bring it into the conversation naturally and without being pushy about it, making it fit into the conversation more as an enquiry how you can help, a request for a piece of useful information.

Good conversation is an art form. Not many of us master it, and for most of us it takes years of practice. Even then, few can claim to fully master the art. We academics seem to be particularly clueless in this respect, perhaps because we have learned to distance ourselves and reflect on issues like these objectively, rather than simply engaging in them and learning by doing. Some good advice for anyone who wants to excel in this art is to listen well, answer questions, show some empathy, and not be afraid of periods of silence. A well-placed silence, as actors know, can render communication more effective and positive.

Eye contact is very important. If you lose eye contact for too long it may look as though you have lost interest in the person standing in front of you. If you stare at him for too long he will start to feel uncomfortable. As with any form of communication, you try to adjust your behaviour to the reactions you are receiving, and you try to find a good balance of looking at the other person while not staring at him or intimidating him. These are skills most of us have acquired through decades of socialization, but which we rarely think about consciously.

When we are talking to more than one person at a time, we try to look at each person for similar amounts of time, so that each of them feels included. If after a while you look always at one person, the others will see you as having decided that this is the most important person in connection with the purchasing decision. That may be correct, but it is not very polite. Besides, you may be wrong. If one of the people feels offended, he will say so when they leave your booth, and that could well be the factor that decides them not to come back. It is not uncommon to hear comments like "I thought the lady was arrogant, she had an attitude". In a case like that, even if someone else at the booth was nice that may not help or compensate for the negative perception. This may sound silly or irrational as a reason to decide not to return, but that is how we human beings sometimes are. So, being aware of this, we try to pay due attention to all visitors, acknowledging each of them through our participation in the conversation.

Be constantly alert for signs of interest or lack of interest. Look also for decision symptoms. The visitor might shift the subject of conversation towards the product and prices. Or he may talk about the specific requirements of his company. If communication is not going smoothly, try passing the person on to someone else on the pretext that he knows more about *X*. As already mentioned, introduce the person by name, title, and job title (if possible), and recap on your conversation to avoid repetition of questions.

Allow the visitor to get warm and comfortable before you press on with any further questions. Once you have established a good rapport, you can ask more detailed questions about the visitor's business and business needs.

A good way to break off an unwanted conversation can be by saying you have an appointment (and looking as though you mean it). At trade shows there are always a series of legitimate excuses to choose from. With some unwanted visitors it may be that the other person is talking too much, so that you cannot get a word in. If that happens, it will even be difficult to explain that you are needed elsewhere. In that case, a good way to get someone's attention when they are in full flow is to say the person's name. Most of us tend to take that as a cue to stop talking. If that does not help, you are indeed faced with a difficult case. If this happens, you are allowed to say "excuse me" and leave.

Paying attention to psychological aspects of conversations should not lead to what is called *psychologization*, where we use most of our energy to analyse the other person's thoughts. We are not there to pretend to be Sigmund Freud. In reality there should be a fine balance between trying to meet expectations by listening to and understanding the other person, and at the same time trying to engage in a warm and constructive conversation. People who spend more time analysing the person they are talking to than engaging in the conversation freeze up in their posture and look as though they are staring, or they get that sceptical look on their face which speaks of a certain distance and disengagement, and will quickly torpedo the conversation.

There are many kinds of distance between sellers and buyers. Two types which have been identified are *social distance* and *technological distance*. Some buyers feel threatened by the fact that the other person is a seller. Suggestions about how to reduce these two kinds of distance have been given by Davis Ford (1980): give the buyer an impression of the ways the seller works. By displaying what you are, you make the encounter feel less scary. This also shows that you are able to distance yourself to an extent from what you do: you are not just a seller.

To reduce the second kind of distance, technological distance, give the buyer an opportunity to inspect the products and grasp how they fulfil the buyer's needs (Ford 1980: 339–353). It is a very simple point, but one which is still often forgotten: have your actual products in the booth. If your product is too big or heavy for the booth, make a model of it, so that you can focus a constructive and informative conversation around it. It should be unnecessary for exhibitors to jot down little sketches of the things they are selling, once the potential customer is there. He expects to see the actual product, and to try it out if appropriate. Photos and brochures are not good enough by themselves, and will not do for this purpose. Even a video may feel a bit amateurish or inadequate in these circumstances. Brochures and flyers are often best treated as reminders of conversations; they should not be seen as an alternative to showcasing the products. In many cases a business card giving a website and an e-mail address will be preferred to literature on paper. In these days of QR codes people are becoming less willing to carry several kilos of brochures along with them in a bag. And paper is also undesirable in connection with the threat of climate change, too, a factor which is gradually coming to concern people.

Feeling welcome is an important issue for visitors entering your booth. Far too few exhibitors welcome their visitors properly, in part because younger generations are more informal in their communication, in part because they have never learned how to do it. At trade shows it is important that each person entering your booth is clearly acknowledged, to the extent that is possible. The easiest way to do this is by some sort of greeting. When we say "Welcome to *XYZ*", and mean it, the visitor automatically feels involved and ready to engage in conversation with us. We do not say "Welcome to *XYZ*, how may I help you?", because that is often considered slightly offensive. Many visitors walk into your booth simply because they are curious. By being too direct you might scare them off. Sometimes we need time to look around. We may discover products that we did not know about. Visitors must be given time to explore these options by themselves before we begin to ask them about themselves.

For all our expertise and training, most exhibitors are inaccessible to visitors in one way or another. It may be in the way we stand, facing away from where people are passing. It may be in our body language, transmitting a "don't bother me" look, or it may be in what we say, as just discussed. If you are not comfortable about meeting people, they are going to notice. If we are not the social type, perhaps we should have let someone else in our company take our place. Here are some tips for how to look more accessible in the booth:

1. Stand where visitors can see you
2. Stand where visitors can come to you
3. Stand where you can be private enough to exchange meaningful information as required (but not so private as to create doubts about your professional motives)
4. Stand on your own

Meeting two exhibitors at the same time is seldom successful. First, it makes you wonder as a visitor why there need to be two. Second, it looks as though they have not got much to do. Third, it gives the impression that they would prefer to be talking to each other rather than talking to you. Fourth, it is often more difficult to meet and talk to two people simultaneously, in part because you always have to think about the other person who is not immediately involved in the discussion. This mistake is often made by important companies occupying large booths, where there are plenty of young staff. At worst these situations can look more like teenage parties than serious business encounters, which represents a misunderstanding of the role of entertainment at trade shows. The mistake is also made in smaller booths containing just one standing table. As that is the sole focal point, all booth staff tend to congregate there; in the worst case they may perch on the corner of the table, looking like a flock of ravens ready to attack. It would be much easier for visitors to walk up to that table if there were only one person at it.

After a face-to-face meeting with staff, the visitor will take away an impression of the encounter. This impression will be either positive or negative. Naturally, we want to make sure it is positive, or as positive as possible, but that is not always easy to ensure. This issue raises a series of questions, including “what is a positive meeting?” and “how can I try to ensure that the meeting is positive?”

First, there will be many different kinds of positive meetings. There will not be one guaranteed route to arrive at any one of these different sorts of meeting, but many. The general recommendations, such as being positive, alert, and polite, can serve as a basis, a set of necessary conditions. However, they are not enough to crack the problem. For that we need something more.

If we dig deeper into the question, we find that building trust is a key concept for a positive meeting. It is in fact the single most important concept in all business transactions, especially for service businesses. This in turn raises another question, how does one build trust? Two rules to follow here are to be well-informed about one’s subject and to be focused, which means answering visitors’ questions as accurately as we can. We do not oversell or take unnecessary risks by being too clever. If we are selling holiday homes in Spain, say, we do not assure the buyer that prices will not go down next year. We do not know; no one knows. Knowledgeable visitors will be aware of that. Most visitors react negatively to pretentious and “wrong” answers. It may be that they like the houses you are selling, and that they are even comfortable with the price. But, without trust, they will not proceed. Often there will be many sellers of a product. What matters most is not necessarily the best product, or even the best price, but the best relationship. Another way to look at this is to think of the relationship as part of the product.

It is not always easy to leave a visitor with a positive impression of our products and services. Some visitors are downright difficult and rude. Some love to hear themselves talk and will carry on forever. Others keep repeating the same questions.

As a golden rule, stay with the visitor for as long as you are needed, provided there are no other visitors in the booth currently. If other visitors require your attention, make sure you do not simply walk away without some sort of polite leavetaking. Every meeting should have a clear beginning and a clear end. Say "Would you excuse me for a moment?" or something similar. If there are no other visitors in the booth and you are on duty, there are not really any good excuses for ending the conversation prematurely. Bear in mind that it will look quite strange and rather comical if you end the conversation and the visitor remains in the booth with you standing silently in another corner. So long as you are engaging in conversation with visitors, it looks as though you are popular. That will attract more visitors. When another person walks in, we try to wrap up the conversation we are already engaged in.

For many practical reasons we are not allowed to get bored with our visitors. That is a great sin (but one often committed), and although it may be understandable it is unforgivable. It is an indication that the member of staff in question is not the right person for the job. If you enjoy your work and you like talking to people, you should not need to get into this situation. There should always be things to talk about. That does not mean that we have to behave like clowns or crack jokes the whole time. To adopt the role of entertainer is seldom a good conversational strategy. Be, rather, a rational but polite individual. Try to make an effort to understand everything that is said, and answer as accurately as possible.

That is all very well (you may say), but what about those really annoying visitors who refuse to leave the booth? Well, if you cannot encourage the person to go elsewhere, plan a set of agreed signals with your booth colleagues. For example:

- Arms crossed could be "Help me get rid of this visitor", for instance, tell me I am needed on the phone
- Arms on hips could be "Could you take over this visitor?"

Some conversations simply do not work because of bad chemistry, as we say nowadays, that is the fact of having very different personalities. Sometimes that can be enough to wreck a conversation. That is all right, if it happens occasionally. We do not connect with everyone. No one does. Try not to overanalyse these situations. If we do, we only risk distancing ourselves further from the conversation. When we are in a conversation we should focus on what is being said and nothing else. Don't be afraid to say "Excuse me, what did you say?" or the like. If you are being a good listener, not only are you entitled to ask such a question, it actually demonstrates that you are listening well. Thus it becomes a positive element in the conversation, and helps build the relationship.

Some exhibitors, through error or sheer bad luck, take up the position of a guard at the aisle, making a barrier between the company and its potential visitors. It may be that they are tired of being inside the booth and would like to look around, but cannot leave the premises. There should be no need for people to stand at the entrance of your booth like security guards. This only tends to scare potential visitors off. Your booth is supposed to be a welcoming place. The barriers to entry become unnecessarily high if you place your staff at the entrance. People will feel that they are being a nuisance by edging you back inside. And another impression this creates is that the contents of the booth cannot be all that interesting, since the staff are distancing themselves from it.

This does not mean, though, that you should not assign someone among your staff to take responsibility for security at the booth. Whoever is given responsibility for security should plan and co-ordinate efforts with the show organizers' security people. He should also draw up a range of likely scenarios, and involve all staff in training for them, so that everyone knows what to do in each case. It may be anything from a visitor who faints in your booth as a consequence of dehydration or stress, to someone who starts yelling at you and refuses to leave. In the first case, at least one member of your staff should have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) skills. In the second case, you need to get someone to practise how to escort a person away through a crowd without getting too physical. In most cases it is enough to wear an item of clothing labelled “Security” and to lead the person away with clearly directed words and a hand showing the way: “Please sir [it is almost always a man], leave the booth at once”. Once in the aisles, stand with the person until he leaves the area. If he does not leave right away, call the organizer's security detail. They should be able to lead the person outside the hall. Luckily, these situations rarely happen at the average trade show.

Make sure also that the flow of people along your aisle is free enough for people to walk to and fro at their own pace. You do not want anyone in the aisle slowing down the traffic. If that happens, try to sort it out in a friendly way before it causes a problem. It may be anything from a food seller to a few people talking on mobile phones and blocking the flow of traffic into our booth. Whatever you do, never use *exaggerated violence*, that is more than is absolutely necessary. Just the idea of something like this being recorded will be enough to keep your chief executive awake at night, and will certainly not earn you a promotion.

Try to avoid having your entrance diagonally across from the entrance to your neighbour's booth. A blockage outside his entrance will tend to lead to blockage outside yours also. We are not permitted to police the aisles, but we can make simple requests to passers-by.

If there is a real hold-up in the aisles, contact the organizer straight away.

2.5.3 Body Language in the Booth

As we have seen, we communicate with more than the words we utter (their meaning and the way we say them). We also communicate with the way we dress and the way we move our bodies in the booth, including our facial expressions. We should pay attention to our body language. We do not make sudden movements or anything that could make a visitor uneasy. In a booth there is very limited space to move around, so doing so can be really problematic.

Booths are very often overcrowded, at least at certain times in the day. If that happens, we might consider asking people to queue to enter the booth. We would then only let new visitors in as others leave. When done properly this can be perceived as a positive sign of exclusiveness rather than a restraint and a consequence of poor planning (which is what it sometimes is, for instance if too small a booth size was chosen initially). Overcrowded booths are no use to anyone. They quickly become chaotic and stressful. As visitors we cannot see the products or talk to any of the exhibitors. Our visit risks becoming uninteresting. When the booth is beginning to get crowded, it is recommended that staff try to remain at their stations, spread evenly across the floorspace in order to handle as many requests as possible.

If on the other hand the booth is empty, we do not under any circumstances leave it unattended. For all practical purposes, an unattended booth is worse than not being present at the show at all. At best it looks odd, but more often the passer-by will take it to reflect some crisis, as if everyone inside had to rush out to solve a big problem. Nevertheless it always happens from time to time, usually because the booth was short-staffed and the only remaining staff member had to go somewhere, even if only to the toilet. This situation simply says "unprofessional", or "poor planning" – which is much the same thing.

In general, while one is moving round in the booth one's arms should be kept down and by one's sides, as when making a speech (though this is less applicable if you are at a trade show in the Mediterranean region or in South America, where gesticulations are part of communication). Your body should be held straight, facing the person you are talking to. If you stand a little twisted and turned away from the person, it looks as though you are trying to get away, or as though you do not want to engage fully in the communicative situation because you feel sceptical and are looking for a way out. At any rate it certainly does not look good. When a group of visitors arrive, try to create a circle by stepping back. If you do not try to include everyone in the conversation, you will appear excluding. Those excluded will want to leave, and will look irritated. Consequently those you are talking to will want to leave too, because they look on one another as one big group. Having a conversation with a group of people is more challenging in various respects. In general the discussion will become broader, and humour will play a more important role in easing the extra tension.

Avoid any kind of tic, such as tapping your finger or your foot, flicking your fingers, or the like: these are perceived as nervous movements. (This might not apply if you are at a trade show for the music industry, but in that case the tapping should at least be rhythmical.)

Some readers might want to see the topic of facial expressions covered in more detail. After all, they seem so important for making a sale. But, in my view, too much training in this area will often lead to unnatural and stiff behaviour, as when we hear that people are "going to smiling school". Who has not seen a staff member sitting on a bench with a cold smile which slowly turns into a grimace? The cold smile becomes even worse than no smile. The problem is psychological. If we think too hard about natural behaviour, it tends to become less natural. Some basic ideas about body language are worth teaching and bearing in mind, but this can quickly become excessive. The same applies in the case of facial expressions.

People who focus too much on how they look tend to focus less on what they say, that is, they pay less attention to the actual conversation while their attention is elsewhere. When communicating it is important to listen, to be able to respond quickly to what the other person is saying. Our minds should not be wandering. Again, most staff do not need to "work" much on these issues. It is important not to turn this into psychologization. While we are generally content with our lives, this shows in our face and we do not have to worry about it. Our communication and body language will follow. With some general politeness we should be all set to meet any visitor, no matter how awkward.

To make the conversation successful, we offer a smile at a convenient moment and try to show real interest in what the visitor has to say. In most cases he will repay us in the same coin. Now we have a good basis for productive communication. Good, positive energy is an upward spiral of giving and receiving. We should give of our best and wait for this to be returned. Then we give some more; and so forth. It normally works. If anyone needs a theoretical reason for accepting this, presumably we could apply *the theory of reciprocity*, already mentioned. And that also gives us the golden rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". If you smile all the time, you run the risk of looking like an idiot. Try instead to be in tune with the person you are talking to.

During the pre-show training, comment on one another's behaviour. You might also consider videotaping body language in the booth while training. Get the participants to comment on their own body language, too. What worked and what did not, and why?

Most of us do not need to be told about all this; we know how to act, how to be natural. However, most of us can do with some gentle reminders occasionally. It is very easy to show a less attractive side to ourselves at times, and we do not always give a conversation the attention it deserves.

2.5.4 Booth Tidiness and Organization

All objects lying around the booth which do not contribute to attaining the company's goals can be seen as "noise"[12] and should if possible be removed or put away. These items merely divert attention away from what we want said and done, and within an environment that is very restricted in space and in time, at that.

Untidiness can stem from small and seemingly unimportant things. For instance, if you leave a few used plastic cups on a table, visitors will notice them and find them out of place. This is not about the cups in themselves. The likelihood is that some visitors will associate them with mess in general and this may reflect by association adversely on your company. If there are many cups lying around, visitors will think the booth looks messy, untidy, or at worst, say if the cups are half-full, even disgusting. The next step may be that they start to wonder if the

[12] "Noise" in communication is anything distorting the original message. At a trade show the message is defined in the strategy. Anything which does not contribute to attaining that goal is classified as noise.

sloppiness they have seen is typical of other parts of the organization's activities or of their products. Having some mess in your booth may not be such a big deal if you are selling motorcycle parts, but it will certainly be an issue if you are a pharmaceutical company. And there is another point about plastic cups: they look cheap. You might want to invest a few dollars more in mugs with your company logo on. And if so, you can also use them as valuable giveaways.

Does all this sound too harsh, verging on over-policing? Well, everything we place in that booth is going to impinge on our product and our company – everything from the things we leave lying about to the shoes we are wearing and the perfume we chose to wear. This is not a thing about trade shows in particular, it is just that at trade shows everything is compressed and put to the test before such a large audience. That is, the effects of our behaviour and the impression people get from our booth become much more striking, since we are exposing ourselves to the whole world over just a few days.

Untidiness can arise from items such as:

- Cups and drinking glasses
- Cigarettes, lighters
- Sunglasses
- Newspapers
- Printed material from other exhibitors
- Luggage
- Garments, shoes
- Completed and half-completed inquiry forms
- Cheap pens spread across a table
- Kettles and vacuum flasks
- Waste paper
- Cardboard boxes
- Pieces of unfinished booth decor or structure

It can be a good idea to put one of the exhibition staff in charge of tidiness in the booth each day, and to ask everyone to pick up after themselves and their latest visitors. By rotating responsibility for tidiness you avoid making one staff member look like a policeman or rubbish collector. If the booth is small, you will probably not want a cleaning lady running round it. There are already enough different roles to keep track of and enough people to deal with as it is. Furthermore, such a person could seem rather out of place in this environment. She might get questions from visitors. And that would also send a signal that our staff cannot pick up after themselves – which might be true, but this is not the place to show it.

If there are tidiness problems, issues that cannot be resolved quickly, or issues which keep recurring, they should be reported to the booth manager/team captain for the trade show straight away, not left till the end of the show. Ultimately, tidiness is a major concern for our joint marketing effort at trade shows, because it reflects on our image.

2.6 Organizers, Show Management, Show Owners, Show Promoters, and General Service Contractors (GSC)

Trade show organizers or hosts are usually either an association (that is the norm in Germany, for instance), or a company owned by a private individual. These alternatives correspond to considerable differences in the way a trade show is run. With an association, the focus is on the interests of its owners. That will usually imply maintaining certain standards, and often involves a strong educational aspect. When a show is run by a private individual, the focus is often on profits and the short term. Find out who is behind the show you are participating in. That will help you understand what kind of show you can expect. For instance, *privately-owned trade shows* are not always known for inviting the best speakers, because they usually charge high fees. That does not mean that privately-run, for-profit trade shows are necessarily less good, but it changes the way participants see the show and what you can expect. Then there are also mixed forms of trade show, part-association, part-private company.

Sometimes, the owners of a show will contract with *show promoters* to run the trade show for them. In all cases, the show will be run by a *show manager* or someone with a similar title.

The sites of most conferences are fixed and long-established. Organizers who want to develop a new conference will be looking for interesting destinations and exhibition spaces. Organizers nowadays are more likely to think in terms of entertainment and tourism, as people are often looking for an excuse to go away somewhere nice. That could be a major city, of course, but it might alternatively be a resort, such as Las Vegas or, today, the even larger casino city of Macao.

A trade show is an excellent way for an *industry association* to achieve many of its objectives, as Table 2.10 suggests. We may categorize the various functions of an association in terms of their relevance to the trade show:

We see, for example, that providing greater purchasing power through group discounts is a major function of the association which is highly relevant to trade shows. We also see that trade shows are excellent opportunities for disseminating general information, creating and maintaining social relationships, and developing statistical data and research. But we also see that trade shows are not a place where associations improve employee–employer relations or handle industry/professional legal affairs. For those things, the environment is too noisy, too turbulent, and too much oriented to other activities. Such things are better handled in direct, private conversations with the parties when they are calm and at home and can focus on activities that are not part of the trade show.

Another class of associations are *trade show and event associations,* which work for the improvement of the trade-show industry itself, primarily to enhance the trade-show experience and performance for exhibitors. Here are some examples, predominantly from the USA (Table 2.11):

These associations work to help members become better at what they are doing at the trade show, which includes basic training, best practices, insights, business intelligence, and seminars.

Table 2.10 The functions of an industry association (See also Hoyle (2002: 10–11))

Functions	Relevance to trade shows
Providing greater purchasing power through group discounts	High
Disseminating general information	High
Creating and maintaining social relationships	High
Developing statistical data and research	High
Promoting members' professional development	High
Offering education and training	High
Providing group travel opportunities	High
Creating positive public relations	High
Introducing opportunities for entertainment, networking, and peer interaction	High
Establishing industry standards	Medium
Influencing legislative/political affairs	Medium
Building a body of knowledge through publications	Medium
Defining the industry/profession though demographics	Medium
Performing public service activities	Medium
Identifying and defining common causes	Medium
Improving employee/employer relations	Low
Handling industry/professional legal affairs	Low

Returning to the organizers: we often forget that trade shows are very much like shops which we can rent for a short term from someone who has in turn rented the site for a longer term. This can be a profitable business. Behind these shows we find companies like Canon Communications, Reed Elsevier, ROC Exhibitions, etc. These companies take tenancies of exhibition sites, trade-show centres, convention centres, and hotels in order to rent individual booths out to exhibitors. This business is very much marketing- and sales-driven.

Trade shows are big business, often bringing great benefits to a city. That was how they started, and that is how they are often seen and judged today. In many cases host cities will turn the trade show into an important component of their own self-promotion. Many cities will try to benefit from their trade show by channeling visitors and exhibitors into other activities as well. For instance, it is no accident that Las Vegas has become the host to many of the world's largest trade shows. It is a showbiz city. If places like this are able to persuade so many industry experts to travel so far in the name of work, that is because they offer leisure activities. Once at a trade show, exhibitors and visitors will find time for other activities besides work. From a company's perspective, that may be seen as interference, stealing attention away from the trade show itself and reducing its effectiveness. On the other hand, companies want to be where everyone else is, meaning of course first of all their customers. And customers like going to casinos too.

The leading trade-show cities continue to be established commercial centres such as Hanover, Milan, Frankfurt-am-Main, and Düsseldorf. Of course, these

Table 2.11 Trade show and event associations (See http://www.all-about-trade-show-exhibits.com/associations-resources-and-publications-49/(2012-09-20). Some changes have been made to update the information on this site afterwards. EACA is now E2MA)

Association	Website	Aim and services
Center for Exhibition Industry Research	www.ceir.org	For 30 years, CEIR has been highlighting the importance of exhibitions in today's business environment. Its goal is to promote the image, value, and growth of exhibitions. This is accomplished through producing primary research studies that demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of exhibitions as a marketing medium. CEIR then incorporates those findings into a targeted, continuing promotional campaign
Exhibition Services and Contractors Association	www.esca.org	ESCA is dedicated to the advancement of the exhibition, meeting, and special events industries. Through the education, information exchange, and level of professionalism shared by members and their customers, ESCA promotes co-operation among all areas of the exhibition industry
Exhibit & Event Marketers Association (E2MA)	www.e2ma.org	The Exhibit & Event Marketers Association (E2MA) is the trade-show industry's newest association, formed by a merger between the Tradeshow Exhibitors' Association (TSEA) and the Exhibitor Appointed Contractors Association (EACA). The mission of the E2MA is to enhance the expertise of exhibition and event-planner professionals in exhibition and event marketing, and to raise the level of service excellence on the show floor
Exhibit Designers and Producers Association	www.edpa.com	The Exhibit Designers and Producers Association (EDPA), founded in 1954, is an internationally recognized national trade association with more than 400 corporate members from eighteen countries which are engaged in the design, manufacture, transport, installation, and service of displays and exhibitions primarily for the exhibition and event industry. Its purpose is to provide education, leadership, and networking for the advancement of its members and the exhibition industry
Healthcare Convention Exhibitors Association	www.hcea.org	The Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association (HCEA) is a trade association representing organizations united by their common desire to increase the effectiveness and quality of healthcare conventions and exhibitions as an educational and marketing medium HCEA promotes the value of exhibitions as an integral part of healthcare meetings

(continued)

Table 2.11 (continued)

Association	Website	Aim and services
		Since 1930, HCEA has provided healthcare exhibitors, medical associations, and suppliers with a forum for the exchange of mutually beneficial information and ideas
International Association of Exhibitions and Events	www.iaee.com	IAEE promotes the unique value of exhibitions and other events which bring buyers and sellers together, such as road shows, conferences with an exhibition component, and proprietary corporate exhibitions. IAEE is the principal resource for those who plan, produce and service the industry
Canadian Association of Exposition Management	www.caem.ca	CAEM is the Canadian Association of Exposition Management. It is Canada's national association of professional individuals involved in managing, planning, and producing trade, consumer, and professional expositions and similar specialized events, as well as companies providing products and services to these events. Together it works to ensure the industry is heading in a direction that will benefit everyone. It provides valuable industry-specific services, programmes, and products, including a newsletter, unique publications, employment referral, seminars, an annual conference, professional certification, and industry research
Event Marketing Institute	www.eventmarketing.com	The Event Marketing Institute is a think-tank, educator, and global professional resource dedicated to the advancement and development of best practices, insights, and business intelligence for individuals and companies using live marketing as a strategic marketing initiative. EMI serves as a catalyst for innovative thinking in event-marketing strategies, tactics, and measurement

cities, like all major cities, also offer a wide variety of leisure activities. Visitors to the Fiera di Milano may also want to find time to see the Duomo or go to an opera at La Scala, if they can get tickets. Knowing that, exhibitors can use these attractions to their advantage, for example by buying tickets well in advance, organizing visits, and integrating all this into their marketing activities while in the city.

General service contractors (GSC) are companies which the organizers contract to provide all the labour and services required by the exhibitors. If everything works well, you should need no further contact with the organizers themselves once you have registered for the show and know how things work. Still, in case something does crop up, you ought to know who the organizers are and how you can get hold of them. Know who to contact for different problems that might arise at all hours. The information may be crucial when something goes wrong, and sooner or later something always does. It might be anything from a noisy co-exhibitor to malfunctioning electricity supply. When time is scarce we do not want to waste it finding out who is who and what they do. Instead we just want a list of functions, names, and phone numbers.

Having a good relationship with the organizers may turn out to be an advantage for you if you should need some special favour. It might also influence your chances of securing a specially desirable location at the trade show, or of getting first access to suppliers for external services needed around your booth – say, a bench along the aisle, some extra plants in the odd corner, or perhaps even a food stand close by. Trade shows are about face-to-face meetings. Organizers are just one of the categories of people you want to meet in this way. Good personal relations with the organizers are likely to take you further towards achieving your marketing goals.

Find out what kind of insurance the organizers have, and in particular whether it will reimburse your costs in case of fire or other damage. Study the whole range of issues related to liability law: who is responsible for what if something goes wrong? Who pays? This should be a part of your *overall risk assessment*. If the documentation is not clear, ask straight questions. If you are a major player, set conditions specifying your own requirements.

Start by reading the contract and the rules and regulations section of the show manual. Show organizers can help in a number of ways apart from their role as sellers of trade-show space. They can provide statistics on previous shows, directories of exhibitors and press, a good deal of material which will help you become better prepared. You can also ask them for advice.

2.7 Trade Shows and Trades Unions

It is always a good idea to read the exhibitor manual when you can get hold of it. It will help you to prepare and tell you what you can do and what you cannot do. Many trade shows are heavily regulated, not least with respect to the people you take on for the work of constructing and dismantling your booth. Many trade shows have a *union-only set-up* policy, intended to avoid high insurance costs if exhibitors were to do it themselves. That is standard in the USA, for example. Union-only policies are usually non-negotiable. This means that things can take time.

What kinds of services are provided by unionized labour? These will include (cf. Levinson et al. 1997: 154–156) the work of:

- Carpenters
- Decorators
- Electricians
- Plumbers
- Projectionists (required at some shows)
- Riggers (handle all machinery)
- Lorry drivers (handle material in and out of shows)

At some trade shows you will be allowed to set up your own booth, provided you can do it in less than 30 min. If it takes longer, the union may have the right to come in and take over. Of course, that will cost more, so make sure to include these costs in your total trade-show budget. In many countries, tips are given for excellent service, but if a bribe is suggested you should contact the show manager.

The above has covered the “software” side of trade shows. In the next chapter, we shall look more closely at the “hardware” side.

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