Deliver a commanding performance

How to cast your booth staff for a smash-hit exhibit

At a trade show, your exhibit acts as your brand's stage. And each staff member plays a part in your brand's story.

To create a story that truly hooks attendees, you need the right players and a well-thought-out script to achieve the best performance. From a solo staffer working a 10'x10' to a large group navigating a double-decker, it's important to staff your booth with the right people to make your brand the star of the show.

Try these tips for assembling a standout exhibit staff and learn how to set them up for success at your next event.

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Cast the right crew

With all the exhibit prep and planning involved, it's easy to gloss over a staffing plan and simply tap your sales group. But building an energetic team of ready-for-prime-time players holds the key to successful engagement, so aim to expand your staffing horizons.

Choose an ensemble

Take your time to assemble a mix of expertise across the organization, and make sure their talents align with the booth objectives. Since your attendees and their interests will run the gamut, so should your team.

Take personality and previous exhibit experience into account. Opt for positive, motivated, and enthusiastic types who have the gift of gab, can energize the booth, and are comfortable with the unique selling environment of trade shows.

Not everyone has to be a seasoned staffer (more on training in a bit), but every person should understand how to interact with booth visitors and what's expected during the show.

Think about how you can best accommodate any users with mobility impairments, including chairs, closed captioning, and more.

A healthy mix of sales, marketing, product development, and customer service = better conversations and connections on the floor.

Casting call

A smart way to manage expectations is assigning specific staff roles. Remain flexible, as plans can change on-site, but having specific functions in place helps everyone know where they need to be and what they need to do.

Consider breaking your team into these groups:

Greeters: Choose your cheeriest people to work the information desk, scan badges, and direct visitors to specific areas or experts. They can also stand near the aisles to engage passersby.

Transition/qualifiers: These team members qualify attendees and move them toward an appropriate staff person or product area.

Experts: Seasoned salespeople or specialists who direct product areas or demos.

Floaters: These staffers serve as backup and can help wherever needed.

Dress the part

Whether or not you go with a booth uniform, decide what vibe you hope to convey for your brand. Then encourage folks to dress accordingly.

Approachable and fun
T-shirt and jeans

Educational
Suits

Comic Con
Cosplay capes/wigs/clown shoes

If you do decide on a coordinated look or outfit, make sure it's comfortable and easy to wear.

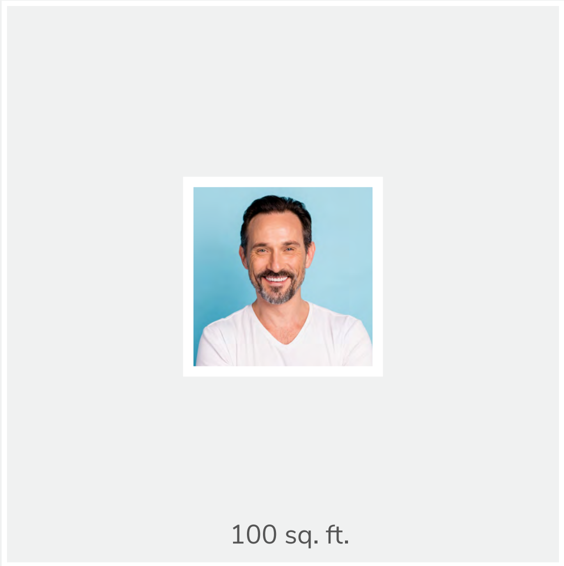
Staffing size

Not sure how many staffers you need?

Start with the booth size to determine appropriate coverage, and also consider social distancing — reduce staffers to ensure enough open space for attendees to enter comfortably.

A good rule of thumb is one staff member per 100 square feet of open/working space.

This quick calculation allows everyone to interact, with some breathing room for visitors, staff, and products.



Prepare the script

With your team and roles in place, it's time to train and inform. There's a lot of information to relay, so prepare materials with all necessary (and helpful) information about the show.

Several weeks before the event, compile a detailed packet (think who, what, when, where, why) to hand out or send virtually.

Key info may include:

- An overview of the event with links to resources on the event site
- Registration details
- Designated roles and responsibilities
- Staff schedule
- Purpose for exhibiting and booth objectives, along with any key facts/figures related to your objective
- Booth number, location, and expo hall map
- Booth theme and layout
- Health and safety protocols for the booth and overall show
- Details on demos, activations, and presentations
- Client list of potential visitors and/or scheduled meetings
- City/venue info

Meet and greet

Schedule team meetings before the show, and provide a basic elevator speech with key messages. Encourage staffers to personalize it and practice, practice, practice. Because a trade show is an unusual selling environment, provide training that covers specific booth activities as well as engagement tips and exhibit etiquette.

These meetings (or calls) help staffers feel comfortable and keep everyone up to date. If possible, hold a team lunch or outside activity to encourage bonding, which benefits the in-booth energy.

Value your VIPs

Provide a list of key clients who may be attending, along with contact names. Determine a welcome protocol for high-profile visitors. If a top client's CEO arrives, send your most senior staffer to greet the visitor personally.

Exhibit etiquette

Yays

- Be approachable: use open and casual body language
- Look visitors in the eye (but not so much that it's creepy!)
- Greet visitors with a firm handshake (or respectable elbow bump — we think the handshake is coming back, but read the room to determine what makes the visitor feel most comfortable!)
- Use your ears and listen
- Be attentive to what the visitor says
- Carry breath mints
- Smile!

Nays

- Talking or texting on your cell phone
- Eating or drinking while standing in the booth
- Congregating with other staffers
- Leaning on counters
- Slouching or yawning
- Gum chewing
- Getting too close for comfort! Mind visitors' social-distancing boundaries

Set the scene

Once you're on-site, schedule a booth tour (including training for product demos and interactive/immersive activations) to familiarize staffers with the layout and flow. On the day before the show, host a kickoff meeting in a private space to review the details and get everyone pumped to hit the floor.

Tip: Avoid yes or no questions like "Are you having a good show?" — that response means they could keep walking. Go for dialogue! Then listen intently. Being too focused on your own script means you could miss something. Remember, active listening gains attendee trust.

Move past the monologue

Attendees know a sales pitch when they hear one. Avoid canned introductions and start a genuine conversation. Engaging and productive booth interactions occur between you and the visitor.

After a quick hello, ask open-ended questions to learn more:

- What do they do?
- What's their role at their company?
- What are they looking for?
- What's a key challenge they need to solve?

Qualifying attendees

Qualifying attendees is an important part of the dialogue. But be respectful and apply this rule: engage first, qualify second.

Plan with the end in mind

Make sure your team knows what success looks like. And be clear about how you plan to measure results once the show doors close.

Every element of the booth and the people you've chosen to represent your organization all play a part in meeting your booth objectives, which can vary from show to show.

Determine what you want to accomplish:

- Gather as many leads as possible
- Brand awareness
- New product or service launch
- Booking productive meetings

Score your results based on these success metrics.

Applaud their efforts

You've chosen an enthusiastic and energetic team, but even motivated people need incentives. A dash of healthy competition makes the hours go by faster and energizes people to achieve goals.

Create fun activities or gamification with daily prizes and perks:

- First hot lead of the day
- Most qualified leads collected
- Biggest deal closed on the floor
- Reward efforts for post-show follow-up and closed deals

Read the reviews

If gathering leads is the goal, determine HOW you plan to capture them.

It doesn't matter if you go analog (business cards in a fishbowl, badge scanner) or high-tech (beacons, RFID, interactive displays), but be clear about how they'll be collected, handled, and vetted to avoid post-show follow-up confusion or missed opportunities.

Tip: Encourage staffers to compile key details about qualified visitors while the info is still fresh. Provide a pocket log to staffers before the show so they can easily jot down notes.

Curtain call

Use the data from your lead collection strategy to create customized post-event outreach — prepare templates ahead of time so it's easier to execute when you get back to the office.

Send info based on attendee preference(s), not a generalized list of products/services. Personal, targeted follow-up lets prospects know that you understand their needs and have a genuine interest in helping them find solutions.

Tip: One way to track progress is to check outreach results at various intervals. The cadence will depend on the length of your sales cycle. Example: two weeks, two months, and six months; or after three months, six months, and one year.

As the exhibit producer, it's your job to find the right cast, help them find their voice, provide the script and tools so they can perform at their best, and keep the booth production going behind the scenes.

Choose the right cast

Putting in the time and training to build this stellar cast ensures a successful trade show experience for your booth and your brand. And as the credits (leads!) roll, take a bow... then cue the applause.

Get smart on creating engaging exhibits.
Download our complete guide.

Download

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