guest column

Train your salespeople how to qualify or disqualify trade show walk-ins

Continued from Page 1

Continued Page 22

Gimmicks help draw prospects to your trade show booth

In last month's article I discussed issues to take into account when preparing for a trade show, particularly cultural and security considerations. Now we will get down to the practical aspects of preparing for the show.

First, you must have a “people” plan. You will spend a lot of money and other resources attending a trade show, especially a major industry event in another country. A major show is like a positive alignment of the stars. You will have your senior management in attendance. Clients will bring in their senior management to visit with suppliers and see the most current developments in their industry. You cannot let this opportunity go to waste.

If you have important deals in the works, or you have key clients to develop, the trade show is the perfect venue. Develop a schedule for your key people.

Of course, they will need time to see the show and to meet with people on the floor, but their most valuable time, from your viewpoint as the salesman, will be in small group meetings with the key managers of the clients.

These meetings should take place away from the display booth. You can have a separate meeting room, go to a breakfast, lunch or dinner, or visit the golf course.

Try to pre-arrange as many meals as possible between your key people and the clients. Work your bosses to the bone. A trade show is not a place for fun and games and wasted time. Use every opportunity you can.

You need a booth-manning plan. Someone must always be there. How many people will have to be there at any time will depend on the size of your company and the number of product lines you have.

You should always have people available who can give basic information on any of your products. If you qualify a visitor as a potential client who needs detailed information, you should set up a meeting with a specialist.

You should have a manning roster available so you can set up meetings when the proper person will be in the booth.

It is amazing how much time and money companies spend in planning and designing a display for a trade show. Then there are additional costs in time and money in shipping, setting up and breaking down the booth.

It is equally amazing to me how little time is typically spent in preparing the personnel to take part in the show. There is usually little common strategy, and woefully few established objectives.

Set up a series of meetings well before the show to establish overall objectives, as well as objectives for each participant.

On a person-by-person and department-by-department basis, these objectives may be related to meeting customers, closing deals, getting leads, and unveiling new products or services. You may be interested in exposing your company to a new market, or to finding new suppliers, or to negotiating better terms with existing suppliers. Whatever they may be, they have to be discussed and understood by all.

These objectives should not be only conceptual. Once the various objectives have been determined, goals should be set.

Only if goals are set will concrete results be achieved. If one goal is for the CEO to meet with major clients, a goal should be set as to how many clients will be met, and what should be the outcome of the meetings.

If your goal is to qualify/disqualify 50 prospects, then you have to take steps to ensure that at least 50 prospects will visit your display, and that you have sufficient personnel on hand to go through the process.

Now that the objectives and goals have been set, you have to attract the right people to your booth. Target your invitations and your advertising. Make calls and send emails to all the right people.

Your very important individual meetings may be established in advance, if this was an objective. But you probably need new prospects if the show is to be a success. You may also want to invite smaller customers that do not warrant a private meeting. Market to the objectives and goals you have set.

All types of gimmicks are used to draw prospects into the tent. Depending on the culture of the show it could be beautiful women, celebrities, giveaways, food and drinks or business card drop-in raffles.

This is not even the beginning of an all-inclusive list. The list could go on as far as the imagination can take it. Just remember that the gimmick you use should work toward the objectives and goals you have set.

The business card raffle is often used, and can be a very effective marketing tool. I will discuss this more in next month's column. But whatever lure you use, you must have your salespeople trained in how to quickly qualify or disqualify walk-ins.

Most will be tourists passing the time or looking for free handouts. Your people manning the booth cannot get involved with non-prospects while good prospects are not getting attention. The pace of selling at a show is much faster than that of a typical sales call.

You have to qualify quickly and get pertinent information so you can have an effective follow-up.

At times you will be inundated with walk-ins. You cannot spend too much time with any one, and you must disqualify the tourists quickly, no matter how beautiful or handsome they may be. Set up dry runs before the show to practice your questioning techniques to insure good qualifying practices.

Practice writing notes on the backs of the business cards or elsewhere so you will remember the pertinent details about qualified visitors.

Set up future meetings as possible. Make the most of the limited time you will have available for each person.

The show will be over before you know it.

Contact: globelsalesman@worldcityweb.com