

TIPS FOR GREATER RETAIL ENGAGEMENT AT TRADE SHOWS

Trade shows can be a great way to build profile and make lasting business relationships. However, for those trying to make the sale, this guide will share the importance of understanding the conflicting objectives of retailers in attendance at a trade show, so that you can maximize your opportunities.

As a retail buyer, what do you look for when you attend trade shows?

For major retailers, and their attending buyers and category managers, trade shows are multi-purpose, including:

- **Relationship building with current vendor base:** Meeting for a coffee, meals and a series of formal and informal meetings. Frequently, the Category Manager works with a product's broker on most day to day issues, and the trade show is an opportunity to interact and relationship build with the primary vendor contact. A meeting between the Category Manager and principles reinforces the relationship, and supports the important role of the brokerage team.
- **Top to Top meetings:** The show brings in the senior management from the vendors, which enables the Category Manager (and potentially their boss) to have important face time with them.
- **Sales Growth Opportunities:** Category Managers are typically looking for SALES, represented by bringing on new Vendors with new technology, new items and innovation. Interestingly enough, a Category Manager would be disappointed to see a new item from a current vendor at the trade show, that hadn't been presented to them previously.
- **New Innovations:** Trade shows are a great way to learn about other new products, emerging technologies, industry trends, packaging innovations and other useful insights.

What makes a retailer stop at a booth?

- a) **Location:** The biggest reason to stop at a booth remains location – a challenge for new vendors that have to earn the best locations over years of participation, or pay substantial premiums to the event management.
- b) **Engaging Design:** Booths are a window into the personality of the product and vendor. Its important that the atmosphere around the booth be both positive and engaging. An attractively set up booth aligned with the character of the vendor is a great way to draw people in.
- c) **Engaging People:** Hosts that are engaging and professional are also important are a reflection of the vendor's passion – and can be undermined by hosts appearing disinterested.
- d) **Priority Setting:** For larger shows, Category Managers simply don't have the time to stop at every booth, as they typically plan a day to visit current vendors, a day to walk the floor quickly looking for innovation and new items, and then ideally, if time allows planned return trips to the most promising new products / vendors. You may have one chance to drive home how you are innovative and can deliver new sales for the retailer.

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What type of information would a retailer want to see from a vendor exhibiting at a trade show?

As a foundation, the following information should be available to share:

- The packed products on display, and when possible, a sample to taste or take away
- A one-page handout about the product and the company (reinforcing the unique attributes of the offering)
- Contact list, including the broker or others that would be leading a new item presentation
- Where you are currently being sold (current listing base)
- Logistical information, including how product will be transported to the retailer

What would be the key questions a retailer would ask of any company exhibiting at a trade show?

Likely, these are short interactions, and the pitch needs to be well rehearsed and compel additional interest and discussion. However, some of the key questions likely to arise include:

- Tell me about your product (Where is it produced, process, unique story, innovation involved...)?
- Live samples for tasting / viewing or even taking away for key retailers.
- How many varieties? How large is the complete line?
- Is this your final packaging? (The labeling should be bilingual.)
- Is this Canadian nutritional info on the packaging?
- Is your product available in larger packaging?
- What food safety standards do you have in place?
- What is your current listing base?
- Is there an ability to be first to market?
- What is your costing?
- Is there a shelf life to the product?
- What is your product retailing for in your current listing base?
- What regions are you selling in (North America, Canada, Western Canada, BC)?
- What broker / distributor are you utilizing?
- Shipping logistics

What's a good sign that the food company is ready to sell to market?

Category Managers will be looking for several signs that they are ready for market, including:

- They are already selling to another region / retailer
- Compliant labelling
- Appropriate food safety standards are in place
- Is the packaging tight and professional, with a Canadian retail ready label?
- Knowledgeable representatives
- Where necessary, a broker is in place
- Industry information provided on category size and market segment trends
- Shipping logistics in place – already selling in the country and region
- Efficient and concise sales sheet
- Strong and well thought out retail sales plan

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What would be the most important tips to share?

Trade shows can be a terrific way to raise your profile and build sales for your products. However, it's important to:

- Create a positive and fun environment in your booth – people like to have a great time.
- Be passionate, however avoid appearing rude (sometimes being too aggressive can appear rude)
- Be prepared to answer questions at a micro level, however let the Retailer guide the depth of the conversation.
- Share contact information, exchange cards with everyone. Always ask for a business card or to scan their floor pass.
- Always follow up EVERY discussion with an email, thanking them for their time and keeping that relationship alive for the future.
- Display your products within your booth professionally and with pride – not simply tossed on a table.
- Food safety trumps everything – make sure you're solid in this area.

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