

Launch Pad

Boosting the impact of new products at trade shows— Some suggestions on how to do that

by Mark A. Hart, Visions Launch Editor, President, OpLaunch (mark_hart@oplaunch.com)

Trade shows can boost your new product success rate. But trade show impact is often sub-optimized during a new product launch. In his column, Mark Hart explains how to change that, as he gives practical suggestions and tips on how to maximize the use of trade shows.

After working months or years to develop a new product, how do you achieve an above-average response for that product from your target customers, partners, and media representatives at trade shows? What is important besides your process for recording sales leads?

This series contains practical insights for communication strategies on how to do that at trade shows from my observations at recent major trade shows. The tips range from having the right booth attributes to maximizing activities related to the show.

Build anticipation

At least several weeks before the trade show, inform your target customers and partners that your company will exhibit at the trade show and invite them to visit your booth to evaluate your new product and interact with your company's specialists. Even if they are unable to attend, they are likely to appreciate the personal invitation and they may have a colleague who plans to attend.

To improve the probability that these potential buyers will visit your booth, include an invitation to visit the booth at a specific time. For instance, include a note that says: "Visit our booth Monday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a valuable opportunity to meet an important industry leader or obtain a special promotional item." If you use the postal service, insist on a size that is larger than a standard postcard so that your message stands out. Include your booth number in the correspondence.

Launch media coverage

Activate your new product-specific public relations efforts as part of the trade show. Attempt to get press coverage for multiple types of target buyers—buyers who need to solve a problem immediately; those who are concerned about productivity; those who approve new technologies; and those who approve the purchases. If you are concerned with pre-announcing product specifics, focus on a benefit

statement such as "Visit our booth to learn how you can reduce your water analysis cost and duration by up to 50 percent."

Inform the field sales staff

Ensure that your field sales and service representatives are informed about the new product and that they receive adequate training before the public presentation at the trade show. Before providing an advance copy of the brochure and a price list, consider something more comprehensive, such as a customized training session delivered in a webcast format. Your field representatives are the ones who spend the most time in front of customers and they shouldn't hear about a new product from a trade journal.

Evaluate low-cost options for your company representative to participate in predefined activities during the trade show,

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such as holding an on-site press conference or hosting a new technology presentation.

Collect comments and application information from beta testers. Ensure that this information is incorporated into the collateral materials that will be available at the trade show.

Preopening activities

It is important to enlist sufficient resources to ensure that your booth set-up will be complete well before the deadline. Then you can use the later portion of the allotted set-up time to evaluate the offerings from other booths and interact with potential partners.

In addition, be sure to attend the show's opening ceremonies activities. This will give you a chance to renew acquaintances and survey attendees' expectations for the show.



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Press conferences

If you are planning a press conference, extend personal invitations to industry leaders and the writers and editors from prominent journals. You will need to compile an expected guest list from those individuals that you personally invited, plus the list of registered media representatives from the trade show registration. Someone from your firm should personally distribute media kits

to writers as you check their names against the expected guest list. When writers see their own names on the guest list, they are more likely to feel like VIPs.

Before the press conference, collect the writers' contact information and ask about the publications that they represent. This ensures that you will be able to analyze the results of your press

conference afterwards, and to follow up to see if the writers and editors have published articles in the future. Even if a writer does not get an article published about your product from this show, you can use your contact with the writer in planning for other events during the year.

Facilitating personal introductions

At your press conference you should facilitate personal introductions between industry leaders and writers. Also, seat individuals with common interests in small groups and allow enough time for them to interact before and after the press conference. Ensure that the leaders and writers meet the product specialists at your company.

Your press materials and presentation should emphasize the news value of your new product.

That is what writers and editors are looking for. Your material should present benefits that the customer will experience, and even include customer quotes, if possible. Avoid starting a press conference with company history or annual financial performance data. Avoid debatable taglines or self-promotional phrases like “We are the leader in this area” or “We provide the highest performance available.” Reporters are skeptical of such claims, which usually belong in the realm of advertising.

Planning the press conference

Before the press conference, empower your new product presenters by providing them with abundant resources such as input from product managers, public relations specialists, and media specialists so that they can make an outstanding impact.

One caveat: Be wary of allowing a high-profile speaker such as your CEO to dilute your intended new product messages, because he did not receive the appropriate training. Often these top executives are more comfortable talking about last year’s financial data or deflecting rumors about mergers or acquisitions than talking about specific products.

Press releases are abundant at these shows. They help writers who are looking for stories for their publications—both domestic and international. Make it easy for the writer to create a news story about your new product and successfully present it to their editor.

Media kits

About 10 percent of the exhibitors at the 2004 Pittsburgh Exhibition and Conference (www.pittcon.org) prepared media kits that were displayed in alphabetical order on long rows of tables in a multipurpose room shared by more than 100 media representatives. Exhibit 1 on this page shows some of these kits. The room also had lists of schedules, phones, computers with Internet access, snacks, and message boards.

Exhibit 1: Media Kits Displayed at a Trade Show



About 10 percent of the 1200 exhibitors prepared press kits for this trade show—2004 Pittsburgh Exhibition and Conference.

Because there are so many choices, the media kits that were bulky or hard to open were the ones that were more likely to be ignored or thrown away.

The more desirable media kits were that

“Activate your new-product specific public relations efforts as part of the trade show.”

ones that had a show-specific cover and a hint of newsworthy content. An example of a large company with an irresistible press release was “Thermo Electron Corporation Launches More Than Twenty New Products at PittCon 2004.”

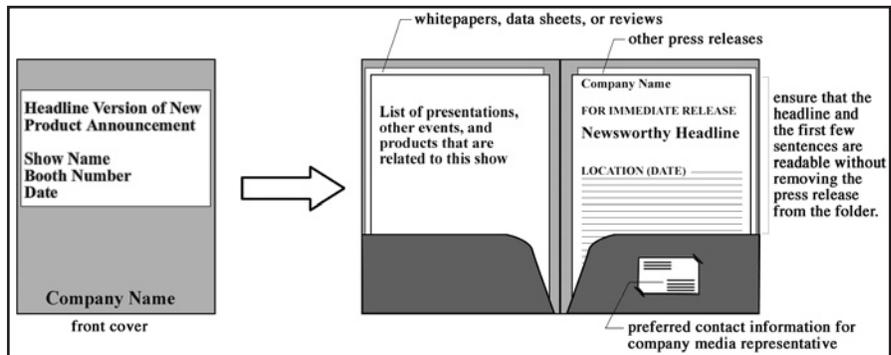
Exhibit 2 on this page shows a generic template for an effective media kit. A press release headline such as “XYZ Company demonstrates a mobile version of their popular hazardous materials analyzer for use by first responders” is more likely to be interesting to an editor than “MS 2500M with improved ion source is now shipping.”

When a properly resourced team invests in effective preshow activities and adequately prepares for press conferences, their product is more likely to be differentiated from other product offerings at important trade shows.

Part 2 of this series will cover attributes of trade show booth that can increase new product sales. 📌

Mark A. Hart, certified new-product developer and the President of OpLaunch, is Launch Editor of Visions magazine.

Exhibit 2: Media Kit Template for a New Product



The most effective media kits are rich in information that enables writers to easily create a news story about your product and successfully present it to their editors.

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