

DRIVING ATTENDANCE

Tips, techniques and best practices for attracting more and better attendees to the next-gen trade show and events.

AN EXCLUSIVE WHITEPAPER ON TRENDS AND INITIATIVES

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5 BEST PRACTICES FOR CONVERTING PROSPECTS INTO ATTENDEES

The best trade shows out there are top notch because they function as the heart of a community of professionals. Therefore, driving attendance is essential for any show that strives to become or remain the must-see destination in its industry. Converting high-quality prospects into attendees year after year requires a diverse and innovative marketing mix. Creativity before, during and after the show is key in capturing the right demographic and keeping them coming back for more. We asked some of the leading show professionals to share their best attendee-generation strategies, and we present the top five here.

1. Dazzle Them On The Show Floor

Attracting attendees starts by creating a community that the industry wants and needs to be a part of. So the cornerstone of any attendee-generation strategy must be the show floor. To beef up its show floor experience, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) started the World Culinary Showcase in 2009. The goal was to create a gathering space, with top-notch design and production values in which attendees could celebrate the industry. At the same time, the attendees would also gain valuable insight and information from first class chefs and restaurateurs who entertain and inform the crowd throughout the show.

NRA also uses awards programs and related pavilions, like the Kitchen Innovation Awards, to give attendees a one-stop shop for the most innovative products around.

“Many attendees have told us that the Kitchen Innovation Awards Pavilion is their cheat sheet on how to work the show,” says Mary Pat Heftman, Executive Vice President, Convention, at NRA. “When you are a large horizontal show the variety of products and exhibitors you have can sometimes be a detriment because there is so much to see. This gives attendees a way to see it all easily, but more importantly, high-level users have vetted it. It’s an attendee engagement tool!”

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EXPO



2. Tap Into Your Exhibitor Base

The number one reason people attend one event over another is because exhibitors that interest them will be present. That is according to the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), which asked show attendees what motivates them to attend certain shows while skipping others (for a comprehensive look at show attendance drivers, see chart on page 3).

Exhibitors are the key to attracting the right audience so working with exhibitors to reach their core attendees is essential.

“Every show needs to harness the knowledge and self interest of exhibitors to extend their attendee base,” says David Saef, Executive Vice President of Strategy and Marketing at Global Experience Specialists (GES), one of the world’s largest and best-known providers of exhibition and event services.

A comprehensive and cooperative exhibitor marketing campaign can push significant attendance and broaden the reach of any show. Macworld uses such an approach to great effect.

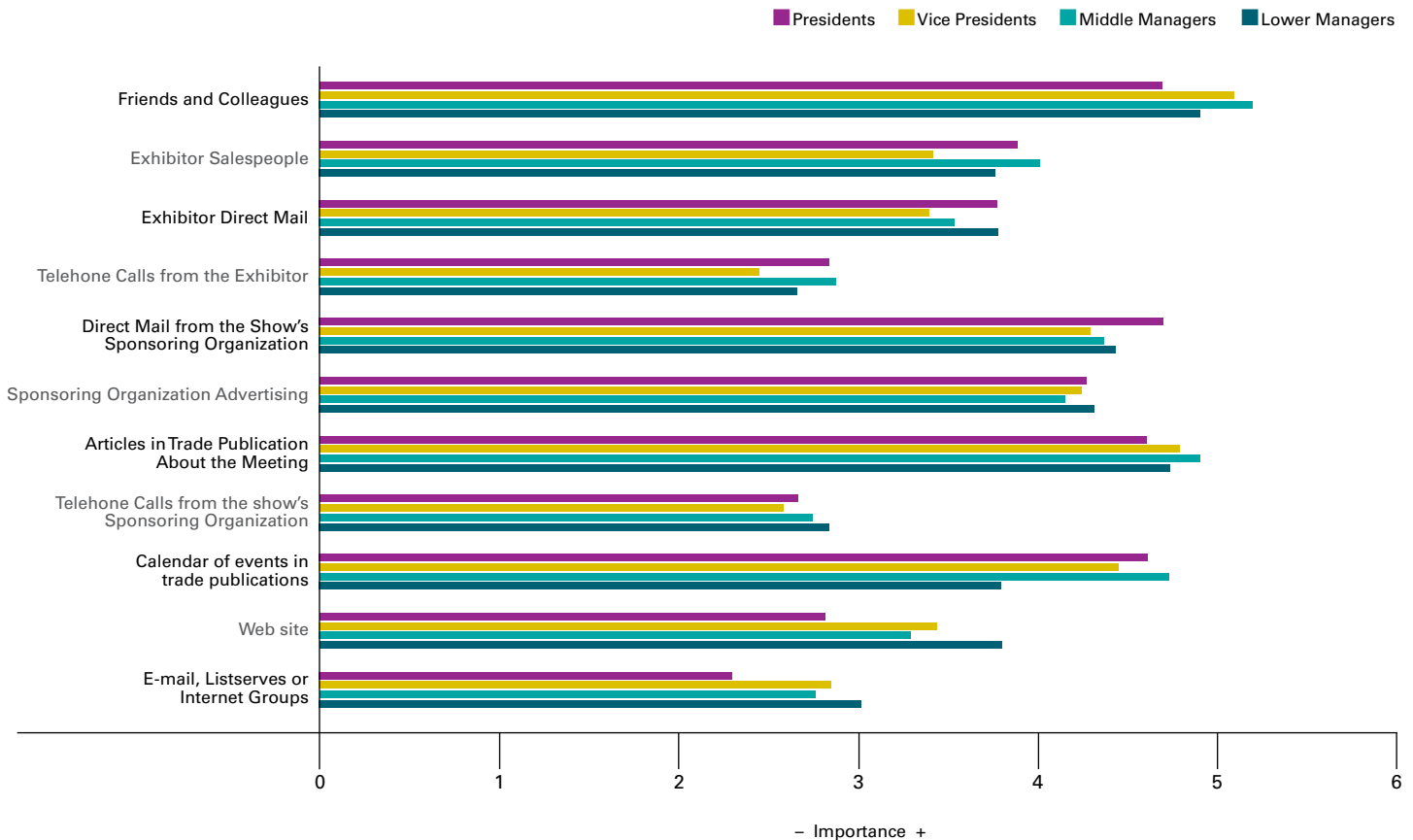
“We work really closely with our exhibitors,” says Linsy Miller, Vice President of Marketing at publishing and event giant IDG, which manages Macworld. “We build a toolkit for them that has customized HTML and their own priority codes with exhibitor-only rates that they can distribute to their customers and prospects,” says Miller. “It’s a huge advantage to the exhibitors and sponsors, who can now reach out to the buyers they’d most like to see at the event and extend them a personal invitation. It also has a secondary benefit for us in extending event awareness.”

The toolkit also includes a customized registration system that tracks registrant and pass allotment. “Exhibitor efforts deliver approximately 10 percent of Macworld’s verified attendance,” says Miller. “It’s a significant number for us.”

The show also encourages exhibitors to promote their upcoming presence at the show via their Web site and social media platforms, which can then push prospects to the show’s social media efforts and spark additional online recruitment.

EVENT ATTENDANCE HOT BUTTONS

Sources of Information Considered When Attending a Show for the First Time



Prospective attendees at all levels of an organization cite personal recommendations as their primary source when deciding whether to attend a show. Exhibitor outreach is also crucial.

Source: Center for Exhibition Industry Research, “Come one, Come All: Segmenting Attendees by Title.”

3. Have A Comprehensive Social Media Strategy

According to research from CEIR, the attendance of friends and colleagues is the most important factor in converting first-time attendees (see chart below). Social media is essential for creating the kind of viral buzz that will attract newcomers. It's also key for keeping your entire community of prospects engaged throughout the year and poised to commit sooner and with more enthusiasm, which further enlarges the viral snowball.

For effective attendee generation, social media must work in combination with your own Web initiatives and must connect with the right industry influencers so that your social media platforms become the best source for aggregate insight on the industry.

As an example, the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) has created a video wall on its site where industry members can upload a video or testimonial. The site is

incentivized with a contest that allows visitors to vote on the best video each week. Visitors are encouraged to use the site as a forum to talk about trends. That information is aggregated and filtered, and visitors can vote on whether they agree or disagree with the insights of their colleagues. All of this insight is pushed out through social media, and these same channels subsequently push fans and followers back to PMA's interactive Web site.

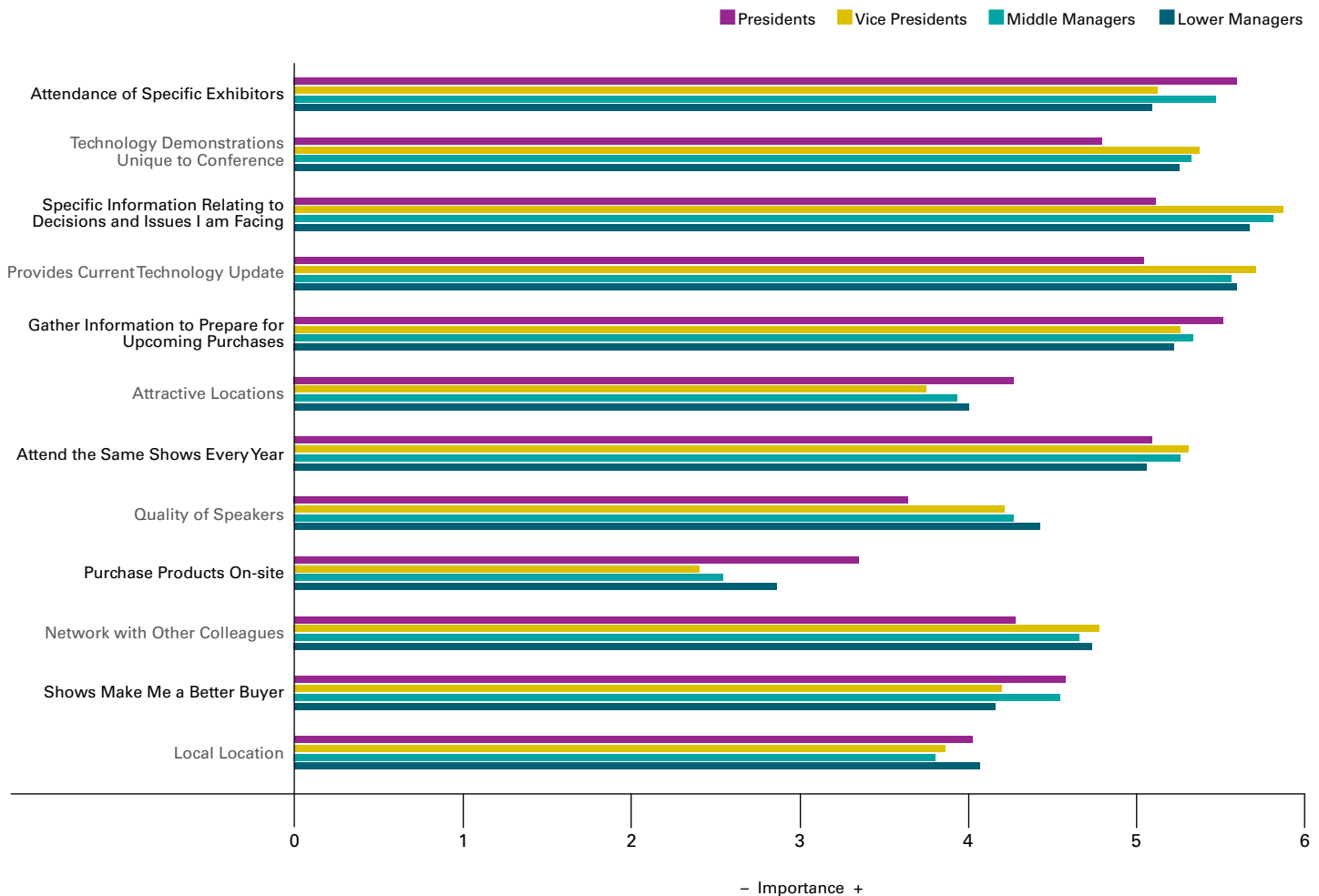
The result is an integrated online presence for PMA that allows it to be the preeminent aggregator of online insight on the industry. "It says to visitors, 'This is your community and this show is the place where your community will gather to take it to the next level through face-to-face interaction,'" says Kelly Koczak, Vice President of Marketing, at PMA.

4. Connect With Bloggers

Bloggers are influencers and you need to make them a channel of communication to your potential attendees. "Bloggers are essential in getting those maybes off the

MOVING THE NEEDLE

Factors that Influence Show Attendance



For executive managers, the most important factor in driving attendance is the presence of specific exhibitors (see item 2 on page 2).

Source: Center for Exhibition Industry Research, "Come one, Come All: Segmenting Attendees by Title."



dime,” says Saef. “You have to get bloggers to influence opinion, to say ‘pull the trigger now. You’re part of this group and you should be here.’”

The key, he says, is to identify the top 10, 20 or 25 bloggers in your industry and then establish a special relationship with them. When you sign a new speaker, add a session or set up an exhibitor demo, tell the bloggers before you tell the mainstream media. Let them get out ahead of the story so that it can resonate throughout the blogosphere, bounce to social media outlets throughout the industry and become something everyone is talking about.

PMA builds relationships with food bloggers, not only online but at the show as well, through a food bloggers’ workshop and panel discussion on site. It also started a guest blogger section on its own blog. “It’s an opportunity to engage different audiences and get them talking and sharing information before, during and after the show,” says Kozak.

5. Give Prospects A Virtual Taste Of The Show

Outdoor Retailer (OR) had great success last year when it produced a one-day virtual event on sustainable design. The event targeted a secondary, but still important, contingent of show attendees—the designers who create new products for finished-good manufacturers like North Face, Teva or Patagonia. It helped the show spotlight its somewhat under-served raw materials exhibitors and attracted 500 designers. But even more notably, it increased attendance among designers at Outdoor Retailer by 58 percent in a year when general attendance was up 15. “We had a good comeback show,” says Kenji Haroutunian, Vice President at Nielsen Expositions and OR Show Director, “but designer attendance well outpaced overall attendance because of our virtual design center.”

Another way to capitalize on virtual is to live stream one room of the show’s education track to offer potential attendees a sample of what they are missing without

actually turning your show into a complete virtual event. For optimal success a stream must be properly managed. Access to the stream should be registration-based. This gives you their information for subsequent marketing efforts. There should also be a facilitator who can take questions from streaming attendees so that they feel connected and get the most out of the experience. “There are people who are target attendees who are not going to be there for one reason or another in a given year,” says Saef from GES. “If I give them a taste, they might feel engaged enough to come next year.” ■

SPOTLIGHT: CASE STUDIES IN DRIVING ATTENDANCE

What’s Next For Mobile

E3 Insider Launches a next-generation app.

Mobile is where electronic communications is going. And although many shows have waded into the mobile pool with a show app, which, when done right, can help generate attendance, the newer developments in mobile technology are even more focused on converting prospects into attendees. One of the most promising is an interactive virtual experience like the Electronic Entertainment Expo’s E3 Insider. Call it Mobile App 2.0; E3 Insider is more like an online event experience that starts pre-show and continues to increase in value during the show.

Users can get a sneak peek at exhibitors’ virtual booths and view product announcements, photos and video trailers.

Once the show starts, E3 Insider provides a real-time news feed, streaming video of press conferences and a variety of video interviews, all available for desktop viewing, but optimized for mobile devices as well.

One of the most innovative elements is a virtual show floor map that will indicate where the most traffic is on the show floor so attendees can easily see where the action is. And those not in attendance will also have insight into what the most popular stops were. “It’s an extension of the brand,” says Linsy Miller of event and publishing giant IDG, which manages E3. “It’s a way to enhance the event for people who are in attendance—make sure they don’t miss things and let them do advance research on what they want to see. And it gives people who aren’t able to attend a glimpse of what’s going on.”

E3 Insider launched this year, but Miller predicts the ability to experience so much of the show beforehand will be a great tool for pushing attendance in years to come. The pre-planning tools are geared toward building anticipation and the level of interaction non-attendees can experience will build hype and buzz.

But in order to turn mobile experiences like E3 Insider into first-rate attendee recruitment tools, shows will have to revamp some of their older and clunkier online registration forms. Macworld, another IDG show, has already charged its registration vendor with optimizing for mobile. “As



people are leveraging their phones so much more, we see an opportunity," says Miller. "It's absolutely necessary that we look at our registration and data capture solutions and ensure that they are mobile enabled. We don't want a bulky, lengthy registration process on the phone to be a road block." ■

SPOTLIGHT: CASE STUDIES IN DRIVING ATTENDANCE

Making The Most Of Online Communities

Web-based efforts drive attendance with on-site connections.

Successful internet-centered attendee recruitment and retention strategies are long-term endeavors that involve building authentic communities around your event. The best models connect online communities with on-site extensions. Here are three ways the National Restaurant Association brings online and on-site together.

Star of the Bar. The Star of the Bar contest allows bartenders and mixologists to upload a video of themselves making a creative cocktail to NRA's YouTube feed. The online community performs the first round of judging, selecting the top six finalists who are invited to compete at the show and have their drinks judged by a panel of celebrity chef experts.

The top three finalists compete at an after-hours event sponsored by Bacardi. This year 27 bartenders and mixologists entered the competition, and nearly 4,000 people voted online.

The key to success, says Mary Pat Heftman, Executive Vice President, Convention, at NRA, is the on-site element. An online-only competition creates energy in cyberspace, but it doesn't always translate to the show floor. "The more

opportunities you have to come to the show and compete live, the more it maximizes the excitement," she says.

The contest was a key driver in increasing views of the show's YouTube videos from 440 in 2009 to 99,000 this year. And it isn't just YouTube. "Our social media efforts have taken off," says Heftman. "Page views to our blog have tripled in the last three years. Twitter followers have increased three fold. The contests have really boosted our engagement. It's made us relevant to a larger audience."

Kitchen Ink. Connecting its online presence to on-site events took a fun turn this year with the launch of the Kitchen Ink Web-site. Online, it's a place for chefs to show off their cooking-related tattoos by uploading pictures to the site. Several of the chefs who showed skin online were presenters at the World Showcase on the show floor where they could flaunt their body art in person, creating that face-to-face connection. "It was a great way to celebrate the passion for food that so many in the industry have. People had a lot of fun with it and there are some really well known chefs who participated," says Heftman.

Daily Deals. Another initiative that started online and culminated at the show was Daily Deals, an online group-buying discount program similar to Groupon. Several exhibitors agreed to offer special at-show deals of at least 50 percent off certain equipment. Those interested were required to purchase an online ticket, which had to be presented to the exhibitor at their booth in order to activate the deal and ship the product. "We didn't want to just move product," says Heftman. "We wanted to develop ongoing business relationships. Exhibitors were thrilled with the traffic they got to their booths, and on the attendee side, this is an opportunity for prospective attendees to see that there is value in product purchasing at the show that pays for their coming." ■

SPOTLIGHT: CASE STUDIES IN DRIVING ATTENDANCE

Using Virtual

Outdoor Retailer ups attendance with niche virtual events.

As marketers continue to segment their potential audiences, attendee outreach inevitably becomes more and more targeted. And as show organizers learn more about exactly what each segment of its audience expects from a show experience, a new challenge is born—to offer the most personalized approach to attendee generation possible. One burgeoning strategy to personalize the attendee recruitment process is creating niche virtual experiences targeted to specific audiences. They are a great way to add value for niche exhibitors by offering them a special online venue—an additional place to reach their target market. They also have been proven to help draw that target market to the larger show by whetting attendees' appetites for what they'll see, feel and experience, and who they'll meet face to face, at the larger show.



Outdoor Retailer's Virtual Design Center, called Sustainability in Design, did just that for the designer market. Although designers, who create new products for outdoor clothing manufacturers, are a small segment of the overall OR audience, they are still significant. Designers attract component manufacturers as exhibitors to the show, and that makes up about 10 percent of the show floor, according to Kenji Haroutunian, vice president at Nielsen Expositions and OR show director. "We have brands that are finished goods like North Face and Patagonia," says Haroutunian. "And then we have the companies that provide raw materials to those companies. They are somewhat underserved at the show. They don't get the key spaces because we're reserving that for finished-goods manufacturers that buyers want to see."

The virtual event let OR focus on the design community and offered those component manufacturers some star time. "It let us focus on the story of sustainability as it relates to raw materials sourcing and tell it in a virtual environment." The show included a virtual show floor and an educational component. "We had some good partners and we got about 500 designer eyeballs on it," Haroutunian says.

What it also succeeded in doing was driving attendance at OR up 58 percent among designers. Overall show attendance was up around 15 percent. "It was a good learning experience because we found out that it did drive a particular group of attendees to the show." ■

SHOW ORGANIZERS TELL US THEIR FAVORITE ATTENDEE RECRUITMENT TECHNOLOGIES



Mary Pat Heftman, National Restaurant Association. "YouTube has become a really important non traditional marketing tool for us. Our YouTube video views have gone from 430 to 99,000 in two years.

What's great about it is video lets you experience the flavor of the event. It gets people talking about you and thinking about you. That's what we all want."



Kelly Koczak, Produce Marketing Association. "We're starting to incorporate the use of Quick Response barcodes on our direct mail pieces so prospects can scan the code from the marketing piece and have access

to special discounts. It's another way to add value to our direct mail efforts."



Kenji Haroutunian, Outdoor Retailer. "Social media done right. There is a value to social media for events that goes way beyond what it presents to brands in the market. As a show, we are aggregating the community,

and that's what social media tools do as well. If you aggregate businesses together, which every trade show does, then you have a special function within that community to grease the wheels of communication, to help them learn from each other, to understand more of what's going on. So social media complements the trade show. The show is the live center of activity. Social media sites are the virtual center. It doesn't take away but adds to the draw of the face-to-face event.



Linsy Miller, IDG World Expo. "Our mobile app. At Macworld this was our third year with a mobile app, and more than 50 percent of attendees, plus people who weren't attending, downloaded it. We were

able to push mobile messages to half our attendees and to prospects for next year. It's a huge opportunity for us when it comes to attendee generation."