

How to Fail at a Trade Show

Thirteen faux pas to avoid.

Looking to generate more leads at your next trade show? Make sure none of the following apply to you.

1) Food in the Booth. Because nothing says “We’re exactly the type of professional, sophisticated organization with which you should do business” like a salesperson in the booth devouring a chicken sandwich. Save the overpriced show floor food for the cafeteria.

2) Table across the Front. Want to discourage potential leads from stopping to talk? Put a big table between you and the aisle. Instead, place your table in back or alongside the booth.

3) The Sitter. A close second to Table Misplacement is the practice of spending the show seated in the booth, rather than standing at the aisle making eye contact with attendees and encouraging them—verbally or otherwise—to stop and chat.

4) Talking on Cell Phones from the Booth. “Good afternoon, Mr. Attendee. You and your questions and the chance we might do business are important, just not as important as this call.”

5) Leaving Early/Arriving Late. We all love a crazy-busy show floor, but some of the best leads come when the show slows down, and those of us in the booth can invest ample time with the people that walk by. I’m shocked at the number of booths that stand empty for the first and last 30 minutes of the show hours simply because show traffic is slow.

6) The Premature Tear-Down.

Amazing the number of people who tear down their booth four hours before the end of the show. “We thought it was really important to be here, but hey, it’s been a long week and it’s time

for us to go home.” Never mind the money you spent for the floor space or the lead you never got because you were on the flight home by the time she walked by your booth.

7) The Vast Wasteland. There are two versions of this faux pas. The first is the complete booth with nobody in it. What? Assuming I’m interested in this company’s products, I can grab some literature and call them? Why even have a booth? The second version is the company that paid for the booth and never came to the show, so the booth sits empty but for a white placard with the company’s name. Might as well put up a sign that says “ABC Corp: We had better things to do today.”

8) The Interloper. My biggest pet peeve. This is the person who was too cheap to pay for his own booth so instead he roams into mine to try to sell me something. Since I try to conduct myself with a modicum of class, I don’t actually tell him what I’m thinking, which is, “You are not only advertising the fact that you’re too lame to pay for your own booth, but you’re distracting me from my purpose here. Get out.”

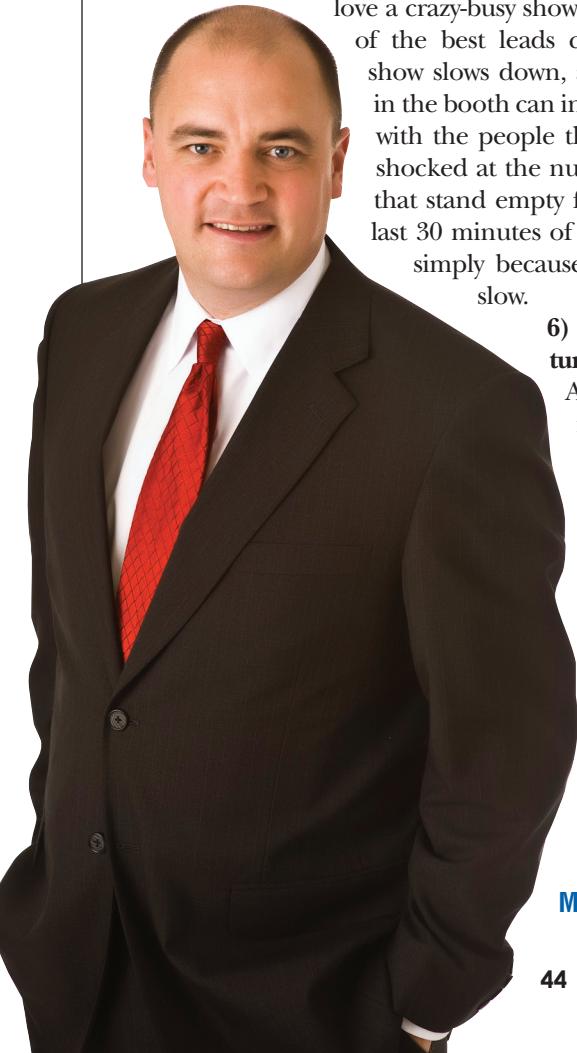
9) The Annoying Neighbor. Perhaps a third or fourth cousin to The Interloper, rather than standing at the front of the booth greeting attendees as they walk by, this person occupies the booth next to mine and insists on striking up conversation. Buddy, I’m sure you’re a great guy, but frankly, I didn’t drop five grand to be here so I could listen to you; I’m here to find new customers.

10) The Clutter Bug. I actually had a sales person preach about the benefits of lean while he stood in a booth that had paper, office products, lunch leftovers and samples strewn all over. The organization of your booth says a lot about you and your company.

11) Computers, Novels and Rip Van Winkle. A jaw dropper for me. Are you here to sell or to surf the Internet? The one that takes the cake, though, was the fellow across from me at a trade show this fall who literally sat down in his chair, propped himself up on his display and went to sleep. No kidding.

12) The Close Talker. For a demonstration, see Elaine’s boyfriend in “The Raincoats” episode of Seinfeld. In trade show terms, this is the person who puts his face three inches from yours while he explains his product. Take half a step back and he takes a half step forward. Yikes!

13) The Sloppy Dresser. See “Clutter.” I’m a suit and tie guy at a trade show. I know not everyone is, but do yourself a favor and skip the jeans and untucked polo. ■



MATTHEW KIRCHNER CEO, American Finishing Resources, LLC, mkirchner@afrnw.com