

More Bang for Your Buck

How to Get the Most Out of Trade Shows

By Carolyn J. Feimster, SCMD, President, CJF Marketing International, North Brunswick, NJ

ARE YOU GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TRADE SHOW WORK? Are you considering adding trade shows to your tourism marketing efforts? This past September I traveled to Orlando to attend La Cumbre – The Americas Summit, this country's largest travel trade show for the Latin American markets, to meet with some trade show gurus. They shared what makes trade shows so successful for their shopping centers and companies.

Because Hurricane Frances pounded Florida just days before La Cumbre and Hurricane Ivan was on its way, many delegates were uncertain if the show would still take place. The La Cumbre website kept delegates informed, providing alternative contact numbers since widespread power and phone outages disrupted service throughout Florida. By opening night everything was back to normal.

According to Rick Still, industry VP/the Americas, Reed Travel Exhibitions and managing director, La Cumbre, "It was critical that this show happen at this time because the Latin market is coming back." He said the tour operators were anxious to participate, even if it meant sending an alternative delegate from an office closer to Orlando.

The 15th Annual La Cumbre was three days of scheduled business appointments, seminars and networking opportunities for buyers/planners and suppliers/exhibitors throughout the Americas. Each year the show typically hosts 400 supplier companies (hotels, attractions, airlines and shopping centers) and 350 buyers (tour

operators) representing 27 countries.

The Latin market is finally coming back to the US after 9/11. In 2002, Latin America and the Caribbean represented over 13 million arrivals and contributed over \$20 billion dollars to the US economy. La Cumbre 2004 delegates were expected to conduct nearly \$1.5 billion in business during the show. The US Department of Commerce says the Latin American region accounts for 32% of international arrivals to the US, with Mexico representing 75% of the business, or 10 million visitors.

Prior to 9/11 the Latin markets were huge for the shopping center industry in specific markets because these shoppers spend four to five times as much as the domestic market.

Still's advice to shopping centers participating in his show: "First, analyze the ethnic population in your market, because so much of Latin American travel is VFR (visiting friends and relatives). Next, have a vision and commitment from senior management and the staff and resources to pursue the market."

The shopping center

industry's participation in trade shows is a recent phenomenon compared to the hotel, attractions and airline industries. Credit for participation should, in part, be given to Shop America Alliance. Because they could share a booth with Shop America, for the first time shopping centers were able to participate and receive the benefits without having to design and staff their own booth. This gave them first-hand experience in how to work and maximize trade show attendance.

Selecting the Appropriate Shows

So how can you best take advantage of trade show opportunities? Select only the most appropriate shows for your center or company. Start by finding out what shows your DMO (destination marketing organization, such as your CVB) attends. Do your research. What are your top markets? Focus on shows that target just those. As La Cumbre is for the Latin markets, Pow Wow is for all the international markets, World Travel Market is for the UK market, and the list goes on.

Next, what type of visitor do you see at your center? Is it mostly group travel? Then consider NTA, National Tour Association (see article from JONESREPORT January 2004) or ABA, American Bus Association. The meetings and conventions groups have their own trade shows. Just about every niche of the tourist mar-

ket has one. Be specific and know who you want to target and where they travel from.

Chris Szalay, director, marketing and tourism for North Park Management Company in Dallas, takes a methodical approach. "As soon as I accepted this position I researched all the leisure travel into Dallas, looking at the feeder markets and which segments generated the most business," she said. "I then looked at the percentage of business travel as well as the breakdown of group versus FIT (foreign independent traveler) business." Szalay develops a balanced tourism marketing plan with short, medium and long-term programs. Tourism is a long-term commitment, but as she points out, "Senior management does not always understand that, so I balance my programs with some three-to six-month group travel programs from "pre-formed groups" such as church groups, organizations, bank travel groups, etc."

Kathy Anderson, president of AZ Travel Marketing and tourism consultant to The Rouse Company and Fashion Show in Las Vegas, also analyzes arrival trends and forecasts of domestic and international inbound markets to a destination one year in advance. "This year-out analysis helps us focus on how best to maximize ROI with limited trade show budgets so we can build the trade show costs into the following year's budget. Yet we still maintain flexibility in case of unexpected industry changes and opportunities," she explained.

Pre-Show Prep Work

Once you have developed your trade show schedule, the prep work begins. If it is a pre-appointment show make sure the appointments you request are tour operators that come to your region and are interested in shopping. Before any trade show, I send e-mails to my target tour operators to pre-sell them by telling them about our new programs and asking them to request us for a meeting. Mutual requests by a tour operator and destination get top consideration for an appointment.

Work with your partners and develop a co-op mailing. For example, the UK is a top market for Grand Central Terminal, but the World Travel Market in London is just too costly for this year's budget. Therefore, we are partnering with the Empire State Building on a direct mail campaign and an e-mail blast to the top UK tour operators. In addition, Empire State Building Sales & Marketing Director Anna Domingo will take our collaterals for a nominal fee. "One of our tourism goals is to leverage our budget with other New York City icons. Working with the Empire State Building gives us the opportunity to have a presence at this important tourism industry show and visibility in our strongest market," explains Paul Kastner, SCMD, VP of Jones Lang LaSalle and director of marketing for Grand Central Terminal." Domingo points out that this not only leverages her budget but also gives the tour operators additional options. "We are not competing with Grand Central but are encouraging visitor traf-

fic to flow from one NYC attraction to another. Our competition is Chicago, London and Las Vegas," she explained.

Sally March, tourism manager for Mall at Millennia, a new upscale shopping center in Orlando, pursues markets based in part on information she receives from her CVB. "I begin by contacting the in-market reps our CVB employs overseas to find out what is new, what products are selling, who the current top operators are and any new companies that have recently opened," Marsh explained. She then compares this data with research she does on the trade show's website, which lists the buyers participating in the show. After she exhausts her first set of criteria (top markets with tour operators interested in shopping who send at least 10,000 passengers a year to Orlando), she widens her search to the smaller companies. Qualifying the buyers first makes it easier for her to prioritize her request for appointments. "In addition to requesting appointments with the more lucrative buyers, once I am at a show I always make time to visit the booth of the receptive tour operators who are also attending the show," March added. It is important to have relationships with both the tour operators and the receptive operators they work with here in the US.

For The Rouse Company, Anderson develops an e-mail communication plan prior to selecting her request for appointments to encourage the tour operators to request her. "To ensure higher readability, we have an e-mail template we

consistently use for brand recognition. The graphics are embedded in the e-mail because some operators have difficulty opening attachments. Often, we will e-mail individually instead of using group blasts to avoid being mistaken for spam," Anderson explained.

Collaterals and Message

Providing the appropriate collaterals in the proper quantity is important. Keep detailed notes from each trade show so you can refer to them when deciding on what quantities to print next year. As much as we love to distribute our sales kits, tour operators do not like to carry them at the show and usu-

We are working on an article featuring innovative programs established with DMOs such as your CVB, state tourism office, etc. Please submit story ideas to CFeims1000@aol.com or call 732-249-6080 and we will set up an interview.

ally request that we ship them. This means if we over pack, we are lugging everything back or worse, leaving behind materials for the garbage. If you are attending a show for the first time, ask the show organizers what they recommend.

Some malls, like Fashion Show in Las Vegas and Mall at Millennia, distribute their sales kit on a CD.

In addition to the proper collaterals, March also understands the importance of presenting the appropriate message to the operators. In her case, it is selling the experience of Mall at Millennia as well as giving the operators something

of value for their clients. The secondary message is the Mall at Millennia as a dining destination and potential venue for events. "At the trade show, we provide the tour operators with a deluxe shopping bag that includes a coupon book, directory and the sales kit on CD," she said.

Networking and Seminars

Many times trade shows offer educational seminars. Seek out those of interest and attend. At La Cumbre attendees could learn the latest statistics on the Latin market. There were also seminars on customer service, including one on a hotel sales training program designed to create and maintain customer value in a globally competitive economy and one on Walt Disney's service philosophy.

There is much more you can do to capitalize on your trade show investment. In January we will focus on added-value events, the necessary follow up, and will provide you with a trade show checklist. ■

CJF Marketing International offers a range of services for creating and implementing strategic tourism, economic development and marketing programs for shopping centers, urban entertainment projects, downtown retail districts, communities and commercial properties globally. The firm also offers educational programs and seminars for corporate meeting planners, shopping center developers, communities and re-development agencies. Feimster can be reached by phone at 732/249-6080 or by fax at 732/545-3138.
