



WHAT TO LOOK
FOR IN TRADE
CONFERENCES

SHOW TIME!

TRADE SHOWS: Are they worth your time and money? To go or not to go, that is the question. Each year, in North America alone, there are more than 10,000 trade shows and professional meetings. Of these trade shows, more than one hundred are solely related to the day spa and salon market. You could arguably attend a trade show a week, except for national holidays, and still not cover them all. How do you choose the best one(s) to attend? The answer is simple—research and planning. There is no substitute for doing your homework.

First and foremost, you must realize that trade shows are businesses. You receive a myriad of solicitations on why you should attend a particular show. While you are getting these, potential exhibitors are also receiving pleas for them to attend as well. There is a commonality of interest in your attendance and that of a company that wants to market services or products to you. For both parties, it is a convenient way to bring together potential clients and vendors. ➔

by Ameann DeJohn and Robert Trow

Making an investment

First and foremost, selecting a trade show is a serious business decision. Approach it the way you would make any investment in your company. Determine what you are looking to accomplish by attending. Second, determine your budget. How much can you afford to spend in terms of hard (actual dollars) and soft (lost working time)?

The educational programs should offer breadth and depth on all aspects of your profession including science, technology, the spa business and marketing—to name only a few topic areas.



How much will airfare, lodging, meals, local transportation, and registration fees cost? What will be the loss of income if you attend? What can you realistically expect the return on your investment (ROI) or payback be? If you cannot readily answer what you will gain by attending, stay home.

Can you afford to take another person with you? If so, whom and what value will they add by joining you? Do they have the temperament and personality to work the show with you? Remember, to get the most out of a trade show, you have to be prepared to work very diligently.

Trade shows are not a holiday. They are hard, tiring work. Pay attention to the show's location.

Are there other trade shows with equal offerings that are more convenient or less costly to attend? Some locations naturally are more expensive to put on a trade show than others.

Here are some helpful hints for answering the question of whether a particular show is right for you and your company.

- Consider the stated goals of the trade show organizers.
- Research the promoters of the show. What is the organizer's background and reputation?
- Determine how long the show has been around. Use the Internet as a research tool to obtain information about the show, its venue and history. New shows carry much more risk. Look for great track records.
- Study both this year and last year's program guide and attendance list to see if it fits with your objectives.
- Contact colleagues who may have gone to previous shows to obtain their opinion.
- Ask vendor representatives, owners and sales representatives who you know and trust. They often can provide insight into which are the best, most professional and productive trade shows to attend.
- Make sure the size of the trade show is sufficient to provide a multitude of opportunities in terms of programs, exhibitors and networking.
- Think carefully about your goals and objectives and what do you hope to accomplish by attending.
- Review the educational program to make sure it offers both solid and varied professional development opportunities?
- The topics offered to attendees should be of interest to you and readily further your goals.
- Ensure that the educational and professional development program is strong and diverse.
- The speakers should be nationally respected experts and leaders in their respective fields. It is advisable to go to www.google.com to learn more about the presenters.
- Avoid shows that only offer self-serving manufacturers' programs.
- At the same time, seek out shows that do offer manufacturers' classes that provide additional information on lines that are of interest to you. Get to meet the people who run these organizations and let them know who you are. Personal contact will yield dividends for all.

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Look for exhibitors who are good listeners and can readily offer professional help and assist you with your needs.

The content

The educational programs should offer breadth and depth on all aspects of your profession including science, technology, the spa business and marketing, ingredients, emerging trends, economics, and emerging legal issues—to name only a few topic areas.

Networking opportunities with others in your field are always an important show component.

The potential to seek out either new career opportunities or recruit additional staff to meet a present or anticipated need is another factor to consider. Often, you can meet individuals who could add value to your team, if not now but in the future, as staffing is always an ongoing issue.

Be certain that there are opportunities to learn about new product and service opportunities to expand or energize your business or skill set. Look for something you currently do not offer that is worth serious consideration. Many times, adding lines or services provides inroads to reenergize staff and increase operating profits without incurring greater overhead.

The list of exhibitors must have the potential to present the latest in new offerings, science and technology. Make sure the trade show is not simply an on-location bazaar or flea market.

If your current vendors are in attendance, seek them out. They usually offer significant financial incentives through “show specials.”

Search for the companies that you currently work with. Ask for updates on forthcoming products, launches and professional treatment protocols. Raise issues you would like clarification on with them that can make your current relationship stronger and more profitable. Let them know the good, bad and ugly about doing business with them. Sometimes you can meet directly with the owner or CEO. Take the time to tell them how they could help you and your business. Let them know, very directly, what you need from them. Do not be shy.

Attend the shows that can help you to bring back new ideas to implement, either personally or in your business.

Participate in round-table discussions or “Q & A” sessions. These forums allow you the opportunity to share ideas with new and old colleagues as well as listen to theirs.

Remember, it helps to network and establish relationships with others that you can get advice from or bounce ideas off of from different regions and disciplines both during the meeting and afterward.

Map your day

Prior to attending the trade show, map out your schedule. Plan your time as though you were making a major investment in your business. Why? Because you are!

Set up your calendar in advance to best take advantage of all the opportunities the trade show offers.

Take notes—none of us have the memory we think we have. Information is critical.

At the end of each day, review your notes. If something or someone impressed you, reach out to them and learn more whether it be a vendor, speaker or colleague. Everyone likes to respond to someone who shows interest in what they have to say or offer. Do not be shy. Introduce yourself wherever you can. Reach out and make new friends.

First impressions

Before you walk onto the exhibit floor, pay attention to your appearance, take the time to dress professionally and comfortably—especially in regard to your shoes. The standard dress code is comfortable, smart-casual clothing.

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Make your
choice carefully
and you will
reap a great
return on your
investment of
time and money.

Do not get hung up by people or exhibitors in whom you have little interest. You are doing everyone a favor by not wasting your time or theirs. It is acceptable to politely say you are not interested or are en route to another place.

Avoid exhibitors that seem only interested in scanning your card or offering a canned sales pitch. Look for good listeners who can readily offer professional help and assist you with your needs.

Do pay attention to exhibitors who ask you about your company, your goals and expectations. The best vendors are also the best listeners. They know, as well as you, that their products or services are not for everyone.

Evaluate exhibitors on their appearance, energy level, and offerings. How a company presents themselves to you during the sales process can tell a great deal about how you will be treated if you become a client.

A great exhibitor can also provide "value added" consulting services to you by offering marketing information, updates on emerging science and technology, retailing tips and merchandising ideas.

Putting it all together

After time on the exhibit floor, review the information you obtained. Discard the materials that do not interest you and keep notes of those that did attract your attention. Go back to potential vendors a second or third time with a careful list of questions to learn more.

Make note of the expected follow-up from those with whom you spoke. Evaluate the promptness and thoroughness of their follow-up with you. How a company responds to you when they are trying to obtain your business can well be a significant indication of how you will be treated as a client.

Always remember you are spending a great deal of time and money to attend a trade show. To get the most out of it, select the right show for you, map out your plan of action and at the end of each day, review what you set out to do and have actually accomplished. Plan for the next day as you would your first. Remember, you are working.

Dan Thompson of Oasis Wellness, a leading Canadian spa, sums up his philosophy quite simply on trade shows with regard to the exhibit hall: "I attend trade shows to use my time more efficiently." Instead of looking at every product, service or course that comes across his desk all year, he gathers the

information that interests him in a file, then selects a trade show featuring the companies and topics he wishes to learn more about. The show gives him an opportunity to compare suppliers and product ranges quickly and efficiently. He spends the first day looking at everything and the remaining time going back to obtain more detailed information on what interested him and his company. He often brings a team with him and all members scour the trade show floor for items of interest. They gather at the end of each day, share notes and decide which companies they wish to revisit.

Valerie Hassan, a leading esthetician in Boston, MA, selects trade shows primarily based on their educational offerings: who is presenting and the topics. Her goal is to keep herself updated on trends, emerging science and technology while expanding her professional network.

Whether looking for new products, education or networking opportunities, plan out your schedule and use your time wisely. Trade shows are a wonderful, effective venue to learn about many things. However, make your choice carefully and you will reap a great return on your investment of time and money. If you select the appropriate trade show, you will see dividends accrue to you both personally and professionally for years to come. **LNE**

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