

VISPROM Part 1

Contents

Quality Quest

Why you must invest in first-time attendees

A word about timeline

Creating attendee-friendly shows

Fighting Falloff

List management

Attracting tomorrow's attendees today

Other white papers include:

Visitor retention

Showprom in a downward recession

Communication

Market research

Knowledge leadership

The exhibitor knowledge gap

Trade show sales

Keep up to date with developments and business opportunities through our online Market Intelligence Service.

Oi you! - or - How to increase trade show visitors.

Imagine for a moment that you produced an event and no one came. The thought produces cold chills.

With any show, there's always the possibility that attendance will be below expectations. Additionally exhibitors are sophisticated enough to realise that if they see 100 people in one day, that's not necessarily a quality day. It's more important for them to see 10 quality buyers.

What works best for a specific show depends on many factors. There's no one formula that works for every industry, every season, every location. As a result show organisers are constantly tinkering, revising stale promotions, testing new media, changing timing and so on. But what happens all too often is that the basics of visitor promotion get forgotten.

Quality Quest

Forget the total attendance figures; find the power buyers Exhibitors are getting sophisticated enough to realize that if they see 100 people in one day, that's not necessarily a quality day. It's more important for them to see 10 quality buyers.

The best method for attracting exhibitors is to attract attendees, of course. But astute show managers realize that that means more than just attracting the thundering hordes. There are certain key buyers -- the ones with money in their pockets, and the authority to spend it -- that exhibitors particularly want to see. If show management can entice more of those buyers to the show, everybody wins.

How can you determine which are the most important companies to target, and who are the most important buyers within those companies?

This might sound too simple, but the best way to start is to ask the vendors. Organisers might hold a series of meetings with vendors, inviting both those who have,

This White Paper underlines the principles and best practice of visitor promotion as well as exploring great attendance promotion ideas from the staid to wild, simple to complex, inexpensive to costly.

In addition the paper examines ideas that have worked well for trade and public show organisers across the world pulling in large, enthusiastic audiences of visitors and potential customers.

Hopefully, they'll get your creative juices flowing and lead to great ideas that will work well for building attendance at your next event.

and those who haven't, signed up to exhibit. Ask them what companies they want to see at the show, and the titles of the decision makers. They're usually very willing to tell you this. They know it will help them have a better show, and they're flattered to be asked.

The next step is to call the companies the vendors have identified, and ask for the names of the individuals who hold the titles the vendors specified. Double-check with the company to be sure that each individual does in fact have the appropriate responsibility. This is a time-consuming process, but a necessary one.

But it's also necessary to go beyond vendors' recommendations: The vendors might each mention the same dozen names. But you can add to that list. Go through trade publications looking for lists you can buy, or talk to list brokers. Get lists of similar titles at similar companies.

Trade magazine readership surveys, or your

own post-show surveys, can also indicate which titles have buying authority. Such surveys have shown that although the chief executives of smaller companies attend some event, the heads of large companies do not. In larger companies, manufacturing managers and manufacturing engineers have the money and are the decision makers, not the chief executive. Thus, attendance promotions aimed at the chief executives at larger companies would hit the wrong targets.

Reaching the buyers

One way to increase representation from leading companies, is to develop a "Top 50 Program" to supplement the standard mailing to previous attendees.

The selected individuals receive a special registration package. A personalized cover letter tells the recipient how many people from his or her branch attended the preceding year. The letter goes on to say that "in order to remain competitive," the branch should send a certain number of people to the next show, and that this package will make it easier to do so.

The package includes complimentary registration forms, a conference brochure, a fact sheet on the show and a fact sheet on the Top 50 companies' participation. That way, they know their competitors are sending people. The registration packages are also sent to Top 50 companies that have not been attending the show.

Show managers and industry authorities suggest additional methods for reaching the buyers themselves. Issue a special invitation but a phone call is even better. When someone picks up the phone and calls, that creates human interaction. That human interaction can be very persuasive. A person is harder to ignore than a piece of mail, and taking the trouble to make the call conveys the message that you genuinely want the individual to be at the show.

And keep those phone calls coming. Call to ask their thoughts on the development of the program. Tell them that you'd like to be sure that you're covering everything that's important to them. Let them know that your intention is to meet their needs. Everyone responds well to an acknowledgment of their importance.

Another possibility is to ask quality buyers to be on an advisory council for the show, or even participate in the program itself. Those who accept will thus have a sense of "ownership" in the program. And even those who don't accept will be flattered to have been invited.

Special treatment

Special invitations, special consultations and special offers all help to get the quality buyers to the show. Once they're there, the VIP treatment should continue. You might want to go so far as to have certain power buyers met by limousine or helicopter when they arrive. Whatever the perks may be, buyers should be told in advance what to expect, as a further incentive to get them to attend.

The organizer may have the show open at a certain time only for key buyers, or arranging for them to be given a special tour of the show. Decision-makers really don't have either the time or the inclination to go from stand-to-stand. Perhaps provide a hotline on which power buyers can contact show management to get a targeted list of exhibitors showing the products they particularly want to see.

Buyers can get appropriate attention whenever they walk the show if they have a ribbon on their name badge that identifies them as influential. Show managers should explain to those buyers that vendors, recognizing the significance of the ribbon, will be sure that a senior staff member assists them at the booth. And be sure that exhibitors watch for the ribbons so they can follow through.

A VIP lounge, with phones, fax machines and other office equipment, will make life easier for buyers while they're at the show. Exhibitors are told that their best customers can have access to such a lounge but the exhibitors themselves pay for it.

Key buyers possess a great deal of information you need. On-site meetings provide a great opportunity for them to share that information, and at the same time enhance their feelings of importance.

For example, focus groups are held to determine buying plans, the role the show plays in purchasing decisions, how buyers rate one event against competitive shows and what they think should be done to improve the show. Those who are selected to participate in the focus groups are classified by their company's size, and according to whether they have buying influence or purchasing authority. Thus, the participants are in meetings with others of similar stature, and are being shown that their opinions are valued.

Another effective strategy is to invite key buyers and top vendors to a meal function at which they can either discuss a topic of mutual interest or hear a speaker. Make it clear that this is a special program for people at their level; that they will be in a setting that's appropriate for them.

Such a program does more than just pamper buyers, however. Then top decision-makers would like to have a personal relationship with the top executives from the vendors to be able to provide input into product development, or to provide feedback on customer service. Knowing that they will have the opportunity to develop such a relationship is yet another attraction.

Facilitating meetings between vendors and buyers is another possibility. Ask exhibitors for the names of companies they'd like to meet with then try arranging appointments with buyers from international companies -- the ones vendors might find it more difficult to reach.

Whatever techniques you try, you can continue to get mileage out of them even after the show is over. Send a press release after the show saying how unbelievably great the event was, and mention the big names who attended. That creates an aura that this is appropriate for these kinds of people.

Soon, people will want to come to your meeting, will want to be called for their ideas. Word-of-mouth will help, too, as the top people who attended the show tell their peers how well everything went. That's why it's important to see that someone is in charge of the various "power buyer" programs to make sure that they do go well.

Quality buyers are essential to the health of a show. It's obvious that identifying those buyers, getting them to your show and keeping them happy while they're there requires extra effort. But all that effort pays off for exhibitors -- and thus for show management.

Why you must invest in first-time attendees

The old adage still rings true: It costs more to acquire a new customer than it does to retain one - no matter what business you're in. In fact, studies in several industries have shown that the cost of retaining an existing customer is only about 10 percent of the cost of acquiring a new customer.

Without a doubt it costs more to acquire new attendees. The show has to be new every year, with a new value proposition, to expand beyond those people who have come for 40 years and are predisposed to come back.

As patterns of attendance change, shows are adjusting their marketing cycle. The most important strategy is to stay in front of attendee prospects and be present in the thought process when it's time for them to make the commitment

That assumes show promotion has reached them. First-timers have a much higher likelihood of hearing about a show through word of mouth but it indicates that fewer first-timers learn about shows through traditional promotion techniques.

The good news is that across shows and industries, attendance appears to be surging. Sustaining that momentum, however, promises to be a real struggle. Outside of a core audience, show organizers must resell existing customers - and lure first-time attendees - in an intensely crowded media environment.

Rising challenge, falling numbers

Increasing first-time attendees has jumped from fourth place to first as show organizers' No. 1 marketing challenge. By identifying first-timers organizers are starting to address this as a priority, rather than just one of their objectives.

The change makes perfect sense. In the wake of 9/11 and the recession, about 25 percent of attendees across all shows disappeared and organizers' biggest worry was simply reaching attendees. After they gained back a respectable share of attendance, their thinking shifted to international attendees, then power buyers. After responding to exhibitors' calls for quality organizers are now focusing on growth.

Unfortunately, the number of first-timers as a percentage of total attendance at shows may be on the decline. First-time attendees used to account for 35 to 39 percent of total attendance at shows however, recently the percentages of new attendees have dropped to the low 30s.

Do's and don'ts for marketing to first-timers

DO:

Start with the basic value proposition of the show. Show organizers get very excited about what's new with programs. But that's not the tack your messaging to first-timers should take. Don't lose sight of the importance of clearly defining your show's strengths and who you are.

Keep marketing messages, relevant, simple and low-tech. Don't get overly complicated with promotions. The simplest and the more direct are the best.

Use testimonials. Hearing from peers is much better than me telling you what to do.

Use market churn to your advantage. One exercise to go through is asking what new market segments are going to help exhibitors and how to benefit their purchasing activities. Nine times out of 10, you'll find you're not offering education for certain titles that should be coming.

DON'T:

Assume anything, even that prospects know the name of your show. Make a spot in your promotions to explain who buyers and exhibitors are. If you don't, people won't understand it's a show for them.

Expect to succeed without a pre-existing relationship. That's one reason show organizers are teaming with publishing partners. If you can get your messages in context the likelihood of response is a lot greater. But if your customer's online relationship with you is limited to getting promotion, the likelihood he will respond is much less.

Go after new segments unless exhibitors want them or you can get critical mass. The last thing you want is for any first-time attendee or exhibitor to say, 'That was a waste of time'. Exhibitors may have to learn how to work with those channels. They need to see it as an opportunity.

Hold all information for the big brochure. Lead times for marketing are much longer, even though attendees make up their minds at the last minute. Save-the-date postcards and short e-mails are the new rule of thumb.

DO:

Help people plan in advance. Use a robust matchmaking program connected to your database of industry products. It's a landing point for the person looking for a product or a regional or local provider, and it allows appointment-setting for the show. A floor plan that highlights focal areas for different audience segments will debut this year to make the very large show less confusing for first-timers.

Market during the show and year-round. Typically organizers ramp up a six-month, pre-show marketing cycle. During and after the show, send messages to people who aren't there about what they've missed. It never stops.

DON'T:

Let your promotion overwhelm them. Because there will be so much at the show, relevance becomes really important. Segment your audience, figure out the profile they fit, and make the promotion match their needs.

A word about timeline

So when should you start your visitor promotion campaign. Three months prior to the show opening. Six months prior?

Assuming they're working on a 12 month promotion timeline, most organizers work on a 9 month exhibitor promotion campaign followed by a 3 month visitor promotion campaign. But why?

When we all used direct mail, flyers and tickets it was costly to run visitor promotion over the entire marketing campaign of the event. But with the advent of email, social networking sites and a host of other messaging options there's no reason to keep your visitor promotion to the last second.

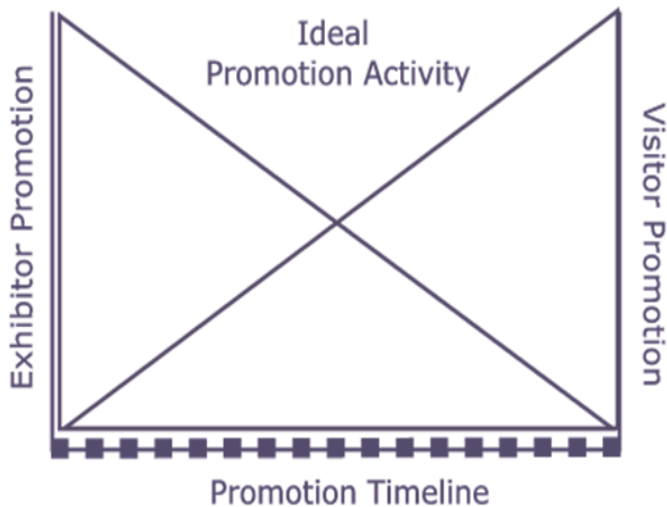
It amazes me that some organisers don't correlate the lack of pre-registration and onsite traffic to the length of their visitor promotion campaign. The longer you run the marketing the more potential visitors will hear about the event and more will turn up. It's simple.

When you're starting the marketing for exhibitors, add a line or two about visiting. Quite a few companies won't exhibit at an event until they've seen it from a visitors perspective.

Traditional visitor promotion timeline



Punts "Bowtie" visitor promotion timeline



Make it easy for them. Give them options as to how they can register to see the event.

As the time line progresses reduce the exhibitor promotion and increase the visitor promotion.

Six months into your timeline, exhibitor promotion / visitor promotion should be 50/50.

Twelve months into the promotion and your exhibitor promotion should be 2% (promoting next years event) and visitor promotion and 98%.

There are multiple ways to communicate with your target market over the entire show marketing timeline.

Some methods of communication are much more effective, appropriate and cost efficient than others. As always, your budget will dictate how many touch points you can have with

your target market. Also keep in mind that you should be trying to find ways to drive the right people at the lowest cost per qualified lead.

And get the exhibitors in the same mindset.

As soon as an exhibitor signs up for their stand get them thinking "visitor promotion". This will reduce the likelihood of them pulling out of the event if they've spent time and money of promoting their presence at your event.

However, there efforts will help you sell more space. Themore a competitor sees pre-show marketing the more they'll want to reduce the competitive advantage of the competitor and perhaps take part in the show.

What better visitor promotion than that executed by your exhibitors.

Not only does it get more visitors to the event, it reduces your costs as well.

Creating attendee-friendly shows

Tips on reviewing your event from an attendee's point of view

Find out what attendees value

- Explore all methods of gathering intelligence, from personal intercepts during the show to on-site survey cards or

regi  **box**

Event registration is a cost, right?
You could probably do it yourself, right?

But finding the software, equipment and all the other things is a pain, right?

If you had a registration company in a box it would solve your problem, right?

WRS Confexsys have launched regibox, an "out-of-the-box", do-it-yourself solution.

For more information go to:
<http://confexsys.com/regibox/>

How to increase trade show visitors.

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This seminar underlines the principles and best practice of visitor promotion as well as exploring great attendance promotion ideas from the staid to wild, simple to complex, inexpensive to costly. In addition the seminar examines ideas that have worked well for trade and public show organisers across the world pulling in large, enthusiastic audiences of visitors and potential customers. Hopefully, they'll get your creative juices flowing and lead to great ideas that will work well for building attendance at your next event.

Some of the subjects covered in the seminar.

- Attendee Communication
- Attendance Boosters
- Attendance Promotion Notions
- Coping With the Trade Show Terrible T's - terrorism, travel, technology, and trimming.
- Creating awareness and credibility
- Guerrilla marketing techniques
- Ideas for attracting and keeping attendees
- Identifying the international buyer
- Reaching the buyer
- Forget attendance figures; find the power buyers
- Oomph that lures customers back time and again
- Positioning an event in the market
- Promotional Tools and Opportunities
- The Visibility Campaign - How to grab media attention and beat out the competition
- The Visitor promotion timeline
- Trolling for International Attendees

The seminar is run as an internal dedicated event for individual organisers in order to address individual show needs.

For more information send and email to admin@ispypublishing.com



Exhibition Management - Costs - Budgeting - Exhibit Design - Graphics - Show Services - Measuring - Success - Sales & Marketing - Establishing Objectives - Show Selection - Space Selection - Direct Mail - Exhibitor Promotion - Advertising - Public Relations - Salesmanship - Hospitality - Lead Management - Show Evaluation - Customer Service - International Exhibiting - Strategic Selling - Time Management - Recruitment and Selection - How to Grow Show Profit - Successful Conference Planning - Customer Care - Finance for Non-Financial Managers - Stress Management - Risk Assessment - Marketing - Promotion - Exhibiting 101 - Show Management - Best Practices - Operations- Show Evaluation - Visitor Promotion - Research - Planning - New Revenue - Sponsorship - Venue Management - Contractors - Attendance - Associations Benchmarks - KPI - Technology - Registration . . .

we speak events



computer/digital surveys.

- Do pre- and post-show surveys, and compare expectations and evaluations.
- Be sure to include as many open-ended questions as possible. (Typical surveys state the anticipated issues and expected responses but neglect more experiential input.)
- If you can't produce data-rich, cross-referenced survey reports, hire a survey company that can help you look at target segments.
- Survey registrants who didn't show up and last year's registrants who did not attend this year's show to discover why.
- Use focus groups and telephone calls to discover attendee issues.

Use advisory panels

Mix buyers and exhibitors to raise the level of discussion to real issues, not petty complaints.

Include power buyers whose opinions exhibitors will value. **Don't skew your input** by naming only supporters to panels. Choose people who are unafraid to give objective, honest feedback, not cheerleaders.

Assign issues/areas for advisory board members to pay special attention to during a show.

Hold a brief meeting during the show to take immediate action on any noted problems.

Schedule a formal meeting or teleconference within a few weeks after the show.

Encourage advisory panel members to express ideas about strategic issues, as well as operations.

Create special hours

Some shows offer pre-show tours or special times for international attendees, as well as an international lounge where special foods, translation services or international newspapers are available.

Many shows offer VIP hours for key buyers and give them special rooms for conducting business.

Appointment-only hours can ensure attendees their target vendors will be available for them.

Early-bird hours with breakfast and coffee may draw early-risers into the show. Late-afternoon receptions on the floor can keep attendees there rather than returning to hotels.

Offer incentives for attendees

A recent survey asked 500 show organizers about their relationships with attendees and value-added initiatives they offer.

- 65 percent more shows are co-locating.
- 42 percent more are offering matchmaking services.
- 39 percent more are offering premium incentives and gifts.
- 329 percent more are offering money-back guarantees.

Tips on making your Web site more attendee-friendly

Online check up

- Is your Web site easy to navigate with specific buttons/areas?
- Is online registration easy? Does it "recognize" members or previous registrants?
- Are you taking advantage of artificial intelligence that can track user tendencies and preferences?
- Is there a social networking area for attendees?
- Can exhibitors be searched by name, product categories, etc.?
- Is there an online appointment or matchmaking function?
- If there's a virtual trade show, does it include product photos and links to exhibitor sites?
- Are maps, lists of vendors by halls and other aids

downloadable for pre-planning?

- Can you open online registration early for international attendees and assist them with visas or travel plans?

Pointers for a happier attendee base

- Today's attendees demand more efficiency but also want a more entertaining experience. Be sure to provide opportunities that mix business and pleasure.
- The biggest complaint of attendees is still lack of exhibitor follow up. If you get specific complaints during after-show surveys, be sure to pass them on to the exhibitors.
- Never take attendees for granted. Remember your role as host and meet and greet as many as you can. Encourage attendees to submit comments by e-mail any time and then respond promptly, put on advisory board agendas, etc.

Fighting Falloff

Show Organizers Rethink Old Strategies to Fight Attendance Falloff

Just file under: "no kidding." The threat that convention attendance will be down in 2009 is a surprise to virtually no one; only unalloyed optimists or confirmed hermits might expect otherwise in the current economic climate.

No one knows if the falloff will be dramatic or whether a turnaround might come in time to spur a second-half reversal. Some shows will buck the trend. But it's probably a safe bet that the average show's attendance numbers will be down through the end of the year.

But it's one thing to face reality and another to be fatalistic. Yes, show organizers would be wise to brace for smaller crowds. But the creative and persistent may be able to prevent huge declines by employing a mix of tactics spanning outreach, marketing, event design and resource mobilization.

CREATE COMPELLING CONTENT: Practical, timely and relevant education may be even more important now than ever.

CREATE SOME BUZZ: Take advantage of the spotlight effect that shows deliver and leverage that with focused marketing efforts that position the show as "the place to be."

COMB DATA FOR MARKETING CLUES: By carefully sifting through attendee data from past shows, it may be possible to connect with prospects both new and old.

DISMANTLE ROADBLOCKS: When they're pinching pennies, people don't have to look far to find excuses to not attend a costly show. Knowing what those might be and countering them is key.

EXTEND, ENHANCE REGISTRATION: Another tip: give people more time to commit to attending, and consider more flexibility on early bird sign-up fees.

EVALUATE COLOCATIONS: A surefire way to attract more people to an event is to broaden its appeal. That can be accomplished by staging more events that incorporate groups allied to a show's main audience.

GET A "FACE": One way to make your event stand out is to have a single big draw, like a notable personality.

INCREASE COMMUNICATION: More reminders about a show

and the importance of attending could sway fence-sitters.

TAP EXHIBITORS, OTHER RESOURCES: When times are tough, it's "all hands on deck." In attendance promotion, that can take the form of involving exhibitors, sponsors and even speakers in delivering attendees and rallying interest.

CREATE A BETTER EXPERIENCE: As good as a show may be, it can get stale. Energize prospects with features that reward their attendance.

List management

How to build and maintain attendee mailing lists

List sources

- Organic — Consider all the data you own that may or may not have been consolidated, including lists from current and past registrations, inquiries to Web sites, survey respondents, prize-drawing entries, etc.
- Association partners — Association lists are usually updated at least annually and have names of people involved in the target industry.
- Exhibitors — Lists tend to be current buyers or qualified prospects with past purchases or recent inquiries. If exhibitors are hesitant to give lists, ask them to send lists to a third-party fulfillment house or supply promotions that exhibitors can distribute.
- Industry publications such as magazines and directories — Lists indicate interest in the industry but are broader in range and may be more difficult to target, unless the publication offers selection processes.
- Related shows or associations — Broaden your scope to include related industry lists. For example, the International Pool & Spa Expo might consider lists from shows or associations involved in outdoor furniture or gardening.
- Competitive shows — You may be able to obtain lists from shows serving different segments of the same industry but be prepared to share your lists in a trade arrangement. One source says competitor's lists are "rare but coveted."
- Reputable list brokers/sources — Brokerage lists are easy to obtain but not the best tactic to rely on. They may be too broad or updated infrequently.

What to look for

- Don't take a random "shotgun" approach. Hone in on your niche market.
- Ask the provider to substantiate how the names were obtained to see whether the purpose actually fits with yours. Lists of buyers of a product are more valuable than prize-entry lists, for example.
- Business-to-business or business-to-consumer cooperative databases that have proven reputations should be willing to provide a representative sample for testing.
- Check the quantity and geographic distribution of the list.
- Ask how often the list is updated. Because of rapid workplace changes, every two to three months is ideal, but most lists will be updated only once or twice a year.
- Inquire about return percentages for snail-mail lists or bounce-back rates for e-mail lists.
- Ask about response rates to see if they're similar to your established lists. Determine your own threshold to balance spending on current clients vs. access to new names.
- Check the depth of the list. In addition to names, addresses, phone or e-mail, does the list include titles, buying authority, purchasing history, budget figures? The more details, the better you can target.

- For e-mail lists, inquire about open rates and click-through rates, as well as bounce-backs.
- Be leery of list deals that sound too good to be true. Bargain rates may be old lists with lots of bad information or unqualified names.

Maintaining your lists

Regardless of where you originally obtained prospect names, once they respond to you, they're yours to maintain. Give the people on your mailing lists every possible opportunity to update their information.

- Ask for contact information/title/demographic updates at least once a year.
- Put a link on every page of your Web site allowing people to enter or update their contact information.
- Send your first "save the date" mailing at first-class postage/return service requested so you can receive forwarding information to clean your list before subsequent mailings.
- Have a dedicated fax line for contact updates.
- Be sure to follow all "can spam" laws about opt-in and opt-out requests concerning e-mail and "do-not-call" regulations for telemarketing.

Rules of thumb

- Expect at least a 10 percent to 15 percent change rate if you update your business list once a year.
- If an e-mail bounces twice, delete it from your list.
- Be willing to negotiate trades for good lists. Offer booth space, publication bins, advertising or your own list in exchange for a valuable source of good prospects.

When it isn't the list

- Poor response isn't always the fault of the list. Examine whether your message and graphics are appropriate and appealing for the target audience. One company created two different e-mails to send to a test sample. One produced much better click-through results than the other, so they used the better one for the mass marketing.
- Timing is an issue with e-mail and snail mail. Sophisticated direct marketers know which day of the week and time of day to send e-mails and how far in advance to drop printed materials.
- Integrate your marketing efforts. Don't rely on one method to reach your audience, especially when you're trying to reach new prospects. Mix up magazine advertising, direct mail, e-mail, PR and other media.

Attracting tomorrow's attendees today

Take a look at the next teenager or college student you see - your son or daughter, neighbour or cousin - equipped with their iPod, surfing the Internet and texting friends on their mobile phone.

What you see before you is the next generation of show attendee. How will they impact shows? Which characteristics, behaviours, and experiences will they leave behind with their adolescence, and which ones are such a part of their personal fabric that they'll be carried into adulthood and influence the way business gets done?

The world is on the cusp of a generational shift not seen since the Boomers. Born between 1979 and 1994, Gen Y is as young as 11 and as old as 26.

By 2010, most brands and shows will be at least impacted by

this demographic, and in a decade most won't be able to thrive without them.

Already, the tip of this wave is settling into their first professional jobs. Right now, they're a blank slate with relatively few loyalties. Do they know your show? Do they understand its value proposition? Does your organization have a plan to reach this influential group?

If you're like most show organizers, the answer is no. Most marketers don't get this generation. The average marketer has no idea how this generation thinks about themselves.

Who is Gen Y?

Technologically savvy and used to an on-demand world, Gen Y can be fickle, demanding and self interested. But, growing up amid the threat of terrorism and corporate downsizing, they can also be driven by duty, independence and stability.

To them, life is about choices - and technology has provided an ever-increasing variety of them along with a vast array of options to connect with those who share the same preferences.

Gen Y places less importance on the material trappings of success, but that doesn't mean they're not career-minded. In fact, research thus far shows this group to be extremely dedicated to achievement and success, a trait that could prove useful to show organizers in the future when shaping show offerings and marketing messages.

How will Gen Y impact shows?

Gen Y is likely to have an evolutionary effect on shows, rather than a revolutionary one. Industry watchers, as well as outside marketers and demographers, predict that the greatest impact this younger generation will have on events is content organization and timing, as well as event marketing.

The trick won't be getting this generation to attend a show - it will be getting them to attend YOUR show.

What are their unique needs? It will likely have something to do with furthering their five-year plans, fueling their entrepreneurial ambition and helping them develop their careers. This may require some planners to make a leap of logic - both in marketing and in planning - to constantly answer the question: How will this help further my attendees' careers?

Shows will also need to create more relevancy for the next generation, and one way to do it is to help them "join the industry community." Sure, research shows they're joiners, but not in the same way as their parents. They're technology joiners but many don't have the skill to work a room and network.

Creating user-friendly shows

Gen Y is the first all-digital generation. As "integrated media" is the buzz among b-to-b publishers, show organizers will need to consider how to become more "integrated" with other media in tangible ways - not just as a sales effort or a neat way to organize a business portfolio. For this on-demand generation, events are part of a brand. A show that's perceived as a once-a-year phenomenon risks losing its relevancy. Next year might as well be the next decade to consumers used to obtaining whatever information they need - from driving directions to movie reviews - in an instant. If they have to wait a year for something, it can't be that important.

When that relationship expands from 4 days a year to 365 days a year, your value and what you can charge to become part of

your 'community' goes up again. In addition, by maintaining relationships throughout the year and by taking advantage of word-of-mouth and viral marketing that comes from having a year-round active community, your advertising costs to get attendees and exhibitors for next year's show actually goes down.

This is a generation that's constantly on. They take access to the Web for granted. Most often, it's the first place they go to find information. They expect speed, and they expect to find what they're looking for on the first try. Most marketing experts agree that a show's online presence, while important today, will become even more so. Shows that don't provide easy-to-use, detailed Web sites or aren't responsive to e-mail and online requests will probably find themselves in trouble.

At the show, this generation expects all the digital toys, wi-fi areas, beaming contact information to PDAs. Can't make a session? Can they pick up a podcast or e-book from it? Is that available in the wi-fi area?" Show organizers will also likely have to relinquish some of their control on site as well. This is a generation that's savvy at doing their research. They won't likely make time to attend an event unless they have an agenda before they arrive, and it may not be the organizer's agenda, she says.

We're talking about people who grew up multi-tasking. They're used to doing what they need to do, when they need to do it. Show organizers might have to build more flexible programs - offering popular sessions more than once, or extending exhibit hours. They expect to have options. They're worried about their time, not yours.

Marketing to Gen Y

The next crop of attendee is the most media saturated in history. They've been flashed, spammed, and pitched to in every facet of their lives since they can remember - and they're not impressed with slick campaigns populated by irrelevant celebrities.

Instead, advertising executives with experience in this younger market agree that marketing to this group must pass the authenticity test.

Another factor that makes this generation a greater challenge to pin down is its diversity. Not only are they culturally diverse - but thanks to every sort of niche media, niche outlet and interest - this crowd is used to messages that target them specifically. It'll be important to carefully test marketing messages because this generation will be harder to market to than any before it.

Show marketers will also need to learn to make their promotions an experience - either entertaining or informative. Gen Y is so used to being sold. They have to decide to allow you to market to them. Marketing has to be a worthwhile experience. It has to answer the question - what am I getting out of the time reading this? Am I being entertained? Did I learn something useful?

For shows, that could mean entertaining and clever marketing, or it could mean planting the show's message amid information attendees would find critical to doing their jobs, such as industry research or e-mail newsletters with lots of how-to tips.

Finally, show organizers will likely have to increase the diversity of media they use to get their message out. Asking attendees how they heard about the show will become an increasingly important research question. For this generation, media outlets can be informal, grassroots outlets that can come and go rapidly. Organizers will need to train their "ears" to identify where the buzz is created and how to capitalize on it.

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