

# Rome if you want to

*Vivid-Interface's Geoffrey Dixon on conversations he'd rather have.*

**LAST MONTH I BEGAN** by setting out the reasons why an organiser should seek to have a close working relationship with exhibitors. To me, it is a no-brainer. By talking to your customers and understanding their business, marketing and sales needs, you are likely to develop synergies, as both parties are contributing towards the same, or similar, aims.

I think the logic for this is even more compelling, as we as an industry need to create compelling arguments for companies to invest in the dynamic face-to-face marketing opportunities.

Despite there being an obvious logic in developing closer relationships with exhibitors, we all know it is often difficult to get them to commit to defining their objectives. This can create difficulties for organisers.

## **You have exhibitor churn, but do you know precisely why?**

We are working with an organiser looking at a variety of its exhibitors; their reasons for exhibiting and an understanding of their relationship to the market and to the organiser. The investigations are proving to be incredibly useful, as we are finding a clear discord between the organiser's understanding of the exhibitor's aims and objectives, and the way the exhibitor-to-organiser relationship is handled.

The result is exhibitors do not feel they have a close



**Dixon: Compelling arguments as to why companies should invest in exhibitions as a marketing tool**

relationship with the organiser. This, in turn, means exhibitors are not working closely with the organiser in promoting the event to market. Therefore, the organiser cannot shape the show to meet the needs of exhibitors, and so the market. The result is a declining event. The good thing is, we can turn this around by developing understanding, working with key accounts to forge a new marketing partnership.

## **Vivid ROME**

I feel that organisers should seek to work with exhibitors in developing an understanding of their return on marketing expenditure (ROME). It will never be possible to have all exhibitors setting clear exhibiting objectives, but that should not stop us from trying.

When exhibitors set clear objectives, and the more organisers know what those objectives are, then the greater the ability for the organiser to work with the market to create an industry event, not just a hit or miss trade show.

We have developed the Vivid ROME system for use by organisers to enable them to develop an understanding of their exhibitors' aims and objectives. An important aim of Vivid ROME is to encourage exhibitors to set clear and measurable objectives for exhibiting.

We know that, on average, exhibitions and trade shows work for exhibitors, and so we should have no fear of

exhibitors having a formal way of measuring return on marketing expenditure.

Vivid ROME is a system that has three significant components:

- Setting exhibiting objectives
- Measuring exhibitor performance
- Understanding performance gaps

Every exhibitor to a show is sent a ROME questionnaire asking them to set out their exhibiting objectives. The question charts can change for different types of event, but the core survey tools are set out below. This set of questions is for trade shows, and there is a consumer show ROME question set as well.

In the first instance, we are seeking to understand how the exhibitor prioritises objectives, and then we are seeking to look at the importance score for each objective.

### Trade show - ROME benchmarking - sales

Please rate how important each of these objectives are in your decision to exhibit, where 5 = a high objective and 1 = a low objective:

	5=High	4	3	2	1=Low
Generating sales leads	5	4	3	2	1
Entering new markets/sectors	5	4	3	2	1
Meeting with current customers	5	4	3	2	1
Selling to current customers	5	4	3	2	1
Finalising contract negotiations	5	4	3	2	1
Signing contracts on the stand	5	4	3	2	1
Building a sales prospect database	5	4	3	2	1
Developing new sales channels	5	4	3	2	1
Networking with other exhibitors	5	4	3	2	1

### Marketing objectives

Please rate how important each of these objectives are in your decision to exhibit, Where 5 = a high objective and 1 = a low objective:

	5=High	4	3	2	1=Low
Increase awareness of our company	5	4	3	2	1
Increase awareness of our brands/products/services	5	4	3	2	1
Reposition our brand(s)	5	4	3	2	1
Generate PR coverage	5	4	3	2	1
Develop relationships with key journalists	5	4	3	2	1
Launch a new product	5	4	3	2	1
Collect competitive intelligence	5	4	3	2	1
Test market a new product	5	4	3	2	1
Conduct market research	5	4	3	2	1

### Distribution and HR objectives

Please rate how important each of these objectives are in your decision to exhibit, Where 5 = a high objective and 1 = a low objective:

	5=High	4	3	2	1=Low
Recruiting new distributors/partners/retailers	5	4	3	2	1
Supporting your current distributors/partners/retailers	5	4	3	2	1
Meeting with your current distributors/partners/retailers	5	4	3	2	1
Seeking to find new employees	5	4	3	2	1
Introducing new staff to market	5	4	3	2	1



**Developing an understanding between organiser and exhibitor for a positive exhibition experience**

Here we have 23 ways an exhibitor can tell the organiser what it is seeking to achieve from the event, and how he prioritises exhibiting objectives. The important thing is exhibitors do have exhibiting objectives, but often they are not easily

expressed. ROME makes it easy.

Once we have this data we have a much clearer understanding of exhibitors. Analysis will focus industry sector, size of stand, length of relationship with event and so on.

**Measuring exhibitor performance**

Once the show has ended, we can measure exhibitors' perceived return on marketing expenditure by sending out the stage two questionnaire. I will only reproduce one section here, but if you have got this far you will get the picture.

Please rate show performance in each of these areas:

	5=High	4	3	2	1=Low
Generating sales leads	5	4	3	2	1
Entering new markets/sectors	5	4	3	2	1
Meeting with current customers	5	4	3	2	1
Selling to current customers	5	4	3	2	1
Finalising contract negotiations	5	4	3	2	1
Signing contracts on the stand	5	4	3	2	1
Building a sales prospect database	5	4	3	2	1
Developing new sales channels	5	4	3	2	1
Networking with other exhibitors	5	4	3	2	1

**Understanding performance gaps**

By comparing the pre-show expectation with the post-show results, we will generate a performance gap. For example, if exhibitor 'A' said generating new sales leads rated 4.2 out of 5.0 as an objective, and the show performed 4.4 out of five, then the event has delivered well. If the post-show result is only 3.8 out of five, then we have not met the exhibitor's expectations, and we have something to talk to the exhibitor about. The analysis is more complex than this implies. In reality, we are seeking to look comparatively across the objectives to identify where the gaps are least, or greatest, in developing our picture of the event and the relationship we have with our exhibitors.

There is more, though. If we analyse all of the exhibitor pre-show data inputs and post-show performance results by say, industry sector, then we can go back to the exhibitor and say how they have performed against the competition, on a collective basis of course. If the post-show evaluation for a specific exhibitor is below that of their industry sector collectively, then there is something for the account team to talk to the exhibitor about. For example, why have you underperformed compared to your competitors, and how can we work together to turn this around?

This conversation would be a whole lot better than having just another exhibitor churn statistic, don't you think?