

# To be a leader, or to be led?

*For Vivid Interface MD, Geoffrey Dixon, there are only companies that know how to exhibit successfully, and those who do not.*

**FOR THE EVENT ORGANISER** information should be key. Understanding of markets should be key. Understanding of exhibitors should be key. Understanding of visitors should be key.

Understanding the dynamic relationship between exhibitors, visitors and the markets they work in, or serve, should be of vital importance to event organisers. The organiser that does not understand the importance of these relationships will sub-optimize on the opportunities available to them.

Let's consider some of the issues raised by these statements. First of all, why is information key? Event organisers should invest significantly in obtaining business intelligence about markets, exhibitors and visitors for so many reasons.

Let's look at the event organiser, exhibitor, relationship. In which ever way the exhibitor may view a show, and whatever their objectives for exhibiting at a show are, they need to achieve ROI.

The exhibitor wants to come away from the event feeling that it has delivered what they wanted to achieve, and their entire future relationship with the event and the organisers will in some way be affected by how they perceive performance.

Organisers should, therefore, always measure what the exhibitor wants to achieve from a show, and then how they feel the show performed against each of these objectives.

Information gathering like this done across the exhibitor base should give us a richness of data that can contribute to the strategic development of the show. And importantly, it can be used to develop a closer relationship with the exhibitor, and even to save a poor relationship.

So much of our work is measuring how tenuous, or fragile, the relationship is between the organiser and the exhibitors of



**Geoffrey Dixon: Whatever, ROI has to be achieved**

an event. And then how the organiser can put this right.

Invariably, the missing link in the exhibitor organiser relationship is information to the extent that the exhibitor is left

to decide, by themselves, if they plan to exhibit or not.

If we can establish both the objectives for exhibiting, and then the performance against those objectives, we have something to talk to the

exhibitors about - whether they rated the show or not.

If they rate the show well, we should be seeking to identify how we can work with them to make their show even better. We may be able to learn from them what they feel they did to have such a good show. In turn, we are able to learn and pass on the tips of good performance to other exhibitors. We may be

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able to sell them up to an even bigger presence by showing them that, although they did well, they only managed to see a small proportion of their target market at the show - according to the registration statistics, or the show research results.

God forbid, but the advice could be that the exhibitor could have a smaller stand space, and so a lesser investment to achieve their objectives. Whichever, the account manager has a reason to talk other than saying: 'Are you going to exhibit again next year?'

If the exhibitor feels the show has underperformed, then the understanding of what they wanted to achieve, and how the show fell short, should be critical in not only salvaging a relationship that could be lost, but also in developing the relationship to one that is strong.

Information about the exhibitor who is performing poorly can be presented alongside the collective results for exhibitors from similar markets, stand size or hall position. In this case, the discussion can be a positive one about solving problems and developing an exhibiting strategy, but with the account manager in a strong and leading position. This is because they have real information from a number of sources that is interdependent and synergistic. In this environment, the account manager can up-sell a failing exhibitor because he can identify with them that one reason for failure was lack of investment on the show floor. It may be because of poor pre-show marketing, it may be because they had the wrong staff on the stand for the type of audience attending the show.

Whichever way it goes, the account manager with real information about what an exhibitor wants to get from exhibiting, and an understanding of how high performing exhibitors got their success and an understanding of the marketplace, will always be in a significantly stronger position than one that is not well informed.



**Invest in obtaining business intelligence**

One client that has an 79 percent on-site re-booking rate found out after our investigation that the relationship with the exhibitors was fragile, and far from being a dynamic partnership. The main reasons were a lack of information from the organisers about the show, a perceived lack of knowledge on behalf of the accounts team, and little client contact beyond pure sales calls.

I remember one event director, who told me that we should not seek to give exhibitors too much information, because they may decide to stop exhibiting. I found it hard to understand

how an event director could hold such a negative view. My belief is that there are no real exhibition rejecters among the corporate community, and that there are only companies that know how to exhibit successfully and those who do not. Information creatively used by organisers will increase one, and reduce the other.

Next month I will look further at the critical benefits of having information about exhibiting partners, and look at how we can knit this to visitor information to maximise business benefits.



**Can organisers give exhibitors too much information?**