

Do we sell well?

*VividInterface MD **Geoffrey Dixon** gets companies who want to sell successfully at exhibitions, asking the right questions*

IN SELLING ANY PRODUCTS or services we should first of all understand our client's or potential client's business. This means asking the right questions and importantly, listening to the answers before defining what we are about to sell.

Trade shows and consumer exhibitions can offer the buyer an almost limitless number of ways of achieving their objectives. Show selling should not just be about selling floor space or a shell scheme, it should be about a consultative sale that focuses on the customer.

- Why do they want to exhibit?
- Who do they want to see at the show?
- Are they seeking to generate leads? If so, how many from what type of visitor?
- Are they seeking to increase brand awareness?
- Are they seeking PR opportunities?
- Are they seeking to sell to other exhibitors?
- Are they seeking to attract distributors?
- Are they seeking to enter new market sectors?
- Is the show about meeting with current customers?
- Are they planning on launching new products?

The answers to these questions should form the basis of the development of the client's 'exhibiting plan'. With this information, selling to the exhibitor is a consultative and educated process. The sales person or account manager is able to give clear advice and give the client the benefit of their knowledge of the show and how the show relates to the market they serve.

The sales manager can also now look at how the show and the client's relationship with the show complement their other wider company and brand marketing programmes and strategies. If a show relationship can work in a complimentary way then there is a clear likelihood that a longer term relationship can be developed.

Understanding the client's objectives also has the clear benefit of focusing the client on why they are exhibiting. I have been told so many times that often exhibitors do not know why they exhibit and they just turn up and can be



Geoffrey Dixon: Ask the right questions

disappointed because they have no clear success measurement criteria.

In our business we see that it is critical to our client relationship to fully understand what the client wants to get out of the market investigations we are about to undertake. If we do not know what the problem is, why the client wants the information and what the client wants the information for, then we cannot deliver a product that optimises in meeting client needs.

I can research an event without ever having met the client and I can deliver insights into the show and the markets they serve but this is not the same as answering specific needs and wants and contributing to the client's development strategy.

So we are looking at guesswork and serendipity compared to delivering against carefully defined business needs.

If we move back to the event business and away from market research we must realise that we are actually insulting our clients if we do not seek to understand their business and how we can make their investment in us work

Feature



"Selling to the exhibitor is a consultative and educated process," says Dixon.

to their best possible advantage.

You cannot take a horse to water and make it drink and you cannot force a client to work a show in a way that will optimise their return on their investment but if we do not work with them to try to get the best then we should not be in the business.

The 'understanding your client' principle works for post-show evaluation as well.

If we have that full understanding of what the client wanted to get from the event in detail, we can review their performance at the show and the strengths and weaknesses of their performance and how well the show worked to help them achieve their objectives.

Hopefully, by now we can see that developing understanding enables us to engage the client in business discussions. It allows us to focus their attention on how they can improve their performance. It allows us to get the client to focus their attention on developing their relationship with our event and how the event contributes to meeting their business, sales and marketing strategic objectives.

Developing this level of understanding of our client's business, their exhibiting objectives and the performance of the show in meeting those objectives we will have stronger understanding of our own business and our own show.

Understanding how our show performs in delivering against our clients, market sector by market sector, is the best business tool we can have in our tool box alongside our understanding of how well we deliver to our visitors.

Marrying together these two sets of research data will give us a strong negotiation and advisory position and hopefully lead to a position where people like me no longer hear from

exhibitors that they are misunderstood and that the organisers "don't give a toss about us once we have signed on the dotted line".

Next month I will show how we are able to accurately measure and then report on exhibitor show objectives and performance with the Vivid Interface VISOR programme.



Understanding the client's objectives is key