

# Understanding exhibitors

*Vivid-Interface MD **Geoffrey Dixon** makes the case for getting up close and personal with your clients' objectives and show performance.*



**I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT** organisers must come closer to their exhibiting partners. Understand their business, understand their market, understand what your show can do for them, understand who they want to see at their show and then you can plan their engagement with your show in a way that is more likely to achieve the results that they are looking for. Success here will ensure that your show stays front of mind for them and is an essential element in their marketing strategy and a ring-fenced part of their marketing and sales budget.

We research shows that claim to have an 85 per cent or 90 per cent onsite re-booking rate. However, these same shows have exhibitors that do not feel close to their show, do not feel close to the organiser and who decide if they will exhibit or not without reference to their account manager.

This should not be the case but in moving away from this position the account team must develop a consultative relationship with the exhibitor and this means being able to work with them and advise them on the optimal show relationship that will meet their exhibiting objectives.

Please, please do not think that exhibitors do not set exhibiting objectives. They do and if you do not know what they are you are either not asking or you are not asking in the right way.

Having spoken to so many exhibitors who do not have a consultative relationship with their organiser account team we sought to develop a research product that can provide a relatively easy solution — a product that enables the exhibitor to easily state what their objectives are and to prioritise their objectives.

It is not enough to only understand what objectives the exhibitor has. We also want to know how well the show performs against each of the objectives and importantly against

other events.

We created a product called VISOR – Vivid Interface Show Optimisation Research to help organisers to develop a good level of understanding about their exhibitors, and about their show from the exhibitors view point.

Different trade shows do different things. They have different positions in their markets. They have different roles to play in the business year of the industry they represent. We can see this by looking at the different profiles created by the exhibitors as they define their objectives.

The objectives the exhibitors have in many ways define the show and organisers must develop a clear understanding of what the exhibitor is seeking to get from the show to understand what they need to provide the exhibitor to make their investment work successfully.

VISOR gets the exhibitor to clearly rate their objectives for marketing and sales and also for distribution, for HR and so on. Whatever we feel is appropriate for the show under investigation.

Importantly, the VISOR investigations are not confidential research so we are able to identify individual exhibitor responses to the organisers accounts team. We make this totally clear to the exhibitor when the research is being undertaken and currently we get between 40 per cent and 50 per cent response rates to the surveys.

If we look at a survey undertaken for a UK-based show held within the last six months we can get a good idea of how the survey works and the results that we get. Then we will look at how we can use this intelligence.

Firstly we send out the questionnaire one month before the show seeking to identify the clients objectives. There are four sets covering sales, marketing, distribution and HR.

# Feature

This one is for marketing objectives and we send out the same list after the show but this time to measure performance. ▼

We are able to use compare pre-show objectives with a post show assessment of performance: ▼

## Marketing Objectives

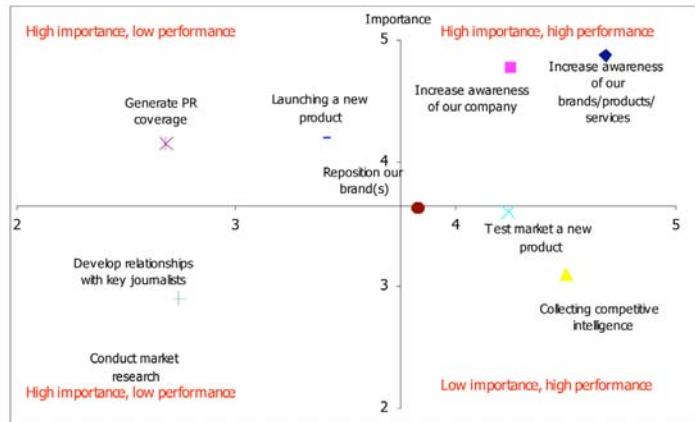
Please rate how important each of these objectives are in your decision to exhibit, where 5=a high objective and 1=a low objective.

- Increase awareness of our company
- Increase awareness of our brands/products/services
- Reposition our brand(s)
- Generate PR coverage
- Develop relationships with key journalists
- Launching a new product
- Collecting competitive intelligence
- Test market a new product
- Conduct market research

## Pre-show Objectives

	Importance	Performance
Increase awareness of our brands/products/services	4.89	4.68
Increase awareness of our company	4.78	4.25
Launching a new product	4.20	3.40
Generate PR coverage	4.16	2.68
Reposition our brand(s)	3.63	3.83
Collecting competitive intelligence	3.10	4.50
Test market a new product	3.60	4.24
Develop relationships with key journalists	2.89	2.74
Conduct market research	2.54	2.50

And then we can plot the results on a graph to have an instant visual representation of how well our show performs. The better the show performs, the more results are in the top right hand corner of the graph. ►



We can also look at the results for individual exhibitors. This is what the show accounts team work with when talking to the exhibitor about their presence at the show the following year. ▼

	Increase awareness of our company		Increase awareness of our brands/products/services	
	Importance	Performance	Importance	Performance
<b>Exhibitor X</b>	Quite important	Quite good	Very important	Quite good
<b>Exhibitor Y</b>	Very important	Poor	Very important	Poor
<b>Exhibitor Z</b>	Very important	Quite good	Quite important	Quite good

We may be taking a series of tables showing an exhibitor who has not had a very successful show to a sales meeting but a good account manager can take this and work with an exhibitor to work out why the performance did not match up to their objectives. They can examine each area stated to be an objective, talk about what the exhibitor wanted to achieve and what they feel would have made them achieve their objective.

Once the account team are having this type of discussion they

are achieving on at least two levels – they are actively examining the show and the exhibitor’s relationship with and performance at the show and then working out with them how they can work with the show to achieve a better performance next time.

It should be every exhibitor’s fundamental right to have a sales and marketing review of their investment and every organiser should reap the benefits of consultative selling.