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by Marcia Passos Duffy

Traveling to attend a golf industry trade show can be expensive and time-consuming. However, if you know how to “work” a trade show, it can provide your golf facility valuable returns on the investment. For one, it is a golden opportunity for you—and your staff (if they attend)—to establish relationships with other professionals in the golf industry. At the same time, it can raise the profile of your facility. Golf industry trade shows are also the prime one-stop location to learn about new trends and practices in the industry that can have a direct impact on a facility’s bottom line.

To make the most of your time at a trade show there are several steps you need to take before, during and after the show.

Define your goals

Before you register to attend a show, you need to know why you want to attend. Trade shows should serve one of three purposes for attendees: education, networking and raising the profile of the facility—or all three, says Jeanne Hurlbert, Ph.D., a network coach who heads OptiNetResources.com, a group that helps entrepreneurs build social networks.

- **Education:** If you are looking to learn something new that that will help you do your job, or help the golf course succeed, the educational opportunities at trade shows come in a variety of flavors, including seminars, break-out sessions and the advice of vendors with new technologies and products.

- **Networking:** If meeting industry leaders is your goal, it is important to understand that networking is not just making superficial contacts, says Hurlbert. There is a temptation in large trade show venues to approach the event from a quantity versus quality approach, and attempt to make as many “contacts” as you can, give your elevator speech as many times as possible and hand out every single one of your business cards. This is a mistake, Hurlbert says. “People who enter with that kind of hit-and-run attitude are generally not successful at networking,” she says. Approach the trade show event with the idea that you are forming important relationships. “Listen more than you talk. Look at this as an opportunity to give and receive information, tips, leads and so forth. If you approach the event with these goals in mind, you’ll network successfully.”

Thom Singer, author of “The ABC’s of Networking,” suggests that you make it a

Quick Tips for Trade Show Success

1

Bring lots of business cards. You can also bring along brochures or postcards, but give them out only to people who really want one. Don’t waste paper on handing out literature indiscriminately.

Above: The Golf Industry Show attracts more than 10,000 qualified buyers, looking for the latest in products and services to advance golf course management.

goal to meet five new people at the trade show you would want to keep in touch with. These people can include vendors, industry experts and people whom you may wish to hire down the road. "Knowing more peers in the golf industry will make your job easier in the future because you will have friends who can share info and who will help you answer any tough questions down the road," said Singer.

• **PR for your facility:** If raising the profile of your golf facility is one of your goals, then you not only need to network and educate yourself, but you also need to position yourself as an industry expert by either speaking or running a seminar at a trade show or other industry events.

2

Plan to attend the speeches, seminars, networking events, etc. Make the most of after-hours get-togethers, lunches and dinners (don't eat alone or just with your staff). After all, you are there to network, right?

Make a plan

Large trade shows can be overwhelming, and developing a plan based on your goals helps you to focus. Become familiar with the offerings at the trade show beforehand, get as much information as possible about the exhibitors and attendees and set goals according to what you want to accomplish.

When you meet people, focus your conversation on them; don't give an infomercial about your facility. Ask questions. People love to talk about themselves and their business.

For example, are there particular areas in which you want to acquire information about best practices that you can bring back to your facility? If so, develop a plan to focus on aspects of the show that will provide that information. Will there be individuals or companies at the event you want to get to know? Are there "categories" of exhibitors or attendees with whom you want to develop relationships? Thinking about what you want to accomplish in advance will help you focus your activities at the trade show.

"Remember, though, that you need to be alert to unanticipated opportunities, particularly networking opportunities, once you're there," says Hurlbert.

Include a list of "must see" booths and "want to see" booths. Spend a little time researching the vendors, so that you'll have a clear idea of who you need to see and

what you want to learn from them. That way, you'll have useful questions to ask and won't waste time with small talk.

If you are bringing staff members with you to the show, you may want to divide and conquer by divvying up the booths you want to hit or the people you want to meet; split up the team so that people attend different seminars. Make sure that everyone gets business cards and makes notes about conversations or seminars so you can share information back at the hotel or when you get back to your facility.

Also, determine what cocktail hours and meals are a "must attend" for you and your team. "Often, people get burned out at trade shows and skip some of the most important networking events," says Singer.

Long hours visiting booth after booth and attending seminars is enough to wipe anyone out, but before you turn in for the night, take some time to organize the information you gathered while it's still fresh in your mind. Sort the information into envelopes and write notes on the outside to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA.

The Golf Industry Show offers hands-on applications and demonstrations for attendees.

How to “Work” a Trade Show

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jog your memory once you return to work. Record the name, business address and e-mail of people you meet. Don't forget to include notes with any information that might be useful; note any hobbies, interests or anything that might help you build a relationship with this individual later on.

Plan for follow-up. If you meet someone you want to keep in touch with, be sure to make notes (after your conversation) on the back of their business card to jog your memory on what you talked about and if you promised to send them anything.

4

After the show

You may have done a stellar networking job at the trade show, but the work you do after the trade show is what really counts, says Susan A. Friedmann, a trade show coach. Make sure you take all brochures and notes you and your staff have gathered and plan to follow up with e-mails or materials after the show. “Having a clear plan of action will make sure that the time you spent at the show was a worthwhile investment,” says Friedmann.

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Make sure you follow up. People know they ought to send follow up notes or e-mails, but not many people do. Be the one that does. Make the time to reconnect with people you met. Also, if your staff attended, make sure that they do the same.

If you are flying back from the trade show, use the time on the plane (or in the airport) to sort through the material—or do it your first day back in the office. You can have your assistant load the cards into your Outlook or other e-mail program. If you promised to send anyone information, do so immediately. Even if you didn't promise to send anything out, but made a worthwhile connection, send along a quick e-mail. Also, plan a meeting with your staff to talk about the highlights of the show and to discuss what everyone learned.

Remember your goals for attending the trade show in the first place, and be sure your follow-up helps promote these goals.

The author is a freelance writer from Keene, N.H.