

DARWIN EVENT GROUP

Approaching Prospects on the Show Floor

Courtesy of The Exhibit Specialists www.siskindtraining.com

Most of us are comfortable handling customers in normal selling situations: in a client's office or in your own show-room. Exhibiting places you in a rather different situation. You are standing at an exhibit with dozens, maybe even hundreds or even thousands of people walking by. You have two choices:

**You can hang back and let the visitor come to you, or ...
You can proactively approach them.**

The choice is clear if you remember why you are at the show. Whatever your objective, you are in the booth to do business. At an exhibit you have to be proactive. You will waste valuable opportunities if you let the prospect walk by.

Some visitors will approach you. But as often as not, they resist making contact. Many visitors scope out the whole show before they commit to a long look at an exhibit; while others are simply shy. It's up to you to take the initiative and approach the visitor.

Many booth people don't feel comfortable being proactive. This is understandable because it is something they may not be used to doing. Further there is the fear of being rebuffed or appearing pushy. Reaching out to a visitor is a compliment – an attempt to engage them that nine times out of ten they will appreciate. But, it's one thing to approach visitors and quite another to do it comfortably and effectively.

Openers like "Enjoying the show?" or "Nice day isn't it?" or "How are you doing today?" are time worn and ineffective because they do not lead anywhere. Visitors can answer with one word and keep on walking. Or worse yet, they can answer at great length and waste your time with irrelevant chit-chat. A good opener not only engages the visitor in a meaningful conversation about business, it leads the booth person to finding out more about the visitor and his needs so a decision can be made on how to help that visitor.

Avoid Closed Questions

Effective openers invite the visitor to pause and continue the conversation. For this reason, "closed" questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" won't serve you as well as questions which by their very nature require a lengthier answer. These are "open" questions which usually begin with words like "how", "what", "when", "where" and "why".

Focus on Business

Asking about the weather or the local sports team may invite conversation, but this conversation will not move you any closer to your objective. Effective openers waste no time. They get directly into the job of qualifying the visitor. The best way to start is with a question around their needs such as "How often do you run into problems transferring business information from program to program at your office?" or ... "Tired of paying an arm and a leg for a quality widget?"

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Three Approaching Scenarios

A good approach doesn't have to be complicated, rather it should consist of words that the booth person can say comfortably and honestly. In a show situation there are three times when approaching is necessary. A quick look at each will give your booth people the necessary background to develop openers of their own.

1. When a visitor approaches the booth.

When a visitor approaches the booth and appears interested something in the booth, you have a great opportunity to approach. Finding a business related opener comes from focusing on what attracted them in the first place. "Are you familiar with our new widget?" or "Do you use a cash manager now?" If you are not sure where their interest lies, ask, "What attracted you to my booth?" All approaches should be preceded by the booth person introducing themselves first.

2. When you are conducting a demonstration

A demonstration will attract lots of people to your display. As the demonstration is drawing to a close there will be some visitors who are expressing more interest than others. You should approach the visitor who in expressing interest. Visitors express interest in a number of ways. Some do it verbally with positive comments and questions. Others do it non-verbally. They nod their head, lean in closer or smile. Experience will be the best teacher when looking for positive interest. Once the demonstration is over this person is approached and asked "What part of the demonstration was most applicable to your needs?" or "How does this product fit into your needs?"

3. When nobody stops at the booth

When the booth is quiet and visitors are not coming voluntarily, the exhibitor has the most difficult challenge. This scenario breeds bad habits like slacking off, making phone calls or taking a coffee break. Staying focused on your objectives will help keep each booth person aware that even though the show is slow, their job still goes on. If visitors are not coming into the booth, move to where they are – the aisle. But not in the aisle, in your booth. Stand at the edge of the booth, look relaxed and inviting and smile. As people walk by try to catch their eye. Most will ignore you but once someone does make contact, be prepared with a simple opening question like, "What are you looking for at the show?" or "I see you are in the printing business, how do you handle down time?" Start with a simple approach and practice it. Like learning any new skill – practice makes perfect. And at a show you can't be anything but perfect.