



# **Guidelines for Effective Exhibiting**

Approved by the Communication Officers Forum on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008

## **INTRODUCTION**

These guidelines were produced by the Global Connections Communication Officers Forum, following a meeting in February 2008 which discussed the subject following a presentation by Peter Cotterill, a founding member of the Society of Event Organisers. These are not Peter Cotterill's notes but some of his comments sparked ideas which have been incorporated here.

These guidelines are not presented as a template to be followed but rather as a stimulus to creativity and fresh thinking about exhibitions.

### **Section 1**

## **PRAYER**

Exhibiting is a spiritual exercise. You may be used by God to change a person's life direction or life-style. You may communicate an unhelpful message that could have a negative effect on someone's life or you could be a great blessing to someone.

- Pray about where you should exhibit
- Pray about the design of your stand and the key message you want to communicate through it
- Pray about who should 'man' the stand
- Pray as a team each day that God will lead the right people to your stand and you will have the right words to say and advice to give
- Pray also for the other stands and exhibitors around you

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT EXHIBITIONS

### Which events should you exhibit at?

It depends what you want to achieve. Mission agencies have a range of relationships with Christians they might meet at churches or major events. You may meet the following groups of people:

1. Christians who have never heard of your agency before
2. Christians who have heard your name but know nothing more
3. Christians who know about you from others or through a church event but have never had any direct contact
4. Christians who supported your agency in the past but have drifted away
5. Christians who supported your agency in the past but were put off or antagonised by a policy of yours or offended by your behaviour and treatment of them
6. Christians who are positive to you and support your work but would be able and willing to do more, perhaps to serve in a part / full-time capacity as a mission partner or home staff member or volunteer
7. Christians who already support you as much as they can

Those in categories 1-3 need a good first impression. (You never get a second chance to make a first impression!) Those in categories 4-5 may need to be reassured that you have changed. Those in categories 6-7 need to be encouraged, appreciated and affirmed.

You are unlikely to achieve all of these goals with the same exhibition and promotional materials, so a good starting point is to decide on which of the three categories is your main target. Estimate the percentage of each of these at the event where you are going to exhibit. (The types of Christians who go to Keswick Week 1 are very different from those who go to New Wine.) You may want to concentrate on categories 1-3 and you should choose your exhibitions appropriately.

Consider the following:

- You don't have to exhibit at any event every year; if you wait a few years between showings you might have more impact. Consider how many of those attending come every year
- Sometimes trying new events can be helpful. And don't be limited by those events that run exhibitions you might usually attend. What about trying to put up a stand at a church leaders fraternal, for instance? For example, a swimming pool and leisure show was a good cross-over for a champagne company rather than exhibiting exclusively at champagne shows
- Ask about who is likely to be there? If a lot of your supporters are likely to be there, so should you. It may be useful to do a bit of research before applying
- Don't rule out conferences as they give you an opportunity to talk up close with a smaller number of people - sometimes you have to take the initiative on this front
- How are you going to measure the 'success' of your exhibit? How many addresses for your mailing list are you aiming to obtain? Are you selling

something? If so, you may work on making a loss in year one, break even in year two, make a profit in year three

- Get a catalogue from a previous exhibition and ask organisations that attended about their experiences
- Look at the motivation for the event. Why is it being put on? What is the purpose of the organisation as a whole? (Spring Harvest is always about 'Equipping the church for action' and each year has a specific theme)
- Consider whether is it possible to work together with another agency with a similar ministry or working in the same part of the world to put on a joint exhibition. Churches are drawn to agencies that cooperate rather than compete

## Section 3

### STAND OBJECTIVES, DESIGN AND CONTENT

Again a lot depends on what you want to achieve. One of the biggest mistakes at exhibitions is that no-one really sits down and thinks about why they are there. Flying the flag isn't enough.

#### a) What do you aim to achieve by exhibiting?

- Decide on your target market - are you seeking to develop your support base in a particular area (see section 1). It is almost impossible to design a stand to appeal to students, young adults and retired people
  - *You need to develop a strategy and stick to it*
- Get an idea of where people are at with regard to understanding of your organisation
  - *Also underline the message to people who know you*
- Define your 'benefit' - i.e. what it is you have to offer people
  - *You are there to put across a benefit. That's what people want - they are asking 'What's in it for me?' Put yourself in their place and ask this about all promotional material*
- Highlight an issue or raise awareness – you are telling not selling
  - *People at exhibitions tend to appreciate exhibitors who aren't selling. However awareness and selling are quite different. Awareness could be defined as making people remember the benefit*
- Work at getting key phrases into people's consciousness.
  - *Give people something to remind them of the benefit you offer*
- Generate leads
  - *Are we there to get conversions to our cause or contact details of susceptible audience? 'Conversions' can be a very lengthy process to carry out at a stand. It's often better to give out business cards or get details. This releases more time*
- Work hard to make sure your staff are highly motivated
  - *Make it a fun and exciting experience for them. If they are not enjoying the experience they will not give a good impression of your organisation*

#### b) Where should you locate your stand?

You may not be able to choose where your stand is placed, in which case you need to make the best of the site you have been given. Consider direction of people flow, natural lighting and stalls around you.

Sometimes the sites of stalls have not been allocated and it happens on a first come, first served basis. Often it is quite difficult in an empty hall to try and choose the best place, but it is generally good to get to the venue early.

Consider the following -

- It is important to look at footfall – often concentrated near the edge
- An exhibition for men is effective if right outside the ladies toilets
- It is not always a good idea to be too close to the café in case people think you are a waiter etc. Also overflow from the café can force away the genuine enquirers
- Seminar areas can also be effective if the people they will attract are suitable

- Often people queuing near the stand is good
- If it is a very big exhibition area, stands round the edges are often easier to find. Stands at the front of a show are a bad idea as people walk much faster as they enter – they are harder to stop. Similarly stands at the back are bad as people are leaving
- Think about line of sight but be aware that things can change
- If there are an odd number of aisles you should be on the end isle as people have to come back again if there's only one entrance
- Booking a site right next to your biggest 'competitor' can also be a good idea. There may also be some synergy with other exhibitors
- More people turn left when entering as that's the side we drive on
- If it's a very big show, don't be too near the end as people may run out of time
- Frontage is important. People feel trapped if stands are too narrow and deep. It's better to be long and thin as there's less chance of being missed. Corner sites and island sites are good in terms of frontage
- Organisers are often more accommodating near the deadline

### c) **How should you design your stand?**

- The key thing in stand design is to get people to stop - you are shooting at a moving target. The first thing has to be to attract attention but hopefully in a constructive way
- Keep it open – don't stick desks at the front of the stand. People's natural reaction is to barricade themselves in. Don't have a table and low chairs. Don't allow exhibitors to sit down. If exhibitors do need to sit, use bar stools with backs to allow staff to hold conversations at eye-level and get up easily yet remain comfortable
- Think about colours - reds are exciting, blues and greens are restful, oranges and yellows are welcoming
- Put nothing below 1 metre except flower troughs
- Make sure that it is attractive at very busy times as well as at slack times. Make sure there is information for people to easily take or read when all the exhibitors are busy talking to others.
- Curves are more welcoming than angles
- Obviously corporate image is important
- Try not to put stands on platforms as these make people feel more exposed
- Don't put down light carpet as this will quickly get dirty - ideally the carpet should be the same as that in the isle to hide the edge of the stand
- Start sentences?? at the edge of the stand near the aisle and continue towards the middle. Someone should be able to work out who you are and what the benefit is in 3-4 seconds. How? Pictures and words. Does the picture portray a benefit as well as having impact?
- Place graphics closer to the aisle
- The right words can be worth a thousand pictures. What are the right words?
  - The word '*new*' is very good - people stop and ask, "What's new?"
  - '*Free*' and '*you*' (in its various forms i.e. addressing the target audience) are also good
  - In a similar way the line '*Don't waste time here*' made people stop and segregated out the audience
  - '*Now*' is also a very useful word
  - Keep the headlines short

- Remember the five senses – apparently touch is the most memory-linked sense. Is there something you could demonstrate? Especially if people can touch it. Smell is the second most memorable sense – a lot of subliminal triggering. The fragrance company in London offer scents for your stand. Cookies with the logo on can be good in this way
- If you're using video – it might be worth doing it without sound with the salespeople effectively adding the soundtrack themselves
- Over-theming can be dangerous as it distracts from the main messages - the presentation shouldn't take-over in its own right. This can make people misremember
- Arouse curiosity. (A coffin with the lid open, placed up high so that you had to get close to see inside proved a great draw
- Sometimes it is useful to contact people through a questionnaire which is part of a survey. If you do this, make it a meaningful survey with some relevance to the event. Make sure you can analyse the responses and publicise the result on a regular basis
- Are there going to be children coming round? What do you have for children?
- Stand promotions:
  - Gifts should ideally be expensive, exclusive and something people really want
  - Quality, rather than quantity, is important. Communicate in an appropriate way to attract the right people. Gimmicks can attract too many of the wrong people
  - A bowl of sweets can be good and small cartons of orange juice with straws are a good form of catering

## Section 4

### EXHIBITION STAFF BEHAVIOUR

Choose your exhibition staff carefully; people need to know the event because they will be asked questions about the overall programme and not just about your agency. They need to have some personality and a natural way of approaching and sharing with people. Those manning a stall need to be seen to enjoy each others' company and to be getting on well. This will say more about the organisation than any words they speak.

#### How should staff approach and converse with potential customers?

Consider the following:

- People manning the stand need to be aware of the objectives and benefits which they are to communicate
- Sound knowledgeable and authoritative, but don't give the impression you know everything
- Key selling sequence: sell yourself, sell the organisation, sell the product/service
- How would you change this for a large exhibition?
  - Focus less on selling yourself as there will be so many other people there and 5 minutes isn't usually enough to sell yourself
  - Could also omit selling the company and even the product
  - Just sell the benefits
  - Work together as a team. Pass enquirers to other colleagues
- Knowing who you're talking to and what they want is also an important part of this
- An exhibition is very much a frog-kissing exercise – they all look the same and you don't know which ones are princes
- **CROAK** – Five stage process:
  - **Contact** – eye, smile, greeting + opening line  
Very important to discuss opening lines and open-ended questions such as: "Why have you come to the event?" Closed questions can help you to find out who you're talking to. Avoid "Can I help you?" as people usually respond with "No thanks, I'm just looking."  
It's important to ring the changes occasionally to keep things fresh. Some people may be able to get away with more than others
  - **Reveal** – who are you talking to?
  - **Offer** – when you know they're interested
  - **Action** – You want to collect helpful and appropriate details. Beware of brochure collectors, who take loads of paper that ends up in a waste bin. Decide what essential details you need and from whom
  - **Kiss** goodbye – handshake to end conversations  
Develop a sign between staff so that they can help each other when they want to end a conversation