

the official newsletter of the pcma capital chapter

Building Sponsorship & Exhibit Sales in the New Economy

Return on investment. Maximizing revenue. Putting money on the bottom line. The sluggish economy of the last few years has made these buzz phrases even more important as we all try to do more with fewer resources and smaller budgets. For insight into the ever-changing world of sponsorship and exhibit sales, I spoke with my longtime colleague Carol Klyver, Principal of Foundations of Excellence.

In the new economy, Klyver says that customers are much more carefully evaluating their investments in tradeshow and sponsorships. “Companies are being more selective now and really thinking about the value they receive for their money. Where before many exhibitors consistently attended the same tradeshow, in this climate it is critical that you clearly demonstrate your value every year.”

To boost sponsorship revenue, Klyver advises, “Be careful when selling individual items as sole sponsorships. It causes people to lose sight of their role in the big picture – the opportunity to partner with you to produce an amazing event.” Instead, consider offering the ability to provide individual items as rewards for committing first or being loyal.

When asked about value, Klyver says one thing exhibitors and sponsors are looking for is greater and more qualified access to attendees. “It’s not just getting the list so much any more. People are using attendee lists differently now – they are looking at who’s going to be there, who do they know?” While a post-show list is a nice benefit, Klyver says it will never replace the pre-show list. “These days people want to prepare and do their homework before they show up, and a post-show list can’t help them [do this].”

Because attendees are getting much smarter about opting out [of lists] and organizations are concerned about privacy of information, show managers must think beyond the list and provide technologies that connect exhibitors and attendees.



Smart badges or lead retrieval services allow exhibitors to capture complete information – not just the limited information provided on the attendee list.

“Making your exhibitors feel wanted also makes a big difference in retention from year to year,” says Klyver. “Find out their goals for being at your show, and try to help them meet those goals.” A frequent exhibitor complaint is feeling like second-class citizens. To combat this perception, show managers must make extra effort to provide good service to exhibitors, not just attendees. Locating meals and exciting events inside the hall increases booth traffic and encourages attendees to linger where exhibitors can interact with them.

Klyver’s parting advice? “Take the time to find out what people want out of their experience. Making the effort to build and maintain sponsor and exhibitor relationships can really pay off in the long run.” It seems basic, but sales are still most effective when you do your best to deliver what your audience wants and needs. People frequently change jobs now, so it’s also wise to remember that your reputation travels with them! •

*by Janeé Pelletier, MBA, CMP
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Mission: The Capital Chapter of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) delivers breakthrough education, encourages involvement in community-based service programs, and promotes the value of professional convention and meeting management at the local level.