Making the Most of Your Visit to a Trade Show

By The World of Concrete Show-Management Team

Knowing the right way to attend a trade show, gather information quickly and efficiently, and turn your time and energy into a highly profitable experience takes some preplanning and organization. “Walking” a trade show, if done correctly, can be an educational eye-opener as well as a profitable return on your investment in time.

Start by arming yourself with a show directory. These directories are handed out during the registration process and are vital tools. Write down the booth numbers of any exhibitors who may have sent you invitations to the show or whose products or services you have used successfully before. Also, note any exhibiting companies offering a similar product line or service. You might want to include those booths that attract your interest even if you do not plan on purchasing their line.

Using the floor plan in the directory, plot your course to utilize the least amount of distance, time and energy Whenever...
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Always allow adequate time, nor just for your prearranged appointments, but also to wander through the show and observe. You may not have been aware of a new product innovation that could benefit your business. Allowing yourself the time to observe could result in a worthwhile discovery.

Trade Show Bureau research has shown that a trade-show attendee spends an average of 21 minutes in each exhibit gathering information. Twenty minutes is a good time to allot for each booth you plan to seriously visit.

The only way to find out if an exhibitor has what you’re looking for is to walk up and ask. Feel free to ask for a demonstration of a product or for more literature describing the product or service.

Take time to take notes. Write down any suppliers or products you feel are worthy of follow-up. Often the second day at a
trade show is used for follow-up, which allows for more relaxed interaction because you have already made initial contact. Revisit the outstanding booths to obtain additional details.

Remember to include in the total time available to you: time to browse booths that attract your interest; time to visit with friends and associates; time to attend seminars; time to watch live product demonstrations, and time for relaxation.

Critical to the success of attending a trade show is to pace yourself and to include adequate time to eat and to rest. Carrying around a great deal of product literature can prove to be quite uncomfortable by the end of the day. Be selective about the product literature you pick up. Another option is to have plenty of your business cards with you; hand them out to exhibitors, who can later send more detailed information to you at your office.*

It goes without saying that a pair of comfortable shoes is a must, and taking time to just sit and people-watch for a few moments can recharge your energy level.

After the show, write a summary or informal report on the exhibiting companies with whom you may wish to do business. Your report, which should reflect facts and your best instincts, along with the material you gathered during your visit, will keep the information fresh in your mind. And remember, the program book you picked up at the start of the show can be used as your directory of products and services throughout the year.

*Editor’s Note: The March 21-22 exhibit in Dallas of The Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries—International uses plastic expocards, which are issued to attendees when they register. Attendees run their expocards through an exhibitor’s electronic reader—just like using your ATM card at the bank—and the attendee’s name and business address are transferred to the exhibitor’s databank, which provides them an attendee printout to be used for follow-up.