



## Event/Conference Optimization

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### Conference Tales...

*Example 1:* I recently spoke at a leading mobile phone conference about the mobile marketing technology solution I represent. Attendance was about fifty people; a mixed bag of other presenters, decision makers and unidentified, presumed thought leaders. My presentation was concise yet carefully thought through and poignant. I painted a picture of the market, identified my target audience's problem, and then built a case for my product/service as the solution. The call to action was soft yet clearly obvious. "We're looking for partners committed to this market who share our vision and want to grow business." Following the presentation several people waited to speak with me. Some had questions, whereas others were interested in following up on a potential business relationship—a qualified lead was born (!). There was one person who waited three people deep (about 15 minutes). He handed me his card and said "We are committed to this market and have been looking for a solution like yours for some time now. I want you to speak with my team." With barely enough time to look at the card he handed me as he walked away, let alone thank him for the interest, I noticed he was a Vice President of one of the world's leading mobile carriers. Fast forward eight weeks, several calls and an in-person visit with his team on their campus, and I'm close to orchestrating a business relationship with this company. Had I cold-called this lead and worked it to this point of the sales cycle, it would have taken many months and additional resources to do so. So, was this luck? Coincidence? Calculated intelligence? Or all of the above?

*Example 2:* Many years ago I represented a company in the distance education space. Our target customer audience was college/university decision makers. Prior to every industry trade show, we aggressively sought out attending decision makers. Our objective was clear—to set and take a personal meeting with as many of them during the conference. Securing these meetings was not easy. Media research, executive letters, direct integrated telesales/email outreach, and RSVP with incentives, were a few of the tactics that went to support this. Our goal was to fill a three-day schedule with back to back 45 minute in-person presentations leaving 15 minutes for personnel change out. Among the thirty-plus (yes, thirty-plus) meetings we would set up, we inevitably received interest from a large percentage and were able to close on several leads following the show. Once we knew our percentage of presentation-to-interest-then-close, we could calculate some forecast of sales from each event; if we did our job successfully in advance. In other words, the most difficult part of the trade show happened not on the show floor or even during it but rather way in advance. Nonetheless, it could not have been executed any better or smarter. While competitors vied for attendee attention with squeezy balls, Guitar Hero sessions and business card drop in fish bowl contests, we were meeting with C-level decision makers, one-on-one, in an intimate setting, capturing their focused mindshare, gauging feedback and soliciting a sale. Powerful stuff!

### "It's a Numbers Game"

You've probably heard sales being described as this before. Simply explained, the more qualified potential decision makers you can get in front of, the better chances you have

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for generating sales. Without a doubt, events and conferences that attract customers in legions is the ideal forum for soliciting a large amount of qualified leads. The economics of it are also quite attractive as it usually ends up costing a fraction of the cost it would take to market and close the same sale organically (through traditional means; i.e. cold calling, direct sales outreach, etc.).

### **Trade Show Optimization**

I call the strategy of getting in front of a large number of customers during an event or conference “trade show optimization.” Here are a few questions to consider if you currently attend/exhibit at trade shows, events or conferences in your market and want to optimize it (and get the most from your expense):

- **Are there any speaking opportunities available in front of large group?** Consider preparing a topic for educating the audience. I recently gave a presentation at a trade show to retailers about “Mobile Marketing for Retailers” mostly because I had the idea and pitched it to them in advance.
- **Is a list of registered attendees to this event or last year’s event currently available?** Host organizations usually have this information. If you’re an exhibitor you will have a better chance of requesting it. Some might even share the list with you.
- **Are there any on-site rooms available to conduct break-out sessions and presentations?** I once rented an RV for this purpose. It was great... I ushered decision makers just ten yards from the conference to my own private mobile executive conference room, complete with demo presentation, open bar and snakes. It was a huge success. It also doubled as a hotel for the night and saved me a ton of money.
- **What does your audience respond to?** Consider offering an incentive. I once used a \$100 American Express gift card for shopping in the local area to decision makers who RSVP’ed and attended my presentation. Where it seems expensive, it kept every meeting on time and for less than the cost of a dinner and flight to the prospect’s home location.
- **Are any out-of-the-box marketing opportunities available to get mass exposure and presence?** Where it’s important to focus on a finite group of thirty-plus decision makers, having some mass presence at a show would pay huge dividends. For example, I once negotiated a marketing piece that extended behind and out of “every” attendee badge with a call to action on the back. Each attendee was exposed to my message, most of them left the piece in their badge holder throughout the entire show (meaning they were walking billboards for my service).

### **Alternatives to Trade Shows/Events/conference**

If your business does not have an organized trade show for your customers, don’t let that stop you. Make an event yourself. Give a luncheon and speak at it. Educate your customers with you acting as the thought leader/subject matter expert. Or, hire a subject matter expert and execute as part of a panel (which will allow you to sneak in your solicitation). Consider conducting a webinar, or virtual meeting online. Invite customers to a holiday party and speak at that. Aggregate your customers. Give them an incentive to attend. And, then present your wares. Optimize your event with calculated intelligence not relying on luck or coincidence.



***About the Author***

Angelo Biasi is General Manager of SMART Marketing Solutions, LLC, a leading full-service integrated marketing company in Naples, FL since 2001. He has helped create and execute marketing plans and integrated marketing solutions for companies such as Playtex, Bic, Rogaine, Tauck, and over 35 colleges and universities, to name a few. Angelo has an MBA in Marketing from the University of Connecticut and has taught Marketing at New York University for over five years. For more information or to learn more, email him at [abiasi@smartmarketingllc.com](mailto:abiasi@smartmarketingllc.com), visit [www.smartmarketingllc.com](http://www.smartmarketingllc.com) or call 239.963.9396.