

Help and advice



Leo Aspden on planning marketing communications

Exhibiting at a show can be the business

IN **CFJ** last August Simon James, Polyflor marketing manager, wrote asking, 'do we need exhibitions?'

Simon and I know each other well, and during my time leading the marketing for the Pilkington's Tiles Group, I lived through the 'life changing' process of conceiving many an exhibition stand.

Like any other product, a trade or specialist exhibition has to prove it's worth and relevance to the target audience.

It has always been a challenge to attract architects, specifiers and key decision-makers, and with manufacturers and suppliers continuing to develop their online presence and visibility. But the right exhibition, specific to the audience's needs, works well and can be extremely effective.

Exhibitions are a partnership between organiser and exhibitor. Organisers must get their product right, attract the right audience, including the key mix of exhibitors.

Exhibitors, for their part, must get their act together, plan and prepare to be effective. It is not enough to simply turn up and expect business on a plate.

Below are guidelines to consider in your exhibition plan:

■ **Decide your objectives:**

Why are you exhibiting. Simply 'flag waving' or attending because your competitors are, is costly.

Examples of objectives:

- Generate leads;
- Launch new products;
- Increase company awareness;
- Increase awareness of product offer;
- Market research; and
- Direct sales,

Objectives should be SMART, (sensible, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific).

If generating leads is a core objective, consider how many leads, from which customer groups (architects, developers, contractors, retailers, stockists). When quantifying, measure the cost of alternative promotions.

For example, if you plan to spend £15 or £20K on an exhibition, how many leads do you expect if you spend the same amount on direct mail, advertising, or an e-marketing?

■ **Qualify leads:** The old saying goes that 'not every customer is a good customer' and likewise you must qualify all of

your exhibition leads.

Whether your lead capture process is a simple form, a light pen to scan visitor badges or your own computer lead management system, categorise and qualify the information as it is captured, not three days after the show is over!

Take into account:

- Contact details;
- Company type (architect, developer or retailer);
- Decision maker;
- Product interest;
- Live project (project name);
- Intend to purchase or specify (timescale?);
- Existing customer /specifier;
- Follow up action (quote, samples, brochures or visit);
- Action timescale

■ **Follow-up:** This makes the difference between success and failure. Arrange a stand de-brief with the team soon after the show. Obtain feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the stand; its position, exhibition or organisation, visitor profile, lead capture process etc.

When setting up your exhibition plan follow-up action. Electronic leads can be imported into your computer management system.

Even if you don't have an integrated CRM system there are contact management systems, such as ACT by Sage, which can process this information effectively and relatively cheaply.

You can then progress your qualifying criteria for grouping contacts and, more importantly, promptly follow-up by letter or email, and even schedule calls or appointments.

Your new contacts are likely to have spoken to your competitors, so the speed of your response is vital. Give contacts the chance to opt-in to receive ongoing contact (e-news), so that you can update them and stay in touch.

Finally, evaluate your leads after the event and measure them against your objectives.

These guidelines in your next show can help make exhibiting good fun and profitable. **CFJ**

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Dr Eric Brown on the royal yacht carpet mystery

'The throne room carpet is orfff yellow!'

SOME years ago, I was sent three tufts from a hand tufted luxury carpet. The carpet was 100% wool and measured 20m in length and was 7m wide. It weighed 1.5 tons and was installed on a royal yacht.

The reason I received the tufts is because they were becoming discoloured, turning from white to yellowish brown. I was asked if this might be mildew. Apparently, the yacht had been in dry dock in Italy during the months of May, June and July, and at one stage the carpet had been completely covered with polythene sheeting whilst a frieze around the room was being gold-leafed.

Later, the entire yacht had been covered in polythene sheeting whilst barnacles were removed from the keel. Ideal conditions for mildew to develop.

Mildew damage to wool is easily

recognised under a microscope. The fibres quickly fibrillate under pressure into numerous cortical cells. I saw none of this characteristic appearance in the fibres from my tufts. However, I did notice that the entire U of the tuft was equally discoloured.

Among other possibilities this is typical of contamination by a gaseous agency. I enquired whether there was any possibility that the carpet had been exposed to any particular airborne substance but the only answer that was suggested was the burning of incense.

Laboratory trials on a slightly larger undamaged off-cut which I acquired quickly ruled this out as a possibility. I suggested that the answer must lie on board and wondered if the ship might be in European waters in the near

future so that I could investigate further. Instead I was sent first class air tickets to the Middle Eastern country where the yacht was stationed.

The carpet was laid in a stateroom, with the throne at one end. Down either side, two rows of jardinières raised slightly above the floor were an integral part of the décor.

The entire white ground (the centre was patterned) had become yellowy brown in shade, the worst areas of all occurring beneath the jardinières. However, on closer inspection, I noticed that every metre or so, there was an unaffected band of tufts measuring 5cm running the entire length of the carpet.

Lines running in the direction of manufacture are almost always indicative of a yarn fault or mix of

yarn lots. However I next noticed that occasionally similar unaffected bands were occurring across the direction of manufacture.

This is most unlikely to be a yarn fault. Taking a sharp knife and in an inconspicuous area, I sliced through the face of the carpet in the middle of one of these unaffected bands only to find that where there was no yellowing, the underlay was joined with 5cm wide black gaffer tape.

This observation, and the fact that the discolouration was worst under the jardinières where the air was relatively stagnant, led me to the conclusion that something gaseous was penetrating from below.

When I returned to the UK, I made some enquiries into the

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