

Trade exhibitions: why they are still relevant

JOHANNESBURG – April 30, 2019 – It is largely understood that social marketing is a must-have in any business' overall marketing strategy. You only need to scroll through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram timelines to find consumers of content, and in and amongst these billions of browsers, you might even find potential users of your services or products.

However, with this mass influx of marketing companies telling you that online is the place to be, it can be easy to overlook the value of seeing potential customers face to face - and history shows us that these customers feel the same way. This is according to Sven Smit, portfolio director at Specialised Exhibitions Montgomery, which is once again running A-OSH EXPO - Africa's largest occupational health and safety (OHS) expo - at Gallagher Convention Centre from 14 to 16 May this year.

"The number of returning visitors from a growing list of countries tells us that the value we believe is inherent to trade shows and exhibitions is also growing," says Smit. "A-OSH EXPO, for example, anticipates welcoming almost 3,500 visitors from over 20 countries who are choosing to attend due, in point, to the fact that we bring well over 100 OHS-focussed exhibitors they actually want to see, all together in one place over a jam-packed spate of time."

Smit says the benefits don't stop at visibility but continue through networking, resentment-free sales interactions and staying on top of industry trends and customer pain points. He offers some detail around what to keep top of mind when deciding whether to attend or exhibit at a trade show.

Access to a targeted, interested audience

Potentially the most attractive part of participating in an exhibition from both a visitor and an exhibitor perspective is that the people you want and need to talk to are right there. You can be relatively assured of a level of eagerness to learn, engage and absorb, which can't be the assured result using online marketing or cold call tactics, says Smit.

"Exhibitions demonstrate a company's credibility and brand, which brings a certain peace of mind to visitors when it comes to the integrity of the businesses with whom they engage on site – and vice versa when you think about it," he continues. "If ever there were a prime opportunity to expand a company's network and customer base, this is it, while history proves that customers attending our shows are primed to talk deals there and then."

Showing off is encouraged

Considering that visiting audiences, including in most cases a healthy contingent of media representatives, have done their research and chosen to attend, they will be expecting sales pitches and product demonstrations from your in-house experts, which makes this the time to prime your sales teams and show off your product sets, says Smit.

"New product launches, existing and new product demonstrations, and networking events on stand are all welcome at expos," he says. "You've paid good money for your space, and most exhibition organisers have worked tirelessly to ensure that the decision makers who may have previously been inaccessible to you are there. This will, as a result, empower you to use this space as comprehensively as possible in talking to them."

Competitor audits and trend monitoring

Generally, larger organisations are known to run expensive annual competitor audits to keep apprised around their competitors and competitor products. These campaigns are not cheap, says Smit, and therefore not a focus for companies with limited marketing budgets.

"Happily, exhibitions bring all of your competitors to one place giving exhibitors a close-up

view of what they're up to," he says. "Here, you can see who competitors are targeting and the methods they're using to do so. The same sales team you'll be priming to speak to targeted visitors should also be tasked with walking the show floors, and bringing back intelligence on what and how competitors are selling back to the team, as this valuable information can prove vital in shaping the businesses focus going forward."

Using the same simple walk-through methodology, expo staffers can gather industry intel on current and future trends that may otherwise not have been apparent to them. In much the same light, exhibitors and visitors alike will gain valuable insights around concerns and issues affecting their industry at large, making exhibitions a good place for ongoing learning in general.

Smit says he could list many other benefits, including the potential for recruitment, feedback gathering, networking, and brand solidification, even for smaller companies.

"The benefits, from face-to-face live-selling to industry trend and real time, current competitor audits, are vast and, with the right strategy in place, the return on investment from both a visitor and exhibitor perspective has been proven time and time again," says Smit.

"At its most basic, exhibitions are here to stay, even if only for the fact that they encourage human interaction, which is a sorely missing result in online marketing campaigns."

A-OSH EXPO, Africa's leading occupational health and safety (OHS) show, is back at Gallagher Convention Centre in Johannesburg from 14 to 16 May 2019. Find out more at www.aosh.co.za