

# When healthcare takes on the trade show

By Louise Pollock

**W**e've all seen the jars of free candy, colorful logo pens and smiley-face stress balls that trade show exhibitors use in an earnest attempt to lure attendees to their booths. At larger healthcare professional meetings — such as those belonging to the American Heart Association or the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics — there are many companies exhibiting, and very little time to get through the endless aisles of information. Although pens and stress balls are useful, you'll really need to stand out if you want to grab attendees' attention.

The first step to successful trade show marketing is setting a goal. Understanding what you want to get out of your booth investment will help you better plan how to go about achieving your goal. And keeping in mind what your target plans to get out of the meeting will help you determine the proper tactics to make the interaction mutually beneficial, and ultimately, ensure results.

Pulling from our experience with what works and what doesn't, below are some

ideas for maximizing your trade show investment, with targeted and strategic campaigns that will advance your business strategy.

## Think out of the exhibit box

Although in most cases you need to be an exhibitor in order to gain access to the meeting venue, you shouldn't let that limit your activities. Instead of getting caught up in the rat race of the exhibit hall, think of ways to enhance your meeting presence beyond the traditional booth. For example:

**Aim for quality, not quantity.** It's obvious that the exhibit might be the best way to reach the largest number of people at once, but quantity doesn't always mean quality. If your goal is to reach key opinion formers with specific messaging, or to gain insights from them for your company or brand, a roundtable outside normal meeting hours at a local venue is one way to capture their undivided attention. Be sure to keenly target your invitation list to healthcare professionals who will be most valuable to your company or brand, send invitations well in advance of the meeting and offer compensation for their time. Or, if your budget doesn't permit a roundtable, try arranging one-on-one meetings with a few select

influencers.

**Strive to stand-out.** Distributing samples at your booth is expected, but not so much at attendees' hotels or outside the exhibit hall. Work with the meeting organizers to determine how you can maximize your presence with unique opportunities, such as sampling outside the convention center as attendees enter, or reaching them in their hotel rooms first thing in the morning with an impactful and useful door drop with an incentive that drives them to visit your booth. Being their first contact of the day will help your company or brand stand out and leave a lasting impression.

## If you build it, they will come

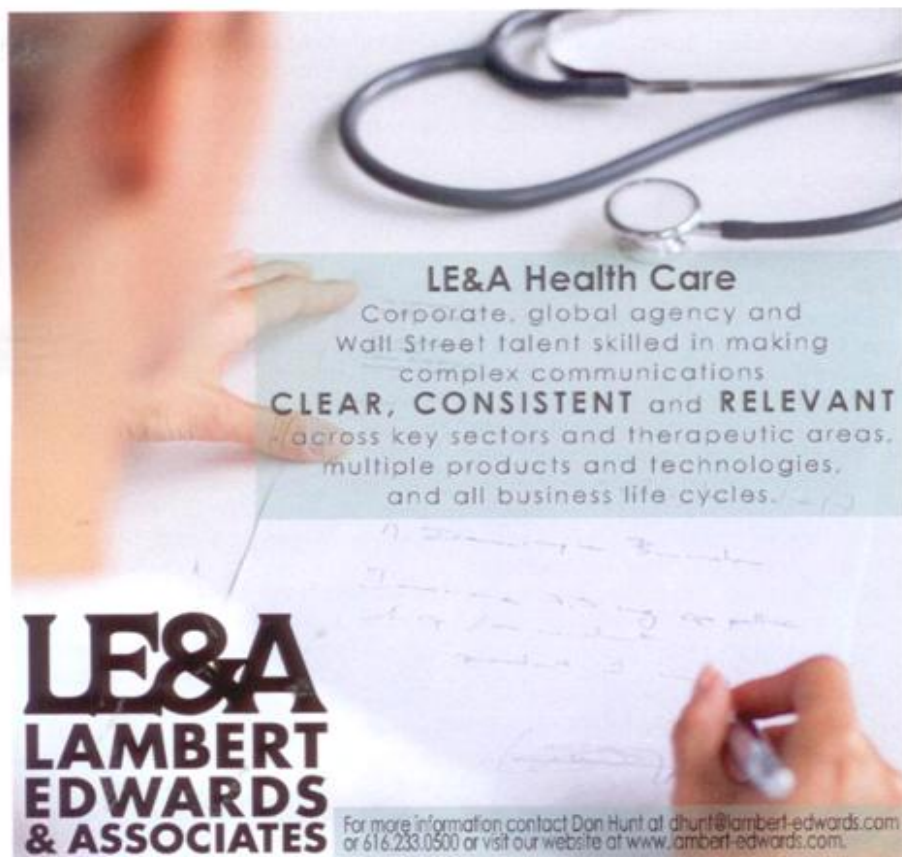
Creating a booth that is inviting and compelling will help you draw the crowds, but once you've reeled them in, don't miss the opportunity to drive your message home and learn from the experts. For example:

- Showcase a video loop with gripping data, messages or media segments to capture attention, provide information and spark conversation.
- Bring your brand's key messages to life through engaging product demonstrations, group discussions with experts and interactive branded educational experiences.
- Get attendees talking about your brand online through cause-based social media engagement at the exhibit.
- Determine the most valuable information you hope to gain from attendees and prepare a quick and simple booth survey that will gather that insightful data.
- Provide a reason for attendees to stay at the booth for a while, such as a celebrity author book signing. Attendees will be happy to wait in line, providing you with invaluable time to drive your messages home and gain insights.

Even the most elaborate booths might not be enough to make attendees stop in their tracks, but add some fresh baked cookies or an aromatic cappuccino machine, and suddenly people can't help but take a seat at your booth and stay for a while ... especially at healthcare meetings, like the American Academy of Family Physicians. A small snack for time-crunched attendees will go a long way towards making your company or brand more endearing.

Don't forget to capture contact information whenever you can. A simple "nice to meet you" note and free sample can go a long way to help build brand loyalty and reputation, and keep you top of mind with your target audience.

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