

## CAEYC: Your Best Trade Show Ever!


You've spent time and effort getting your booth together. Your exhibit material arrived at the desired destination and is displayed enticingly, your clothes are pressed and your smile is at the ready. The doors open and thousands of potential customers crowd into the exhibit hall. Will they spend time at your booth? What do you have to offer them that will ensure they make their way to YOUR booth, shake your hand and give you the opportunity to either begin or strengthen your relationship? Is it skill, luck, a shared history? Is it the size of your booth or the giveaways that you included in your budget? What is the secret to making this trade show one of the most valuable sales strategies in your marketing plan?

“I find that the harder I work, the more luck I seem to have.”

Thomas Jefferson, United States President.

Trade shows are an important component in your overall business strategy. Ultimately, you determine the outcome of your trade show experience; so approach it as you would any business venture. Paying the booth rental and “showing-up” won't do the trick. This is an opportunity to reach literally thousands of potential customers in one swoop - make the most of it!

There are steps you can take to have a successful show. Consider what your goal is in attending the show as well as who will be in attendance, both from the vendor and consumer side. Think about this and be specific when outlining the goals. Your goals should be clear as should your approach in reaching that specific audience. For example:

- Would you like to set appointments with top customers to thank them for their business, discuss their needs for the upcoming year, or introduce a new product?
  - Would you like to set appointments with target customers to discuss how your product/service is of benefit to them?
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- Would you like to identify new customers for future solicitation?
- What else would you like to do?

Consider the mindset of the attendees. Some of us have attended trade shows as a consumer so we have our own experiences to draw from. However, if your only experience is as a vendor, envision the show through the eyes of an attendee. What would draw you to one booth over another? While a “high pressure” sales approach may not be the most appropriate, neither is being too relaxed; that is, waiting for the business to come to you. An attendee is going to be most comfortable in approaching booths where the energy level falls somewhere in between...be engaging without being aggressive. Also consider the fact that while your experience is confined to a 10 X 10 booth (or some configuration of that), the attendees are considering 50,000 square feet!

Now that you have defined what you would like to accomplish and your audience, how are you going to do it? You need a plan, and here are some suggestions for steps to take to reach your goal:

- Begin pre-show marketing and advertising in a timely manner. The “how” of this depends on you---Is it through phone calls, a mailer or free publicity? You choose the manner, just get it done! Remember, CAEYC can provide a mailing list of pre-registrants.
- Now that you have notified current and potential customers of your attendance and desire to meet with them, what are they going to take away from your meeting? Consider the entire experience at your booth; the branding, design, display, and marketing collateral. What is the message that you want to send? You need to put some thought behind your booth design and the flow of traffic. Sitting behind a 6 foot table is not the way to entice people into your area. (Speaking of that six-foot table - think about if it is really needed or if there are more creative ways to display your materials.) Create energy by moving around and utilizing your space to its fullest potential. Is your display interesting? Is it interactive? Don’t underestimate the power of the “decorator element.” Review the exhibitor kit and ask questions. GES and CAEYC staff are here for you!
- Now that you’ve engaged the attendees to stop and chat, decide how you are going to keep track of them. One way would be to put together a lead sheet and collect their business cards.



The cards can be used in a drawing for a give-away. Encourage attendees to tell a friend about your booth...Word of mouth is the most cost effective marketing you can do! The increased traffic will create a buzz around your booth, not to mention energy!

- Explore increased visibility through sponsorships. The more the attendees “see” your company, the more likely they are to purchase your product and/or service later. Consider the message that you want to send and get it out there again, and again, and again!
- Remember the work does not end when the show closes---this is only the halfway mark. Now is the time to roll up your sleeves, turn the corner and head into the home stretch! The results of the show need to be analyzed in a quantifiable fashion. Begin your post-show marketing efforts, as well as consider surveying leads or current customers, creating a budget comparison i.e. expenses versus potential income, and/or analyzing the overall management of leads.

The key to having a successful show comes down to this; prepare for success and enjoy the process! Do your research, commit not only to the show but also to the preparation and evaluation process. There is no doubt that you know your business better than anyone else; you are the expert. Share your knowledge and know-how with your customers, connect with them, and invest time into developing a relationship with them. Give your customers the opportunity to do the same with you and your company---They won't let you down!

The California Association for the Education of Young Children has compiled a list of resources that can be beneficial to exhibitors at our Annual Conference and Expo. Our goal is to provide our members with valuable early care and education materials and access to services and products to ensure their success as they continue on this important career path. We have all chosen to take an active part in the wellbeing of our most valuable asset... our children. Let's reach our goals together!



### **Helpful Resources:**

- *Guerrilla Trade Show Selling* by Jay Conrad Levinson
- *How To Get The Most Out Of Trade Shows* by Steve Miller
- *Trade Shows & Event Marketing: Plan, Promote & Profit* by Ruth Stevens
- **Trade Show Exhibitors Association** - [www.tsea.org](http://www.tsea.org) (Look for the free exhibiting tips in the “Resources” section of the website!)
- [www.trade-show-advisor.com](http://www.trade-show-advisor.com)
- [www.thetradeshowcoach.com](http://www.thetradeshowcoach.com)
- [www.exhibitoronline.com](http://www.exhibitoronline.com)
- **Word of Mouth Marketing Association** - [www.womma.org/wom101](http://www.womma.org/wom101)
- Seth Godin’s blog - <http://sethgodin.typepad.com> (While not specific to the art of exhibiting, insight from marketing guru Seth Godin will have you approaching marketing with fresh eyes and ideas.)

