
your bottom line

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Getting the most out of a trade show

Early in my photographic career, I was routinely called on by well-informed and savvy traveling salespeople. They knew their products as well as my needs and budget. They helped me make intelligent purchase decisions and better use of those products I already owned. And, they always seemed to have a new product or piece of equipment for me to consider.

Complex products, such as processors, enlargers, or printers, were delivered and set up by competent installers—who didn't leave until they thoroughly trained the operators and were sure the equipment was working properly.

Today, this type of service is rare. The profit squeeze, caused mostly by the advent of "mail order" and "discount" supply centers, has forced many full-service suppliers to cut back in order to trim costs and match prices. As a result, we're left on our own to choose, set up, debug, and operate our equipment. However, at a photographic trade show, you can learn to conquer these technological consternations.

Today's equipment is more diverse, sophisticated, and technical than their ancestors of twenty years. Because there is so much currently available, few dealers can afford to stock a great variety of equipment in their showrooms. Thus, a show offers them the opportunity to display more products. Manufacturers are also on hand to discuss their products and help solve any problems you have encountered.

Exhibitors value the exposure a show brings to their business and clients. Many spend in excess of \$1,000 to rent a 10-foot square exhibit area. However, this reflects only a small portion of the total expenses involved. Merchandise must be shipped; unloading and setup costs paid; and employees to run the booth must be flown in, fed, housed, and paid. When the show ends, the display must be torn down, packed, and returned home.

At some shows, such as the PP of A annual convention and PMA, exhibitors might spend hundreds of thousands of

dollars to show their wares. This expenditure proves that they feel they have something valuable to present. As a business person, you have an obligation to the future of your business to take a trade show seriously. The ever-increasing array of new and improved products for photographers can save time and enable us to produce a wider variety of creative and specialized photography—which, in the end, brings greater profit.

As with most endeavors, planning is the key to getting the most out of a trade show. Weeks before the convention/trade show, evaluate your business' day-to-day operation. Consider problem areas and make a "wish list" of the equipment that might make your life easier, your products more attractive, and your profits higher. List the companies you want to see, complete with booth numbers. Also, include a list of specific information you are seeking. Develop a strategy and stick to it—it will pay off. You'll get more accomplished in less time, and you won't forget as much.

The *Official PP of A Show Daily* will be distributed and available on-site at this year's convention in Anaheim. It will include a listing of exhibitors, booth numbers and products, complete with floor map. The *Show Daily* will also feature scheduled events, Early Bird workshops, clinics, convention news, pictures, and restaurant guide.

Once you're at the show, follow your pre-planned assignments and make certain to visit every company and representative you've intended to see. Then, meticulously cover the entire trade show—aisle by aisle, booth by booth. Don't just seek out those products you're already familiar with. Rather, look at everything—even the smallest items. Continuously ask yourself, could I use this product or service in my studio? Would my customers be interested in this? If so, collect product literature and make notes for future reference.

A trade show is probably the best time to make any equipment purchases be-

cause most exhibitors offer "show special" prices on their products. Depending on the product, a show special can save you possibly hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars. Some companies might offer straight cash discounts. Others may include special accessories at no charge.

A few are even beginning to include free tuition for courses at Winona International School of Professional Photography. If an exhibiting company does not sell directly to a studio owner, they will undoubtedly be able to refer you to a local dealer who may discount the equipment you wish to buy.

Leave your card if a booth is overwhelmed with lookers and ask the exhibitor to contact you at your hotel room. Arrange a time when you can meet before or after the show, or when the show is not as busy.

Every day when you return to your hotel, take a few minutes to complete your notes on those products you saw and organize the literature you've gathered. Too often, we collect valuable literature only to trash it later in the day. Instead, digest the information collected and file it for future reference. This way it can later be incorporated into a sound business strategy.

Of course, conventions are also a time to attend programs, meet old friends, and make new ones. Fortunately, today most convention planners schedule trade show hours so they do not overlap with platform speakers—leaving your evenings free for personal time. Use this resource to learn from your colleagues what techniques, products, and promotional ideas have worked for them.

In the past, many people attended conventions just to have a good time. Today, you should view a convention as a time to prepare yourself for tomorrow's challenges. If you want time to "play," arrive a day early or stay a day after the show. Attending programs and covering the trade show can mean some very long days; but, a convention is not a time for relaxation. Time and effort invested by you at the convention can be the most valuable time spent the entire year. Few activities for professional photographers have the potential to do more to increase your bottom line. Don't waste a golden opportunity. ■