



Photo courtesy of Outdoor Retailer / FlyFishing Retailer

Trade shows offer a relatively low-cost way to network with potential customers and business partners.

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF TRADE SHOWS

By Jim Debetta

I have been to more than 100 trade shows all over the world in the past 10 years.

For product developers, trade shows offer one of the most cost-effective ways to network and see what the competition is up to.

Expect to pay a few hundred to many thousands of dollars for a booth, depending on the size of the event. You may save some money by bringing your own carpet and chairs, but larger trade shows sometimes prohibit this.

Yet booth fees are offset by the contacts with retail buyers you meet in person in just a few days. The costs to fly to meet them all would be astronomical. Plus, you gain entree to free seminars and classes on sales and marketing, how to hire great employees and many more topics.

Attending or exhibiting at trade shows allows you to meet consumers and retail buyers. If you exhibit at the show, the hope is retail buyers will stop in and become interested in your

product. Or better yet, that they would want you to call them after the show to discuss business. There is no cheaper way to get in front of all the right people at one place and one time than at a trade show.

Attending these shows allows you to see your competition and learn what they are selling. You hope you will meet a friendly competitor who is willing to share war stories about business.

Most trade shows have educational seminars or classes that teach you everything from how to package your products to how to approach the big retail buyers. Attend all the classes you can – especially the free ones.

If you are exhibiting, attempt to befriend your booth neighbors.

Because you are all in the same boat, you can learn a tremendous amount from each other, including how to grow your business, tricks and tips on how to save money on travel, and how to hire sales and marketing employees. I have learned

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so much from my booth neighbors that I still keep in touch with many of them as our businesses have grown.

Magazines, newspapers and even TV stations usually attend popular trade shows. Since you should always look to tell anyone you can about your new business, what better way then to have a major magazine or newspaper do an article about you? This “free press” can be a great way to introduce your products to many people who may never have heard of your products.

There are thousands of trade shows a year. Visit www.biztradeshows.com or www.tsnn.com to find out more.

Jim Debetta is a former president of one of the leading sports optics companies in the country and a senior sales executive with a leading premium incentive company. He advises inventors and start-up companies looking to launch products with minimal costs and effort. Visit www.decavicorp.com.