

Transcript – GET to YES Podcast

E5: B2B Expos: Turning Your Expo Experience into Sales

Hi, Neil here from The SALES CATALYST, welcome to our next episode. Today we're going to chat about all the things that need to be done *after* the expo.

Ha... and you thought it all finished when the expo closed – you pack up your stand and palatize it, ready to be returned to your warehouse. Sorry to say, No. It's only just started! Some of my most vivid memories, are walking away carrying 'the Gold'... you know, the folders containing all the enquires and sales leads.

Back in those days, it wasn't uncommon to walk away with 100-150 genuine well qualified leads. However, some 30-60 days later, we discovered that most of those leads had disappeared. And to my dismay and frustration, my sales team struggled to covert those leads – certainly nowhere near my expectations. I hope that hasn't happened to you. But if it has, I'd like to share several steps we took, to increase our conversions and ensure a strong financial return from the expo.

In this episode, we're going to cover the vital steps required to move from Exhibitor through to Administrator and then Marketer, so you can convert as many enquiries as possible.

The key points we're going to cover are:

- Sales lead data base – how to manage it, because the sales you make are totally connected to the way you manage the data
- Clear sales tactics, that you can employ to build a relationship.
- Keeping your clients warm, approaching them with respect – especially at the upper levels of the industry
- Sales team delegation, diligence, management and reporting
- Creating urgency

Let's start by discussing the lead list or building your data base. For me, this is where the real work starts. While the expo was all about the big picture, visuals, glamour and exciting conversations, this next stage is all about specifics. That means interpreting the correct information, details of client conversations and the correct spelling of delegate names – the attention to detail goes on and on, but its' very important.

The first thing to do is split up the lead data across 2-3 people in the office, to be entered in spreadsheet. I always made sure I was always one of the four people. Why? Because this helped me understand the quality of the information we'd collected. The spreadsheet was set up in separate columns that reflected the lead data we'd collected. The last column was comments – from the person who had spoken with the delegate. Once that was complete, we'd file it as our master.

The next step was to break the list into separate files, reflecting each sales territory. Each section was then supplied to each sales person and their initial job was to split them into metro and regional leads – because we'd be approaching each group slightly differently.

This first level data split would be then transferred as numeric scores into an Expo Dashboard Report – a one-page report where I could see a summary of all the activities and successes in each territory. Traditionally these expos were on the June long weekend in Sydney. Therefore, our goal was to reach this first level split by the second day back in the office. By the third day we were onto the next stage – preparing a thankyou note for attending our stand – which were generally done as EDMs. Each lead was sent a short email saying thanks for visiting our stand at the recent Expo and one of our team would be in contact over the coming week to discuss with them their feedback.

The following Monday morning, first thing, we'd run a report on who'd opened the emails. That information was passed to our sales team ASAP, so they could prioritise their contact and approach. This process was quite successful because our post-expo goal was to create a relationship, not chase a short-term sale. We found this made a huge difference in our approach and results.

By way of comparison, back in the early days we'd literally divvy up the leads at the end of the show, give them out to our reps and tell them to go for it. Using that sales strategy, I found that in most cases my team quickly moved into what I now call 'chasing' mode. Chasing mode is when you reach out once or twice, receive the promise of a return call and when that didn't come, they'd be on the phone again doing more chasing. All that chasing does, is turn the client off.

Thinking about it from a client's perspective, on the Tuesday and Wednesday after every expo, they're inundated with phone calls and call backs from the companies they'd visited over the expo weekend. All these calls had a similar tone,

"Hi, this is Steve from XYZ company. Jenny visited our stand at the Expo and she asked me to call and make an appointment to come out to see her."

What Jenny hears and feels during that phone call (and every other one from all the companies) is pressure – pushing her to make an appointment to buy. Needless to say, Jenny goes into avoidance mode. From a rep's point-of-view, they aren't getting a response, so they try all sorts of clever tactics, like ringing back 2-3 times a day, hoping that Jenny would answer the phone, but hanging up if it wasn't her! However, once I started to think about it from the salon owner's point-of-view, I realised that chasing wasn't the way to build a relationship, or long-term loyalty.

Instead, I consciously made the decision to play the long game and moved my team out of the chasing game. We were always thinking of different ways we could de-pressurise the post-expo experience for salon owners and instead, looked for ways to build a relationship. We took a more measured approach. Yes, that's right, it was the beginning of the new week when my sales team started to swing into action. By that time, they'd completed researching the salons' that had enquired – getting to understand more about them before any attempt was made to secure a business meeting.

Prior to calling, the reps researched each lead, to understand:

- What they were most well-known for in their area
- What services they offered
- How they positioned their business
- How many brands they carried
- What prices they charged
- Social media activities
- Areas of interest etc.

If the salons were local and at the higher end of our industry, we'd quite often do a cold visit. This was a visit with the single view of sussing out the salon and the clear goal of securing a business appointment with the owner on a mutually suitable day and time. My team were taught to leave all their sales material in the car and go in with only a business card and a device to make an appointment (being their diary, tablet or phone). That's it. Nothing else.

We also mapped out and practiced a special sales approach that I'll have to share another time, as it's a 3-step strategy (should you not be successful at the first attempt). Again, these were all mapped and practiced.

On the other hand, if the salon was a smaller local business, those were inserted into our existing territory plans. Again, they were visited (not called on the phone), however this time my team would go in with their sales aids, because quite often the smaller businesses made more impulse decisions.

If they were regional, they normally be sent an email with the view of setting up an initial phone meeting, which again in most cases worked well, once we'd mapped the sales approach. Ongoing EDM and touch base strategies were added over time, so that we were potentially in contact 1-2 times per month, for about 3 months.

There were two final strategies that worked well within our overall 'longer view' strategy. The first, was setting clear expectations of how we wanted the sales team to interact and engage. Our goal was to create a scenario where the salon owner wanted to engage us – and again this was mapped and practiced. This strategy contrasted with most other reps, who were 'chasing' and trying to engage the salon owner (not the reverse, which is what we were doing).

The other component was tied to how we managed of the sales team. This was done through a simplistic method – using our Expo Dashboard Report – which clearly recorded where each person was up to and what progress they were making with the opportunities. Opening order values were estimated and a 'confidence' percentage was always factored in...

The best thing was that this Dashboard Report gave our opportunity list a projected sales value, at any given time. We needed to calculate our return on investment for the expo and this report gave us the right level of information. Generally, we expected that we could measure our return on an expo by around the 60-90-day mark... dependant on what we were selling at the time.

Finally, we used to also try and spice things up a bit with our sales team. Many of them would go to great lengths to help potential clients buy at the best price, so we introduced a cut-off deadline for the highly discounted expo offers and we stuck to them. In addition, we added some sales incentives connected to the quality of the new business they secured.

I'm pleased to conclude that my long-term association with expos has generally delivered a positive and in most cases, a profitable experience and I hope you've found these episodes valuable in helping help you in achieving the same.

So, what are your take ways from this episode?

Was it:

- Refining your lead capturing system

- Keeping it simple
- Creating a bridging strategy to help you increase the ratio of successful post expo meetings

Until next time... ENJOY YOUR DAY

