

## **Trade show communication: use PR to boost success**

*Strike two birds with one stone: stronger media presence draws more visitors to your stand and spurs demand over months / Effective support for marketing and distribution*

Take a look inside the media centres at trade fairs and you'll notice one thing above all: considering the number of exhibitors only very few press boxes actually contain press kits. Evidently, most companies are unaware how much PR can contribute to their market success – particularly how uniquely effective press communication can be in the context of a trade fair. With professional help you can attract a greater number of potential clients to your stand and through media reports increase demand over a period of months, as well as providing support for marketing and distribution. Particularly companies that otherwise perform little or no public relations should not miss this opportunity, especially since costs for such measures, compared with other exhibition-related expenses, are by all means manageable.

One of the reasons why PR at trade shows is so effective is that almost all specialist media report at least twice about the trade fairs that are important to their readers. With coverage happening in the run-up to and in the aftermath of these events your services could be featured twice over in the media. Not only that, by means of editorial coverage prior to the fair, attention can be drawn to your company's activities not just among existing clients, but especially among the many decision-makers you would otherwise never reach. The result is a rise – often a steep one – in the number of qualified visitors to your stand and new business opportunities.

The second reason for the special role of PR measures accompanying fairs is that trade fairs provide a highly effective context for forging and cultivating personal contacts with journalists. This is not about organising expensive press conferences, which are only worthwhile for leading market players or major new developments within any trade sector. Instead, it is about one-to-one conversations with journalists at the stand with long-term benefit in the form of increased and more qualified coverage. Talking directly is by far the better way to communicate your company's services and respond to questions. At the same time, this will give your company a "face" – a clear benefit when journalists later on decide whether or not to write about your company and its services.

The positive effects of personal forms of exchange at trade shows are all achievable without expending the enormous amount of time required, for example, to organise meetings with journalists in their offices or at your company.

## **Maximise success with professionalism**

The success of all PR measures – thereby maximising the success of your presence at the trade show – rests on a high level of professionalism. Every day, journalists are inundated with masses of information from all sides, placing them under great time pressure. From one second to the next, they must decide whether or not a press release or an invitation to a meeting is of interest to them. So, from the very start, a message needs to be phrased in a way that will catch a journalist's attention.

With press releases, there are further considerations: do you have the right picture material in sufficient quality? Will the style of the release allow it to be adapted simply and quickly to the respective medium? Is there a liaison for further inquiries? If you score points by providing perfectly prepared documentation, you greatly improve your chances of getting press coverage.

At the same time, all PR materials should also be on display at your stand and, above all, in the press centre, the most important place frequented by journalists attending a trade show. Nowhere else are they free from the mad rush of the trade fair to focus on and take in the information tailored to their needs; nowhere else can they get a perspective on the fair and adjust their agendas. In addition, journalists like to gather up press kits at the press centres and study and assess them later on in peace.

Of course, professionalism is also called for when talking to the press at your stand. For a journalist nothing is more annoying if he visits a stand and no one is there to meet him. At least one member of staff should be on hand for an informal chat in case the proper contact is temporarily tied up elsewhere. Likewise, it is important to be suitably prepared for a meeting and to plan for enough time – 10 to 30 minutes are standard. Part of preparing for a conversation is to have a clear idea of what you want to say and which questions you wish to be aired.

Last but not least, it is essential to take notes on conversations as part of the follow-up process. What in particular caught the journalists' interest? What information or materials still needs to be delivered? Which editorial aspects – such as lengthy articles or reports – can be taken further? By adopting a systematic approach you can reinforce the positive effects of PR measures accompanying a trade exhibition.

**Begin several months in advance – and fill the press boxes**

Clearly, companies without any or only little experience of public relations can hardly generate this kind of professionalism. They would be best served looking for outside support. Services of this kind provided by PR agencies experienced in this field are, when gauged against the usual costs of participating in a trade show and above all by the added value they create, an excellent investment. And, besides assisting in the preparation and post-processing of a trade fair, good PR agencies can also help out at the stand wherever necessary – by delegating experienced members of agency staff, assisting with or even independently handling meetings with press representatives.

Importantly, anyone choosing this option should approach an agency at the latest a few months before the trade show begins. This will leave enough time to do everything that promises to make your trade show appearance a great success: clarifying discussions, developing strategy, preparing printed materials, inviting journalists – and of course booking and reserving those press boxes.