

Ainsworth Maguire



**B2B PR
Marketing
Creative**

IT PAYS TO BE AN
Exhibitionist

**MAXIMISING
EXHIBITION PUBLICITY**
Checklist

AN INDUSTRY GUIDE



b2b public relations since 1985

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Making the Most of Exhibitions

Exhibitions are a significant investment in money, time and personnel. Here is our free guide to planning, resourcing and making the most of these precious opportunities.

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Planning



Start early to maximise the opportunities. Early registration gives you the chance to obtain the best stand position with the right foot-fall, visitor profile and visibility. Early birds also have first options on speaking opportunities and to book facilities like interview rooms and press conference suites.

Be bold. There are hundreds of other exhibitors so you need to be prominent. Stand graphics should declare who you are, what you do, and why someone should pause to find out more. If you have an exceptional piece of kit going through the factory before the show – can you bring this forward and take it to the show to pull in the crowds?

Avoid the tired and clichéd. Re-using previous stands and graphics from other exhibitions may be a false economy. Especially for a big show, it is better to look at the whole presentation again and ensure that this is a true reflection of who you are, what you do and how you want to be perceived.

Keep to your corporate style guidelines. For all presentation material to remain credible, professional and easily identified, keep to the corporate guidelines. It is easy to let this slip when different internal staff and multiple external agencies may be involved in stand building, photography, graphic boards, brochure design, video and more.



Start the publicity machine well in advance. Dedicated show magazines and exhibition portals start taking material from participants many months before the show. Keep them in the loop with all your news and increase the show-relevant and exclusive pieces as the show nears. Other trade magazines will run previews the month before, but because of the publishing cycle they will need material about your show exhibit six weeks or more before the preview publication.

Images matter. Use professional photography and video to showcase your capabilities. Good production values will reflect positively on you. Ensure that all new photography is captured in high resolution, preferably in straight-from-camera (RAW) format. The more data the camera captures allows for more flexible post-production and better image quality when they are substantially enlarged – an important factor in producing good stand graphics.

Use photo agency images only on a limited basis. Though technically and compositionally perfect, these images are available to anyone, so the picture conveys a generalised, somewhat sanitised message. Your original professional imagery is usually better. Sometimes you may have no choice but to use stock agency imagery. Ask your design agency if there is scope to customise the stock image by cropping, use of colour filters, in-setting a smaller image and so on.

Models, samples and demonstration equipment. Having something that moves, or better still something that visitors can pick-up or interact with, draws people in and gives you a chance to engage them in conversation. All samples should be in pristine condition, free from cracks, scratches or other imperfections.

Have meaningful give-aways. Pens, mugs, key fobs, even memory sticks are so commonplace that they have low perceived value. Can you find something more interesting and unique? Better still, can you make or process an item that showcases your capability – impressive enough that a visitor would be happy to take it back and show colleagues?

Consider two-part gifts. For visitors that you really want to attract to your stand, consider mailing a two part gift just before the show. This needs to be of relatively high perceived value. The leather case for a multi-tool so visitors can only collect their personally engraved tool on stand, for example.

Revise literature. This is a good time to refresh your literature to update content and presentation.



Signpost your attendance. Use the exhibition logo on your correspondence, e-mail signatures, social media, blogs and web sites. Tell people in your newsletters. Ensure that your sales and other customer contact people are primed to offer invites. Acquire and offer as many free tickets as you can for prospective customers.

Plan your presentations. Whether it is a 30 second elevator pitch on stand or a more formal presentation, scripting is important. Get the key points in order. Practice, with just notes, not a full script. This will give you the confidence to present naturally. It can be fun to have rehearsal sessions with colleagues.

Emphasise what's new. Existing customers know what you do, so why should they visit your stand? Tell them what is new, ground breaking and how this will benefit them. It is an opportunity to stand-out from the crowd and also to up-sell or cross sell other products and services. It is remarkable how many firms are only recognised for part of their service or product portfolio.

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Resources

Staff the stand with knowledgeable, approachable and enthusiastic people. This may mean a plan to rotate staff every couple of days so they are not jaded. Provide time for them to re-charge their batteries with a walk-about to see the show, improve their knowledge and casually meet people off stand.

Record all contacts conversations, and visitor requests. Visitor time on stand is limited. Therefore, capturing this information while it is fresh for follow-up is vital so that after-show contact can be accurate and personalised rather than just comprise a standard response.

Have the back office primed. Send leads back to the office daily and have them send out a customised response. Literature, data sheets and offers sent direct to the visitor's e-mail address are more like to impress if done quickly. Also ensure your CRM system is updated accordingly and complies with new GDPR regulations (effective from May 2018). Many people review their e-mail while having a coffee break at the show, timely communication during the show could convince a prospective customer to return to your stand for further discussion on points not originally covered. At many exhibitions, smart badge scanning technology enables a visitor's details to be automatically captured. See if this is available on your stand.

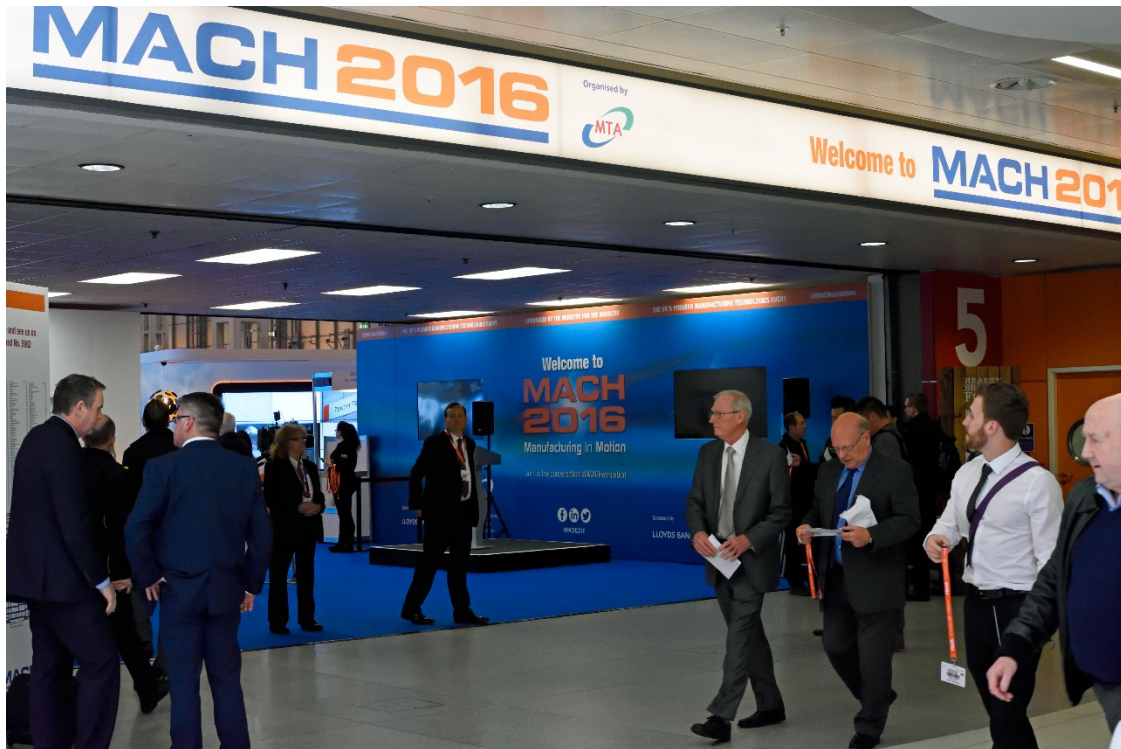
Have your media pack to hand for visiting journalists. This can be a printed copy and also be duplicated on a USB stick. Ensure that you include captioned, high resolution pictures. Media packs contain a variety of short, medium and longer articles that can be used by editors immediately or will serve as briefing material for future articles. Remember, for security reasons some people do not favour USB sticks. Therefore, consider having this material available via an electronic news room on your web site for download as PDF or other file formats. Again, capture a visiting journalist's details for future media relations.

Social Media. Start several weeks before to signpost your attendance. As the event nears tell people what will be special this time. At the show give daily posts and updates. Obviously posts on social media are short, so break up longer news items you have prepared as press releases into short snippets and post these. Remember to include links to relevant pages on your web site to help build traffic.

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Exploiting Opportunities



Say yes to low-cost or no cost opportunities. There are often services provided in the show package that exhibitors can fail to exploit. Get your show guide entry in early. Don't just repeat the previous year's entry without considering your improved products and services or change in marketing focus. Exhibition web sites often feature an exhibitor zone in which product information, news, videos and more can be added. Feed the show magazine and the trade press with your previews and consider what orders, investment or collaboration stories you could hold back to announce at the show.

Visit editors of trade magazines exhibiting with your media pack. Ensure they have your information and open a discussion to discover further editorial or web publicity opportunities for later in the year. Prioritise these calls, be persistent and think about timing. If you have more pressing calls to make, ensure your PR company has this in hand.

Consider advertising and sponsorship. Some of these packages will be big ticket items, but it will be worth hunting out other clever opportunities that may get you noticed.



Active networking. Check out other exhibitors, speakers, networking events and any opportunities that there may be to meet clients, collaborators and potentials.

Participate in presentations. This can be a valuable opportunity to present to professionals who are there to learn something new. Overcome nerves by careful scripting, rehearsals, seeking colleague feedback and having good visuals. Check the AV equipment is working. Have a proper hand-out at the end and give access to the text and visuals on-line. We have a TV media training expert available for professional coaching if you want to polish your presentation and underpin your confidence.

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Tips to Turbocharge Communication



Keep stand messaging and images simple. Visitors don't have the time to read the full story so ensure the pictures and video tells a compelling story. Keep text to a minimum – ideally no more than one theme per panel. If you need to add bullets, make sure they support the main headline of the panel.

Layer the communication. Keeping the primary message simple does not mean dumbing down. If a visitor expresses interest, then you will need a means of providing more in-depth information – preferably back to their e-mail. Avoid the good-intentioned give-away carrier bag full of literature that often never gets read.

Use QR Codes to give easy access to more in depth information. This can automate the information gathering process for the time pressed visitor and is useful when all the stand people are busy. With a couple of clicks someone should be able to access relevant information on your web site, a data sheet, white paper or other key information.



Use video to capture attention. Even the transient visitor can sometimes be captivated by a moving image and linger to learn more. Several small presentations, with clear captioning to re-inforce the message and give subject demarcation, work better than a long corporate blockbuster. We have professional videographers on the team to ensure polished video presentation.

Try the silent movie test. Make sure that your video, by careful editing and use of captions, still conveys a powerful message with the sound turned off. However professional the voiceover, the cacophony of sound from a busy exhibition hall often drowns out the audio. Also for the sanity of the stand staff it is usually preferable to run without sound. It can always be turned-on for an interested visitor who wishes to get up close and listen.

Consider competitions. This is always a good way to secure a bucket load of business cards that give detailed and accurate information on the holder's name, position, company and contact details. Just what you need to feed the CRM system. A suitable prize could also be a useful prop/crowd puller for the stand. Be cheeky, you may be able to persuade a publicity hungry third part to donate the prize, or at least give you a discount on the retail value – just for the exposure. Weekend city breaks, bottle of champagne, tablets, phones and tech are often suitable enticements

Offer white papers. These should reflect the stand graphics and offer more substantial technical material to engage and begin a dialogue. In depth technical writing like this is an Ainsworth Maguire speciality.

Have a decent camera on stand. Social media is instant – so make sure you can photograph and make social media posts throughout the show.

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After the show

Evaluate the experience. Were the visitor numbers and quality what you expected? What most engaged your visitors and what didn't? What will you do differently next time?

Set time aside for follow-up. This is where the real work begins, so you can re-contact the visitors and provide them with the information, samples, trials, site visits or whatever else it is that they need.

Learn from other exhibitors. Was someone else pulling the crowds or attracting prime visitors? What were they doing that you could do next time?

Re-book early. There are often attractive discounts if you rebook shortly after the show. Apart from this, early booking allows you a better location selection and early opportunity to put your name down for other show opportunities.

Follow up to the media. Contact any journals where you were unable to obtain a face-to-face meeting. Send out your post show news release to media attending the exhibition and other trade media.

Continue liaison with the show organiser. Just because the show over, it does not mean all the publicity opportunities are finished. The organiser will still be putting out news and social media posts containing statements from exhibitors in order to build-up for the next show.

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