

# THE ULTIMATE TRADE SHOW CHECKLIST



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Whether you're an expert or a novice at trade show exhibiting, your success depends on your preparation. Even if you already know your target audience, your strategy, and your message, a great deal of work must be done ahead of the show to achieve your goals and receive a good return on your time and investment.

## 12 Months to Go:

- Set your budget and your targeted return-on-investment (ROI).
- Set your goals and strategic objectives for the show.  
Are you there to:
  - Generate leads?
  - Make sales?
  - Increase brand exposure?
  - Debut a new product?
- Decide how to calculate your show ROI.  
If you've attended this show before, build on your past successes, and make a plan for improvement. If the show is unfamiliar, conduct research. Talk to prior participants about their challenges, successes, and failures.
- Research your audience.  
The trade show organizers may have demographic information and other details about its attendees available by request.
- Look into the best high-traffic location for your booth on the trade show floor.  
This will help you determine what type of booth will best suit your needs.
- Reserve your trade show booth space as early as you can to ensure you get your ideal spot.
- Review all contracts and printed materials carefully, and note all deadlines for submitting paperwork and payments.
- Establish firm timelines for your exhibit, from design through manufacturing.  
If you're creating a new booth, allow as much time as possible. Even if you're reusing elements from an existing booth, start thinking about adjustments that need to be made, from adding new elements to swapping out old graphics for new ones. The more complex your exhibit, the more time you'll need.
- Start planning and creating your booth.

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## 6 Months to Go:

- Plan and prepare your booth graphics.
- Plan and prepare your sales and marketing materials, including brochures and handouts.  
If you want to give away freebies, now is the time to make sure they'll be ready for the show.
- If you're launching a new product or service at the event, confirm it will be fully tested and ready for its public debut at the show.
- Choose your shipping, installation, tear-down, and storage vendors.  
Make all concerned parties aware of the correct dates and the scope of services required.
- Choose your onsite trade show team.
- If your event staff will wear uniforms, order them now.
- Book a professional photographer to take photos of your booth and the event.
- If your team is traveling internationally, make sure all passports, visas, and other travel documents will be ready in time.
- Confirm your event registration.
- Make all travel and hotel reservations for you and your team.
- Make sure your booth construction is underway and on schedule.

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## 2 Months to Go:

- Confirm that all signage, swag, brochures, and other marketing collateral will be ready by the event.
- Confirm all dates and details with your shipping, installation, and storage vendors.
- Finalize and confirm payment information with your vendors.  
If any vendors need to receive payment at the event, make sure the payment method—company check, credit card, cash—is agreed upon and arranged well in advance of the show.
- Start marketing your show presence.  
Send out press releases, and notify your customer base. Consider an email campaign themed to the trade show. Don't forget to take advantage of social media.
- Find out which of your competitors will be at the event.
- Contact targeted attendees, and book meetings in advance.
- Get clear with your event team on how personal travel expenses will be handled.
  - Will corporate credit cards be used?
  - Will team members receive a per diem?
- Train your booth staff.
  - Make sure everyone working your booth can field questions about your products or services.
  - Ensure they know your goals and strategy.
  - Have them rehearse their sales pitches.

## On the Day of the Show:

- Keep your booth staff fed, hydrated, and happy.  
Your staff is the public face of your brand; unhappy workers can lead to a disappointing brand impression.
- Keep careful track of contact information collected at the show.
- Execute your plan and reach your show goals.  
You've done the work; now reap the rewards!

**You don't have to do it alone. The right exhibit design company can manage everything, from concept to execution.**

