
YOUR FUTURE IN FOOD

How to Make Exhibiting at a Virtual Trade Show a Success



Virtual trade shows have opened a new market development opportunity for food businesses, like yours, to market your food products to prospective buyers from around the world without having to leave the comfort of your office. This may sound like it would be a lot less work than an in-person trade show but participating in a virtual trade show requires you to put the same, if not more, effort into planning and preparing for the show if you want to achieve the outcomes you have in mind. To do this, you need to create a comprehensive virtual trade show strategy that will make your company and brand stand out and prompt show attendees to stop, read and engage.

Whether you are a seasoned trade show professional or a first time exhibitor, here are some best practices that will help you make the most of your virtual trade show experience.

Choose the right show.

- Identify your target market and which show(s) they attend.
- Evaluate a show's potential by gathering as much information about the event as possible, such as geographical location, timing within the year, show statistics, past attendees and exhibitors, and their feedback.
- Choose a show that not only represents your target market and timing within the year, but that also falls within your budget requirements and matches your business and show objectives.





Define your show objectives.

- Identify and prioritize your pre-event, event and post-event objectives. Examples of objectives you may want to set for each stage of the event process:
 - Pre-event: develop qualified leads, prepare marketing materials, create and practice your sales pitch.
 - Event: secure new orders, launch a new food product, communicate information about your existing food product(s), raise awareness of your brand, gather competitive intelligence.
 - Post-event: drive traffic to your website and/or online store.

This will allow you to focus your energy and resources on your priorities and have an impactful presence at the show.

- Identify goals and targets for each of your pre-event, event and post-event objectives you identified to measure your success (e.g. develop relationships with XX qualified leads that you met through your virtual trade show booth; secure XX new orders worth a total of \$XXX within XX days/months of the virtual trade show, etc.).

Plan your booth.

- Your booth should represent your company and brand. When planning your booth consider what:
 - type of look and feel you want for your booth. Create a visually appealing and inviting environment that encourages your target audience to spend more time in your booth and revisit it throughout the show.
 - key messages you want to get across to your target audience. Identify one to two key takeaways you want your target audience to recall about their booth experience.
 - type of content your target audience wants and needs. Make sure the content you provide is up-to-date and professional looking.
 - type of food products that will be of interest to your target audience and that you will showcase.
- company staff you want to represent your company and brand at the show. The representatives you pick should:
 - have strong company and food product knowledge
 - be personable, outgoing, engaging and responsive
 - have strong relationship-building skills
 - have strong written communication skills, to send and respond to emails and to participate in live chats
 - have strong verbal communications skills so they are professional and confident during video conferencing and webinars.

Create a plan to draw traffic to your booth.

- Develop a sales and marketing plan to encourage your target audience to visit your booth. Consider including the following activities in your plan:
 - identify and reach out to potential prospects to gauge their interest in your food products. From there you can invite them to the show and to visit your booth and/or pre-schedule a meeting with them. A great place to identify potential prospects is through the show's list of attendees and exhibitors that is published on the show website.
 - promote your company, brand and show activities through posts, advertisements, messaging on your event platform, social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter and through search engine marketing, influencer marketing and email communications (beware of antispam rules).
 - host daily activities at your booth such as demos, educational webinars or networking events.
 - interact and engage with show attendees using video conferencing, live chats, phone, email or by participating in networking lounges and educational sessions organized by the show. It is also important that your company staff be online and available throughout the show hours to encourage attendees to reach out to your company and receive a timely response. If your company staff is not online you could miss potential business opportunities.
 - prepare attention grabbing content that is easily accessible and encourages attendees to reach out for further discussion. You can use brochures, sell-sheets, professional pictures and information about your food product(s)



and testimonials. Also, consider incentivizing attendees for reaching out to you throughout the show through contests and draws or by providing them with a special offer to buy your product.

- identify who, how much and how you will send out samples of your food product(s) to prospective buyers.

Be prepared for potential technology issues.

- Test and resolve any potential technology issues in advance of the show including Internet access, camera, microphone, headset, and speakers. If your issues relate to the event platform, confirm with the event organizer who you can call for assistance before and during the show.
- On the day of the show log in early to ensure your technology works.



Note: You will have between seven to 30 days to follow up with prospects after the show and to utilize the connections that you made at the show. If you wait longer you will likely lose their interest and lose potential customers.

Follow-up after the show.

Create a follow-up plan before the show:

- Determine how you will capture, qualify and prioritize leads during the show and the follow-up methods you will use (e.g. phone, email, direct mail). You may choose to use a different follow-up method depending on the quality or priority you assign to each lead. Consider qualifying a lead using the following criteria:
 - Is the lead an influencer or decision maker and how are decisions made at their company?
 - Does the company have the available resources to buy your food product?
 - Does the company need your food product? Are they interested in purchasing your food product now or in the future?

Determine how you will gain feedback from company representatives who participated in the show. This feedback will provide valuable insight into how they thought the show went, specifically, what worked well and what did not. Questions may include what they thought of the event platform, quality of attendees, discussions with potential leads, other exhibitors' virtual booth experiences, marketing materials/activities, ability to interact with clients and technical issues. The feedback can be used to refine your approach for your next virtual trade show.

Measure your success by gathering all of your metrics and determining your return on investment for the show.

Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development can help you build your future in food and agri-products. Our business development specialists can offer consulting, pathfinding services and resources that will help you manage and grow your business.



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