

How to run a successful vendor event

How to Run a Successful Event Shows are one of the best things you can do to generate leads in your initial year of business. If you've never run an event or participated in a show, it can seem overwhelming, and most people don't know how to maximize results from every event.

Follow the below tips to fully optimize your future shows.

1. **Find an Event:** There are lots of opportunities for shows and events to connect you with your prospective clients. Try Googling: Community Events + Your City, or Festivals + Your City, or Trade Shows + Your Area. These searches will help you see all the local events that are happening. Sometimes your local Chamber of Commerce will also have a listing of local events. Look through the events and think about which ones will connect you with your potential clients. This is a great place to start. You can also reach out to venues directly and ask if you can sponsor an event at their venue. This can be more expensive but can work well to reach clients with bigger budgets; think about wineries, yacht and country clubs. Whichever you choose to start with, and so you are not stressed with a tight timeline, give yourself about 6 weeks to prepare for your first show. You will need time to order branded materials, brochures and assemble all the things you'll need for a productive show.
2. **Pre-Show:** Mail Your List & PR on Social Media If your brand new you won't have a list yet, and that's okay (that's why you are doing a show after all). So, if you're brand new, assemble a list of friends, family and anyone that may come out to support you and e-mail them that you will be at the show and ask them to come by and visit. However, if you do already have a list, make sure to e-mail your list with the same information. Also, shows usually give away a few free tickets to each vendor. You can give those to friends or family or even create a contest on social media offering the free tickets as a prize. The goal is to get the word out that you will be at the show. It's also a good idea to let everyone know you'll be giving away a prize, if possible include a picture of the prize in your e-mail or social media post, it gets people excited and encourages them to visit you at the show. Here's a sample of a Social Media Post:



3. **Remember Lead Generation is Your #1 Goal:** Most people go for the quick leads, and don't think long term when investing in a show. Growing your list of potential clients is your priority at any event. Yes, you'll get some up-front leads too, but if you put a few best practices in place, you will get the up-front leads AND dozens, if not hundreds of new people in your database. Make sure you are collecting names, phone numbers, and e-mails from as many people as possible. You can do this by having a clipboard set up, or even better run a contest to collect more leads.

4. **Building Your Booth:** Your booth reflects your brand. Make sure you have a custom banner, matching neat tablecloths, possibly a table banner, and some things that bring visual interest. Here is a sample of our booth at an indoor and outdoor event. Check with your BDMs (Business Development Managers) or Travel Suppliers because they may have free collateral you can use too.

TIP: Always opt for the Wi-Fi access and electricity whenever it's offered. If you can set up a small TV with travel videos, have access to your laptop, and an outlet to recharge your phone those are all critical at a show. Here's a sample of our indoor outdoor booth set up:



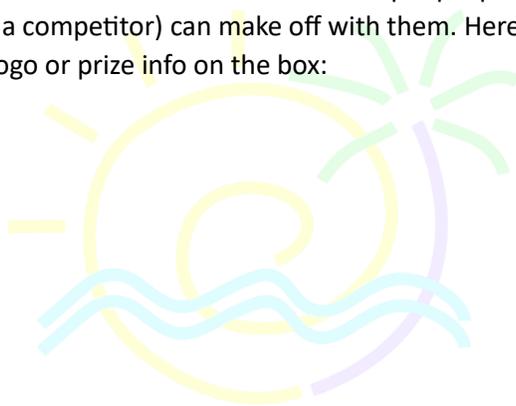
5. **Raffle a Prize:** Nothing gets attention like a nice prize, and it's best to go with something very visible that will attract attention. You can also put a picture of the prize up ahead of time on social media and tell people to visit your booth at the event (be sure to tell them your booth number).

Tip: World Market has a lot of snack items from around the world that work nicely in a travel themed basket. You should also have a few branded items so your company name is obvious. Have "Bon Voyage" notecards printed, and luggage tags to add to our baskets.

6. **The Perfect Lead Form is Also the Prize Entry:** To get the most leads possible, you can ask people to fill out an “Entry Form” to win your prize. The perfect form should be simple, and ask for name, phone, e-mail, and if they want to be contacted for a future vacation request. Nice and simple, people don’t want to fill out lengthy forms at a show. Also, if you are tech savvy you can consider creating a lead form on your website for shows & events and have 2 iPads on hand to enter information automatically. This saves a ton of time with manual entries later. You can receive up to 300+ leads at shows, so entering all that data the following Monday can be quite a chore. However, if you don’t have an on-line form that’s okay just use the manual version for now! Sample of a (lead form) prize entry:
TIP: If you are using manual entries, have 3-4 mini clip boards where people can fill out their information. It’s common to have several people at your booth at the same time and this allows you to hand them a clip board while you’re finishing a conversation with another potential. That way they fill out their prize entry while they wait to speak with you. Also, buy some Velcro squares to attach pens to each clipboard, that way your pens are easily accessible and don’t disappear.
7. **Don’t Forget the Candy:** I don’t know what it is about a bowl of candy, but it’s like a beacon for people to make their way over to your booth, and magically gives you an opportunity to chat with more people. If you are on a budget, consider buying a large tub of mints from Sam’s club. If you have some budgeting dollars to play with, you could even have mints branded with your company logo. See the links at the end of this packet for a company that will do this for you.
8. **Solicit Social Follows:** There’s another opportunity most agents miss when doing an event, and that is soliciting social follows (Facebook, Instagram, etc.). There’s an easy way to pick up social follows! Tell everyone to follow your pages on social media to find out the winner of your contest. Have your links to your social accounts on any flyers you pass out. Let everyone know you’ll be announcing the winner the following week, so heck (FB/Insta/etc.) to see if they won. When you successfully add social followers, you’ll be able to market to them all year long on your platforms.
9. **Look the Part:** Wear a company polo shirt with your agency name. It adds to the professionalism of your company. People that are considering 5K, 10K, 20K.... vacations want to work with professionals in every sense of the word, so having a polished look is a great first start to position yourself properly with prospective clients.
10. **Stock Up on Collateral:** Have a flyer, rack card, or agency brochure printed up. Make sure you use your nicest branding, include information on how to contact you, your social media links, and a little bit about your agency. Don’t try to overload your flyer. Having a clean appealing piece that is easy to read with contact info is the best approach. You can also order brochures from your favorite travel suppliers to have on hand at the show. Be sure to stamp, sticker, or staple your business card with YOUR company information on it so it makes it easy for the client to find you.
11. **Don’t always go for the big shows – Where can you be the sparkly unicorn?** Having tested dozens of types of shows, and you’d be surprised at the results. We’ve found wedding shows, which by the way are usually among the most expensive, can be way less effective than a community event or even a home and garden show. You may be thinking, why would a Travel Agency do anything but a travel show? The truth is if you are at a show where there are no other Travel Agents then you stand out more, I call it making yourself the “Sparkly Unicorn”. Prospective clients are attracted to your booth because it’s something different than the other typical booths at the show. Also, if one spouse is over looking at boring landscaping pavers, the other spouse will quickly make

their way to the most interesting booth in sight, i.e. YOURS! The same goes for community events, if you specialize in family travel or Disney then community events can be a great place to connect with prospective clients.

- 12. Call for Back Up:** Running a show can be a big undertaking, set-up, manning the booth, talking with people for 8-10 hours a day for two or three days in a row. It's a good idea to hire a friend, a helper, or an older child to help you through the show. They don't need to know how to book travel, they just need to tell people a little about your brand and get them to register for your prize (i.e. capturing their email). You will need bathroom, and lunch breaks, and help setting up and breaking down the show so schedule accordingly.
- 13. Secure Your Leads:** Remember that lead generation is your #1 goal and those leads you collect all day long are like a gold mine. So, don't leave them on the table at night, take them home with you and secure them so they are not left out. Also, it's a good idea to have a raffle box where people put the leads inside a box instead of in an open bowl where the wind (or a competitor) can make off with them. Here's one of our favorite raffle boxes, because you can display your logo or prize info on the box:



- 14. Have a Post Show Plan:** Shows and events can be exhausting, and most people don't have a good follow up plan to make the most of every show. Directly after the show get everyone's e-mails into your database, be sure to tag them as "event" or "show" on your marketing category so you can track the amount of business you get throughout the year from investing in shows. Then e-mail the group to thank them for stopping by your booth and let them know it will take 1-2 weeks to get back with everyone that requested quotes. Then mention, if they are ready to book now, to simply reply to the e-mail and you will assist them ASAP (24-48 hours). This lets everyone know you are working through the leads and sets a good expectation for your expected follow-up time. During the show try to put a star or note on hot leads so when you organize them later you can contact them first. Try to call everyone personally, this goes a long way. Remember, even if they are not booking right now, they may in the future and now that they will be getting e-mails from you and seeing you on social media you will be able to build that bond with them faster. Anyone that you get ahold of that you quote – ask for their address and send them a follow up card and add them to your on-going mailing list
Tip: Build your post-show e-mail ahead of time so all you have to do is upload the list and send it off the Monday after the show.
- 15. Connect with the Event Organizer:** Build a relationship with the event coordinator or organizer. Tell them you don't have a big budget but to let you know if they run any specials or ever have last-minute space, you'd love to work out a deal with them. If you have a cute booth and do events at the last minute sometimes you can get amazing deals doing these.

Okay, now you have all the best practices for running a successful event. Research upcoming events in your area, call for prices, and try doing your first show soon. You got this. Then check out the additional resources below to help you prepare for your next show!

BONUS ONE: Here are some helpful links we've assembled to help you prepare for your next show:

Vistaprint (for business cards, rack cards, and printed materials): www.vistaprint.com

Discount Mugs (for branded promotional items): <https://www.discountmugs.com/>

Any Promo (for branded promotional items): www.anypromo.com

Custom Ink (for branded shirts): <https://www.customink.com/>

Displays 2 Go (for banners and event trade show items): <https://www.displays2go.com/>

Fast Signs (for banners of all types): <https://www.fastsigns.com/>

World Market (for international items for your gift basket fillers): <https://www.worldmarket.com/>

Webstaurant Store (for optional branded mints): <https://www.webstaurantstore.com/>

Office Depot (raffle box): <https://www.officedepot.com/a/products/1375138/OfficeMax-Ballot-Box>

Office Depot (for mini clip boards): www.officedepot.com

Avery Labels (for print yourself labels to put on your brochures): <https://www.avery.com/>

BONUS TWO: Here is a handy list of everything we recommend you pack up for your shows.

It's a good idea to keep all these items in a giant tub for quick access, that way if a last-minute show opportunity pops up, you already have all these things ready to go. When you do a few shows a year, this saves you a lot for time.

Items to take:

- o Prize Basket
- o Travel Brochures
- o 2 Tables & 2 Table Covers & Table Banner
- o Business Cards
- o Stand Up banner (Optional)
- o DVD + Video
- o Mini clipboards w/ pens
- o Branded Items to give out
- o Paper & Pens
- o TV
- o Extension Cord & Power Strip
- o Laptop
- o Candy
- o Mickey Ears (If you sell Disney)
- o Scissors
- o Raffle Box & Raffle Entries
- o Agency Banner
- o 2 chairs
- o Masking Tape
- o Step stool
- o Trash can or small box to keep trash

Pre-Show To Do List:

- o Order all branded items
- o Order polos or t shirts for everyone working at the booth
- o Shop & pack everything on the checklist
- o Make Prize Bucket 2 weeks ahead of time, take a picture to put in pre-e-mails and on social posts.
- o Staple or sticker your company info on all brochures.
- o Hire, solicit a friend, or assign your agents for booth coverage, create a schedule.
- o Print Inquiry/Raffle Entries (print more than you think you will need).
- o Communicate schedule and expectations to any staff & train them on process of soliciting prize entries.
- o Send out pre-email to invite clients & prospective to visit our booth.
- o Post a picture on Social Media and invite clients to visit.
- o Set up the booth & take a picture before the show.
- o Walk the show and hand out cards to other vendors, they travel too!

Post Show To Do List:

- o Load new customers into your database. Remember to tag their marketing type as “show” or “event” so you can calculate your ROI (return on investment) later.
- o Schedule e-mails to any hot leads.
- o Announce winner on FB Live.
- o Send a follow up e-mail to all prospective leads (one mass e-mail).
- o Start following up via personal e-mail and phone calls with EVERYONE that marked “Yes” on the entry form question “Would you like me to contact you to discuss a future vacation?”
- o Send a series of 2-3 more e-mails to this list over the next 8 weeks. Ask them to follow you on social media, or book a free consultation with you.

You have all the right tips, go out there and have an amazing successful show!