

Company Seeks To Connect Buyers, Sellers

Many exhibition industry experts have reported that marketing budgets, which fund trade shows, have been tightened, and, although face-to-face contact is still highly valued, the relationship between trade show cost and return on investment has decreased during the past decade. According to Lisa Wieland, director of business development for Monument, Colo.-based Controlled Marketing Conferences (CMC), traditional booth-styled trade shows do provide the essential personal contact required to build business relationships; however, they may not offer enough value independently.

To help exhibition managers alleviate this situation, companies such as CMC have emerged, offering products, services and support to trade show organizers, exhibitors and attendees. "In order to survive, trade show managers must provide incomparable value and minimal financial risk through an event with personalized and customized business features that will retain attendees and cultivate new interest," Wieland stated.

Founded in 1995, CMC began as the brainchild of Bob Mikulas, a manufacturer with a new product in the lawn and garden industry who was dissatisfied with his trade show experiences. Mikulas' solution was to create a conference within a trade show that fosters one-on-one, pre-scheduled appointments between buyers and vendors with common product interests. "Meetings were no longer left to chance as they had been in a traditional booth-styled trade show," Wieland said. "The solutions offered by CMC have been well received since their inception, and the events continue to grow year after year, encouraging the expansion of CMC into other industry events."

CMC owns and operates the National Lawn and Garden Show and has managed the controlled marketing conference at that show since 1995. "It has been extremely successful, prompting the expansion of our services. We now offer the CMC Appointment Division and Tradeshow Online services to other trade show organizers who are interested in adding value to their events."

According to company information, CMC's Appointment Division increases attendance and attendee satisfaction by providing pre-arranged appointment scheduling that allows event managers

to guarantee one-on-one meetings between exhibitors and buyers. "We find out before the event what category of products the exhibitors are manufacturing and what category of products the buyers are in the market for," Wieland said. "Our software program builds an appointment schedule based on those mutual interests."

From these appointments, a controlled marketing conference is created, which can run concurrently with the booth-styled trade show. Commonly, these appointments occur at conference tables, while exhibitors move from appointment to appointment, although the meetings may also be held on the exhibit floor as well.

According to Wieland, when buyers and exhibitors register for a show, they are given a category checklist where they indicate their products' categories or buying preferences. "We update our database continually with this information as registrations come in, and we finally verify it with show managers in their preparation packets weeks before the event," she said. "Because of the flexibility of the scheduling software, the actual schedules can be run just hours before the show."

Virtually any show that markets products that can be broken into categories can be accommodated by the appointment scheduling program, Wieland said. "There are certain events that would be more complicated, such as a technology event that requires demonstrations, but even those can be set up with appointments at the booths.

"The buyers and vendors have both expressed complete satisfaction because of the efficiency and productivity they experience with guaranteed appointments. They know ahead of time who they will see and can plan accordingly."

CMC offers another service, called Tradeshow Online, which is designed to help show managers assess the worth of show attendance and to facilitate follow-up and communication. Tradeshow Online is a business-to-business trade show support website where exhibitors are given a password-protected virtual



At a controlled marketing conference, buyers and sellers meet during one-on-one, pre-arranged appointments in order to do business efficiently.

booth where they can include product photos, specifications, buying programs and contact information.

Tradeshow Online is beneficial in three ways, according to company information. "Prior to the event, exhibitors are given passwords to Tradeshow Online, allowing them to access and customize their virtual booth. On site, exhibitors are given identification numbers, which buyers can scan with Tradeshow Online mini-scanners, building a digital list of priority contacts. After the event, buyers use their passwords to log on to Tradeshow Online and access their list of priority vendors, view products, request quotes or print follow-up reports. Manufacturers view and print lead reports from Tradeshow Online, based on the buyers that scanned them at the show."

Wieland asserted that the strength and survival of the trade show industry as a reliable marketing medium relies on the ability and dedication of trade show organizers to add value for exhibitors and attendees. "Since trade show competition comes not necessarily from other events but instead from convenient, inexpensive, high-speed Internet resources, show organizers must provide exclusive benefits worth paying for.

"In order to do this, trade show organizers will be required to get more involved with exhibitors and attendees as business partners, finding out what their needs are and satisfying them, giving the trade show event a discernable advantage over the competition."

For more information on CMC, visit www.cmccentral.com. § **A.M.**