

Freeman⁷

The ultimate guide to exhibit engagement

Create a compelling booth — at any size or with any budget

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The best part about exhibiting at trade shows? You're face-to-face with your audience (hooray!), and they are already in a buying mood. In fact, 48 percent — nearly half — of all trade show attendees are looking for solutions and plan to buy. Exciting, right?

So, how do you make sure they buy from you?

The last thing you want is for your exhibit to be passed by (or clogged with swag seekers) while your competition builds relationships with your ideal buyers.

And guess what? You don't necessarily need a big booth (and the budget to match) to catch and keep the attention you want.

The truth is, you can create engagement at any size or budget. The secret lies in designing your exhibit's engagement around your business goals, choosing and using the right solutions to design your space, design your experience, and design your results.

This guide curates the best and smartest solutions for your brand so you can maximize your engagement and deliver real business results — on time and on budget.

**You don't need a
big booth to catch
attendee interest.**



Step 1: set your goals

Juggling day-to-day work alongside your exhibit planning? You are not alone. In managing the details, losing sight of the big picture is common.

This is why your first step in preparing for a successful trade show exhibition is to clearly identify your goals for the event.

You need a focal point to guide you: your “North Star.”

Early travelers in the Northern Hemisphere used the North Star as a guide to their destination.

Your exhibit North Star should be just as clear and bright as a real star. What is your goal for your booth? Whom do you want to attract? What do you want them to do both during and after the show?

A key component of your goal is to focus on your audience. The things your target prospects care about should inform your direction.

Consider lessons from past shows:

- Whom did you attract, and why?
- What barriers stood between you and your ideal audience?
- How can you remove those barriers for this show?
- What key learnings can improve your post-pandemic exhibit?
- If it's your brand's very first time exhibiting, talk to clients with whom you have a good relationship, or ask the show manager for attendee demographics.



**Why focus on engagement?
Because if you don't captivate your prospects, someone else will.**



Rules of engagement

Once you've set your goals, translate those intentions into product demos and activities that will encourage visitors to enter and interact with you and your organization.

Honing in on engagement will allow you to:

- Attract the right people to your exhibit
- Design environments that generate productive conversations with attendees
- Use innovative tech to elevate your brand

In a world of short attention spans and limited retention, you need solutions that drive awareness and engagement. The first step to developing these customized solutions is a set of clearly defined goals.

Set your North Star:

Put a checkmark next to the goals that are most important to you. Then rank the top three.

- Raise brand awareness
- Launch new initiatives or enhance brand perception
- Generate leads or grow your pipeline
- Launch new products
- Maintain (and defend) key client relationships
- Make more connections within your industry
- Educate clients on new products and features
- Other _____

Your key goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 2: design your space

Your mission is to create an experience so memorable that people will still be talking about it after the show ends.

Why? Because when people are talking about your exhibit and experience, they're also talking about your brand.

Here's how you do it. First, design your space: the physical layout of your exhibit and how your brand shows up. From a simple 10' x 10' all the way up, there are best practices to keep in mind and key levers you can pull for quick wins.

Even in a small space, you can make a big impact. Consider a bold, even provocative exhibit structure that grabs attention and creates buzz. But make sure it has meaning and is firmly tied to your business goals. For example, a beautiful tree can convey energy and growth: a fitting message if your goal is to launch a new eco-product or service.

When designing, make sure to keep in mind:

- Your North Star (aka: your brand goals)
- Orientation on the floor
- Booth height
- Location in relation to competitors, entrance, food service, and meeting rooms
- Equipment or products to be displayed (and potential safety concerns)
- Hall structure (columns, fire cabinets, cabling racks, etc.)
- Traffic flow in and out of the aisles and into the exhibit (with plenty of breathing room)
- Valuable booth assets to repurpose





Attract. Hold. Close.

Use these three levels of exhibit engagement to your advantage.

- Attract your audience with creativity that can be spotted across the show floor. Use shapes, colors, and sound — even smell and taste!
- Hold your visitors with relevant messages that mean something to them and their challenges. Use digital monitors or small displays paired with punchy copy to capture buyers' attention.
- Close the transaction with genuine interaction. Use conversation, gamification, and tech elements like AR/VR to increase engagement.

Graphics that grab

Attendees ignore graphics that ignore them.

Effective graphics draw attendees into your exhibit and provide an engaging introduction to your brand. But just as important as what you say is how you say it.

Here are some best practices for designing your booth to generate the attention you need to achieve your goals.

Keep it short: You have five seconds to grab attention, so make those seconds count. Think simple and clear. Scrap long paragraphs and lengthy lists of features and replace with bold and captivating artwork instead. Let your booth staff and handouts be your information resources.

Target the line of sight: Present important images and messages at eye level.

Spur action: Create messages that entice your visitors to do something: interact with your product, answer a question, or share an experience.

On display

LEDs, touchscreens, and other small-scale digital displays offer eye-catching and fun opportunities to interact with your brand. Content can include slideshows, sizzle videos, animations, and more.

Here are some tips for dazzling with digital displays:

Aim for eyeballs: Identify the best locations that work for your brand and booth layout. And make sure your in-booth content is available digitally so attendees can watch on their phone and [remote](#) audiences can view it virtually on-demand. (This strategy also allows your content to live on beyond the show.)

Sound off: Make sure your digital displays resonate without any sound, so noisy show floors or volume restrictions won't pose an issue.

Update on the fly: Revise your messages in real time. Whether you want to make a change due to attendee feedback, provide on-site updates about the show, or simply edit a mistake, you have flexibility.

Have a trade show coming up soon? Graphics and digital displays are a great way to make an immediate impact. Dig in deeper with our [exclusive lookbook!](#)

Get started



Step 3: design your experience

You've successfully attracted attendees to your exhibit. Now, how are you going to hold their attention?

With your North Star and ideal audience in mind, you can create an experience that will increase dwell time and deliver results.

Many solutions work across any size booth and budget. Here are a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing.

Your goal	Create this experience
Raise brand awareness	<p>Create FOMO with theater-style seating and hosted thought leadership sessions delivered by your C-suite.</p> <p>Use gamification or a chatbot to educate attendees.</p> <p>And don't forget your virtual audience! Offer digital presentations that can be accessed online during and after the event.</p>
Generate leads or grow your pipeline	<p>Create different moments throughout the day (a Q&A in the morning, demos in the afternoon) to keep people coming back.</p>
Launch new products or features	<p>Evoke intrigue by using translucent walls around your demos or workshops so attendees have to enter to see what's going on.</p>
Maintain (and enrich) key client relationships	<p>Use customizable, lightweight wall systems and some imagination to make your space comfortable and welcoming. Think breakouts, intimate networking spaces, and unplug/recharge areas.</p>

Go for the glow

Want to stand out on a busy trade show floor? Use audio visual solutions to light up your exhibit — and your prospects' attention.



Lighting

From a simple 10' x 10' booth to a sprawling space, lighting can boost your competitive edge. Here's how:

Choose variation: Contrast between light and dark to draw attention to key elements of your exhibit.

Add some flair: Use accent lighting to showcase products and key messages — or shine a spotlight on your logo.

Get moving: Use motion to direct traffic and draw prospects in.

Sound

Sound gets people to listen. But make sure it's not just noise. Being strategic with your audio helps your brand and attendees.

Apply this ABC tip for a soundproof booth:

Choose variation: Contrast between light and dark to draw attention to key elements of your exhibit.

Add some flair: Use accent lighting to showcase products and key messages — or shine a spotlight on your logo.

Get moving: Use motion to direct traffic and draw prospects in.

Largescale multimedia

From video walls that sizzle to projection mapping, large-scale multimedia is a dynamic way to attract and engage attendees. Here's how to deliver the wow:

Customize: Don't simply project your existing content on to a big screen. The message, not to mention the resolution and image quality, may be off.

Be bold: Use videos with contrasting colors to deliver a feast for the eyes.
Use projection mapping: Transform various surfaces of your exhibit structure into temporary screens.

An in-booth presentation area is a great way to communicate key messages and product information, letting attendees learn without committing to a demo or sales interaction. Try out these tips to present like a pro:

Double duty: Design your demo station to double as a mini presentation area. This move can save costs and serve two purposes, and provides a new reason to come back! But be mindful of volume levels!

Mix it up: Vary topics and presentation lengths to appeal to different audience types.

Tell attendees where to go: Think about what you want attendees to do after the presentation and design your exhibit to lead them there.

Ready to get glowing? We've got more tips and tricks in our [audio visual workbook](#).

Get your copy

Immerse in awesome

Immersive, digitally driven experiences can create “You have to try this!” moments that draw attendees in droves.

But first, make sure your immersive experience aligns to your goals.

With your goals at the forefront, you can create a truly incredible immersive experience at any budget — just keep these tips and tricks in mind.

Anticipate crowds: An immersive experience will flop if only a handful of attendees get to use it while the rest grow frustrated waiting in line.

Get tactile: Consider a VR hang-gliding experience — something as simple as a fan that blows the user’s hair back can add an extra layer of sensory feedback to the experience, turning it from “pretend” to “real.”

Don’t neglect testing: Any errors or hiccups in the experience can take away from true immersion.

Go interactive: Letting users make choices helps the experience feel more real and generates a sense of excited unpredictability.

Immerse yourself in best practices — download our three-part bundle to get our comprehensive guide to immersive exhibit experiences as well as a bonus tip sheet and worksheet!

[Download now](#)

Your goal	Create this experience
Raise brand awareness	Consider a cool Insta-worthy image experience.
Demo large or expensive products	Implement an augmented reality showcase experience to let prospects get their hands on it...digitally.
Highlight product and service offerings	Try a digital showcase that lets attendees explore rich content in your booth that will also live on digitally after the show ends.
Tell your brand story	Use spatial VR to immerse attendees in your message — literally.

Draw them with digital

Use digital marketing to attract your target audience online — not just around the show, but all year long. Learn how with our exclusive trade show marketing worksheet.

[Find out more](#)

Let your bot do the talking

Chatbots are everywhere — even at events. They can provide a more interactive form of attendee engagement and help you reach your goals, from driving leads to building brand buzz to improving the exhibit experience. Download our tip sheet to find out how!

Get started





Step 4: design your results

Design is all about solving problems. Inspired by the ideas in this guide but not sure how to get started? Find a partner that will use design principles to develop creative solutions for your exhibit space challenges while ensuring your booth and your brand achieve those North Star goals and objectives.

Great ideas are the key to becoming the talk of the show. It only takes one brilliant idea or experience. Keep brainstorming — and don't settle for the first idea.

Staffing your booth

Now that your exhibit plan is in full swing, it's time to think about who stands behind your brand and in front of your space! Our best practices guide provides a deeper dive and helpful hints to build a winning team.

[Dig in](#)

Making your exhibit work for you

You can engage attendees and meet your business goals — at any budget.

The key is to be strategic.

Set clear goals that tie into your overarching business goals. Design your space and your experience to meet those goals and attract the right people. Be creative and use your resources, tools, and staff wisely.

By following these steps, you can make the most of your efforts and budget, with a booth that not only looks great but also boosts your business.



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Need help solving an exhibit design challenge? Let's talk.

[Request a consultation](#)

Freeman is a global leader in events. Whether virtual, in-person, or hybrid, we are on a mission to redefine live for a new era. With a data-driven approach and the industry's largest network of experts, our insights shape exhibitions, exhibits, and events that drive audiences to action. Our integrated full-service solutions leverage a 100-year legacy in event management as well as new technologies to deliver moments that matter.

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