



Dos and Don'ts of Tradeshow Design

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"Bigger is not always better."



Standing out at OTC

It's no secret that standing out from the crowd at a show the size of OTC can be challenging.

When it comes to tradeshow exhibit design, the biggest and most expensive displays are not always the most memorable.

The difference is often in how well the exhibit is designed, how it maximizes space and how effectively it conveys your message.

Particularly at a show such as OTC, where you cannot presently increase your space size, maximizing the effectiveness of the space you do have is crucial to success.

Strategy 1st, design 2nd.



Why are you exhibiting?

What do you want

at the show?

How will you define success?

How will your exhibit accomplish these goals?

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When researching exhibit options, most people just head straight to the design. However that should never be the 1st step. First things first, define your exhibition strategy. Ask yourself

1. Why are you exhibiting?
2. What do you want to accomplish at the show?
 1. Generating leads
 2. Qualifying prospects
 3. Making sales
 4. Press meetings / a journal magazine
3. How will you define success? If you can measure it, you can improve it next time!
4. How can you get your tradeshow presence in general and your exhibit specifically to further your marketing goals?
5. Share what is going on with your company and within your industry – the opportunities and challenges that exist for your company
6. Your next step would be to develop a creative brief. You want to be careful that you do not end up with conflicting or weak messaging and not get the ROI that you had hoped for
7. A Creative Brief is a document that details – in a clear and concise manner – what you hope your tradeshow participation will accomplish – both in terms of business strategy and creative objectives. Most importantly, it helps give your internal team and exhibit house team clear direction to ensure the final outcome links the 2 together.
8. What are the demographics of your target market? Besides demographics, you may want to delve into psychographics as well – what does your target audience already perceive about your product or service? What drives them or gets them excited. What hesitations may they already have regarding your products or services?
9. What is the single main message about your company/product/service that you want to impress up everyone who interacts with your staff or just views your display from the aisle. This can be accomplished not only with direct messaging but also through subtle design choices that impact the look and feel of your space. This should be short and precise but it is one of the most important elements to include. Your final exhibit design should support this statement.



How do you envision attendee flow?

When visitors stop at your booth, how do you envision your interaction with them? Would you like a reception area to greet visitors? Do you need a demonstration area? Do you need a lounging area? Do you prefer to conduct more formal meetings away from prying eyes on the show floor and therefore you require private meeting space? In every exhibit, from a 10' inline to a 100' island, certain things must happen. You need space for interacting with customers one-on-one, your technology, storage, etc. Each area within the booth can increase or decrease depending upon the theme, space allotment and country protocol.

What technology do you need and why?

Multimedia (animation, video, audio, interactive kiosks) for can make a strong impact, but make sure that you are incorporating them because they further your message, not just because it is cool and flashy. We so often hear that a company wants all the whiz-bang of a large LED wall but has no content developed to put on the hardware.

Same is true for lighting. Well-placed lighting can set a mood that attracts and counterbalances the harsh exhibit hall fluorescents; however it needs to be part of a cohesive design.

What else should your designer know?

Make sure to include any additional information you think would be helpful to the designers to achieve the results you are looking for. Are there "must-have" components? This is also a good place to discuss your company's identity – do you prefer a more modern minimalist look? Are you better represented by a more traditional conservative look/feel? Are there any special elements of your logo or identity that you would like to see incorporated into the design?

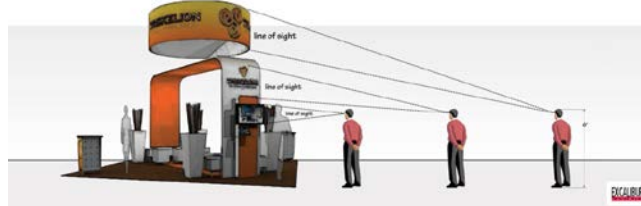
Here's where design materials should be discussed as well. While steel may give you the industrial look you want, it will cost you a fortune in shipping and drayage. Work with your designer to select materials that accomplish your design goals without breaking the bank.

How will this process help ensure ROI?

Having a creative brief in writing will help avoid miscommunication and disconnects, which could translate to costly re-work or an end-product that doesn't meet expectations. It also ensures everyone's expectations are clear and aligned.

Tradeshow Design Do's

- Design for a quick, visceral impact
- Ensure signage is visible from all sides of the exhibit
- Size of booth dictates scale of graphics



Be sure to design for a quick, visceral impact – you only get seconds to capture the attention of an attendee and make them want to stop and talk to you. Be sure to ensure that your signage is visible from all sides of the exhibit and from all distances. I can't tell you how many times I have been walking down an aisle and turned a corner and could not find the name of the company for the booth right in front of me! Never expect a person right in front of your space to break their neck to look up at your hanging sign to find out which company this is.

Let the size of your space dictate the scale of the graphics



Start the planning process **early**

Make sure design reinforces company's brand, messaging and business goals

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Start the planning process early

Give yourself and your designer the time to work through the best representation of your company's brand, messaging, and business goals

Here is one example of how an award winning display perfectly fits the brand of the exhibiting company. Made from rough cedar and with lots of large pots filled with various mixes of earth, potting soil, mulch, etc. attendees are invited to get their hands dirty and run their fingers through the various products – What better way to show the Living Earth?

Designers and engineers needed the time to exactly space the pots, test the weight on a shelf of full pots, and the height needed for the bags of soil - - - without ample time to prepare, this could have been a real miss or maybe even a mess.

Tradeshow Design Do's



Match **colors** to the Pantone scale

Use only **high** resolution images

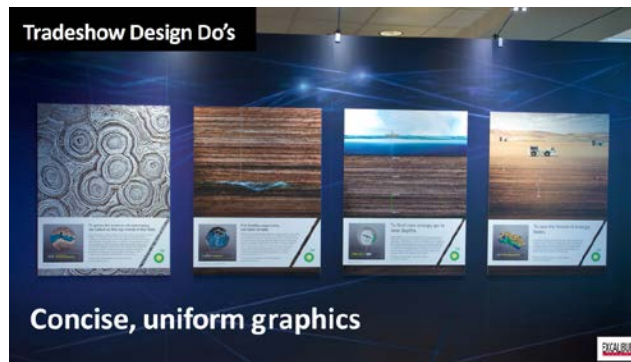
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Turning to your graphics – Especially in smaller displays – your graphics may be your only messaging due to space or budget constraints

Make sure that your graphic designer provides camera ready art for that has a high enough resolution for the size to which you are outputting.

While working with the #2 company on the Fortune 500, we had to actually recreate an image from scratch of one of their credit card products for a large revolving sign – the only image they and their agency had was only large enough for a magazine ad! It can happen!

Stay true to you company's PMS colors but sometimes you have to give a little. Just as coated and uncoated papers of the same PMS number will look different – so will that color on carpet, laminate, fabric, etc. Most of this is due to the inherent light reflecting properties of the material on which the color is printed.



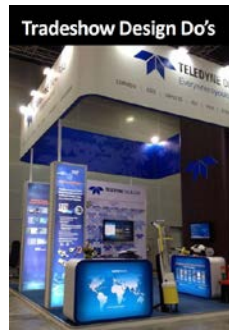
Keep your graphics concise and uniform

One easy way, as shown here, keeps the graphic one size and the band of text the same size and location throughout.



Large super-mural graphics attract attention. Don't be afraid to use them – even the simple image of a smiling employee can convey the positive emotion of working for your company.

With the advent of dye-sublimated fabric and LED lighting it is possible now to have long runs of seamless graphics that are also backlit. Use them to garner attention.



Concise, even with a variety of product messages

EXHIBIT

Here is a great example of a lot of graphic messages in small space.

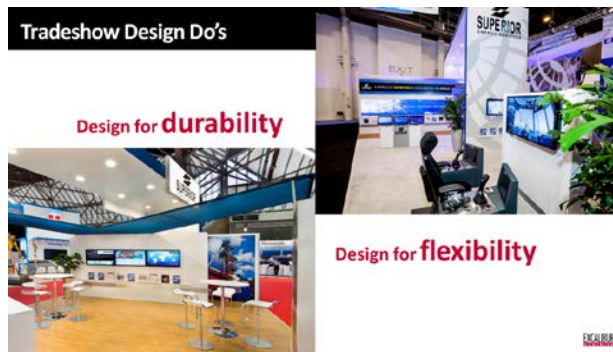
Although it would not typically be my first choice to put messaging on the front of counters – you sometimes have to bend the rules when you need the space.

Remember that the counter front and custom carpet messaging will hopefully be blocked during most of the show hours by the attendees standing in your space!



Another great example of the design synergistically representing the company's product perfectly. In this case, they have a software program called – what else? – The Blue Qube!

How perfectly this tells their story and attracts attendees from the distance with the lighting and colors and creates additional interest by the angles and shapes utilized.



Design for Durability and Flexibility

It makes little sense domestically to design for a one-time use if you are purchasing. Design with modular components that can be re-purposed and / or re-sized for different shows or locations within a hall. The Blue Qube that I just showed you, has one configuration and one size only – so while it is a superb demonstration of their brand – it lacks the flexibility to use components for a smaller space.

If you are considering renting – the rule of thumb we always use is that it takes at least 3 uses in a year to re-coup you money. Rentals can be customized for you – they don't all need to look the same. Consider a rental if you have only one 20'x20' or larger space per year and all the others are either a 10'x10' or a 10'x20'. Could be a perfect solution to make a big impact at you one large show.



One of my favorite topics and, in my opinion, not taken into consideration enough, is the ability to use lighting to set the mood or draw attention to your display or areas within your display that you want to highlight.

Even if you only have a small space – don't downplay the importance of spending time planning your lighting. From something as simple as raising the ambient light within your space so that your space appears to be brighter than anyone around you is a great psychological tool.

Even with simple stem lights – you can opt for a warmer or cooler color output – even if the full Kelvin range of colors are not available – be careful of at least the effect of warm and cool tones.

As you can see by the example on the screen, the cooler whiter light is inherently brighter. You may want a nice warm glow in the bedroom, but do you want that in your display?

The lights can also drastically effect what the attendees see when looking at your graphics – colors may be correct or they may appear to be way off – the 2 boxes both have white walls in this example.



The food industry is a prime example of an industry that uses color to psych out the visual appeal to a viewer.

Which meat or which vegetable is more appealing – keeping in mind it is exactly the same objects used for comparison.

Tradeshow Design Don'ts

- Losing sight of products & services being sold
- Not integrating exhibit design with other marketing materials
- Saying too much



For a few quick don'ts

Don't lose sight of the fact that your products, services, and brand should be what stands out – not the structure of the display itself. The display is the vehicle to deliver your message – it is not the message!

Don't forget to integrate design elements from all your marketing materials including your website, social media, collateral etc. with the exhibit design. It is a real disconnect for an attendee to have search your website which is all blue and get to your booth and see all red – stay cohesive

Don't say too much – Let photos, illustrations, color and light do most of the talking for you

Tradeshow Design Don'ts

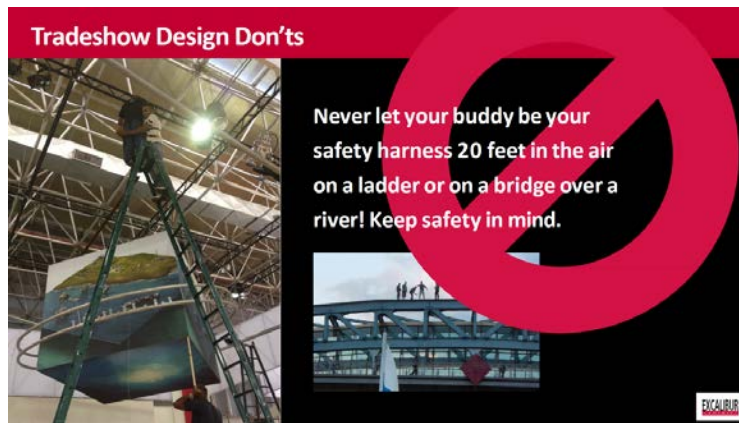


Don't rely on your in-house graphic designer to design your exhibit. Graphic design is a 2-d art form usually working with small spaces like a publication page – Exhibit design is 3-d and factors in many parameters on a much larger scale.

In my 30 years in the industry, I've never met a designer that is great at both.

Don't include trade sensitive information in your exhibit graphics – you don't want your legal team advising you to remove a key graphic opening morning of the show

Don't assume that your first design concept will be your final design. Most people find it easier to edit a design once they see it, than to start from thin air



Another personal favorite – Keep safety in mind!

Granted these are from international venues and would never fly in the US – but here we see a buddy on a 20' ladder being the safety harness and some yahoos that scaled to the top of a bridge rather than using the pedestrian crossing all without any personal protective gear!

Even during set-up and tear down, be careful of slipping on visqueen or empty label backings laying in the aisles. That has flattened quite a few folks and I personally stepped on a piece of banding that kicked up and sliced into the back of my ankle – 10 stitches later – at least my Achilles tendon was intact.

Case Study

St. Arnold's Brewing Co. at the
Great American Beer Festival

10' x 20' Exhibit
Big impact on a \$10k budget
Visible from afar



In closing, I wanted to share with you another award winning design for a brewing company in a consumer environment –

What is striking about this project in that it was produced on an extremely limited budget of \$10k.

We were able to produce a display out of foam and paint it to resemble a wedding chapel – they got great visibility and lines waiting to enter the exhibit each day of the show



- Designed reinforced brand message
- Open modular design
- Creative use of materials
- Engaging / Interactive / Memorable

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Wedding vows were renewed in a masterful marketing campaign that was engaging, interactive, and memorable! The excitement garnered local Denver television and radio stations to do live remotes from the booth. What can you generate on your budget?



I hope this sparked some of your creative juices got the energy flowing this morning. We'll have a Q&A session after and if I or anyone on the Excalibur team can assist you, please just ask.