

Factors for universities to consider for trade shows

Exhibit marketing for universities

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Abstract

This paper investigates factors universities should consider when attending trade shows. The findings are based both on earlier studies, but also a research on this subject. The purpose of this study is to examine important aspects of exhibit marketing for universities which subsequently could be improved to improve the performance at a trade show. The findings of this study are that the booth staff, the layout of the booth, pre-show communication with the desired audience, among others, are important factors for universities to consider when attending trade show.

Introduction

Using exhibit marketing can be a powerful and very useful activity for any kind of organization. It may be used to expand their business, convey a message, improve sales or put their organization on the map. There are trade shows for almost every industry one can imagine, and some of those are industrial products, food & beverage, wine & spirits, books and consumer goods. However, exhibit marketing is not only used by companies to boost their profit. It is also used by universities when trying to attract students to attend their university. There are specific trade shows where several universities attend, and as of any industry, there is a competition between the universities. If the representatives from the university uses the trade show in an effective way, they will receive a good outcome from the trade show. Some may succeed with this, but many will also fail. In this paper, I will investigate which factors that is important at trade shows and how they can be improved. The research question I intend to answer in this report is “How could universities use trade shows better?”.

Method

To get understanding within this subject, the data has been collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been obtained by a survey between the dates 2016-12-01 and 2017-01-03. The sample size of the survey had a minimum required population of 200 answers to improve validity of the survey. The survey was internet based, and the answers were collected from Facebook groups which consisted of persons studying at universities or in some way have associations with universities (former students and to-be students). The reason to this limitation is that this group of people most likely have visited a trade show for universities and therefore are representative for population.

Data will also be collected from various secondary sources, such as scientific reports concerning this subject, obtained from different databases, such as DiVA, Google Scholar and Web of Science. Other sources such as statistical reports, interviews, newspapers and books I find relevant to find answer to my research question will also be used in this paper.

Literature review

The importance of marketing

Marketing is a way for an organization to control communication and relationship with other parts, such as customers and other companies (Hunt 1976). Marketing plays a major role for every kind of organization. There can be many reasons for marketing, whilst some of them can be to increase sales, strengthen a brand or spread a message. However, the main purpose of marketing is to create some kind of value which benefits both the company itself and the customers, by targeting a specific population. (Kotler et al. 2008). Marketing is also important since it is associated with trust, and if a supplier

have trust in an organization, it improves the level of satisfaction (Andaleeb 1996). There are many different types of strategies to be used when marketing. Some common ways of marketing are Word-to-mouth marketing, using flyers and posters, internet marketing (on social medias for example), TV and radio commercials and exhibit marketing. In this paper, I will focus on the latter.

What is exhibit marketing?

A great way for any kind of organization or institution to reach out to a large crowd and convey a message is by using exhibit marketing. Exhibition marketing allows the organization to demonstrate a product, provide information of a subject, to promote a company and so on. The main purpose of exhibit marketing is exchanging of information between different parties and to increase sales (Søilen 2013). Exhibit marketing is often performed in so called trade shows (also called trade fairs and expo's). At trade shows, organizations within certain industries from different countries attend to display their newest products, get a better view of their competitors but also espionage. A trade show is also a good place for companies to maintain and procure business relations (Kellezi 2014). According to Han & Verma (2014), the exhibitors participating in a trade show mainly focuses on the development of business and contact related subjects, whilst the visitors at the trade show strives for an exclusive experience and are motivated by informational goals. Exhibition marketing is often considered to be the first choice when collecting business related information (Dallmeyer (2013). Maguire (2012) states that exhibitions grants the prospect of in person contact with potential customers, which allows them to get a better understanding of their personal needs. A trade show is an important tool for the communication mix for an organization. A person who visits an organizations booth at a trade show will most likely spread the word to other people (Petrova 2014).

Exhibit marketing is a large industry that grows each day. The country with the largest trade show industry is Germany, but the interest for trade shows in Asia is increasing (Søilen 2010). In 2008, approximately half of the companies at German trade shows were European companies. Taking this into consideration, this is a very large industry and companies travel from all over the world to participate. However, it is also a very expensive method of marketing due to the facts that it requires a lot of travelling and transportation of goods and booth materials. Nevertheless, successful marketing at trade show can have great benefits in the long run, such as increased sales and improved business relations which results in greater profits. (Pitta, Weisgal & Lynagh, 2006). Also, if the trade show is done properly, your organizations booth will attract many visitors and potential customers, and therefore the cost per contact is relative low compared to other marketing activities which may not have the same impact power. (Sashi & Perretty 1992).

Optimising the performance at a trade show

Considering the time and cost aspects of a trade show, it is important to use both time and money as efficient as possible. Rosson & Seringhaus (1995) states that a well-designed trade booth, the booth staff and how well-known the company is being important factors at a trade show. The behaviour of the booth staff is also of great importance at a trade show. If a visitor has been attracted to a booth it is up to the staff to keep them there whilst not losing their interest.

Søilen (2013) suggests that the design is not the most important thing when it comes to a booth, because of that in a trade show environment, it is hard to take in all design features. Therefore, it is good to keep it simple. It is important for the booth staff to not only focus on informational aspects but also on relational aspects. If the visitors at the booth have plenty of time, one must not always have to try to sell directly to them, but to focus on establishing a relation with the visitors. (Søilen 2013). This is often referred to as relationship marketing, which concerns the relationship between one organization to another. Relationship marketing is considered to develop stronger relationships with the customers than other aspects, such as performance and sales growth (Palmatier et al. 2006).

Dallmeyer (2013) presents several factors of great importance to succeed with exhibit marketing. Some of those factors contain of

- Selecting an exhibition appropriate for your organization
It is important to attend trade shows that matches your organizations business. This way you will most likely get in touch with your desired audience.
- Build a strategy and set objectives.
The organization must set up goals and plan the exhibition well for a successful trade show. It is important to set up goals so the staff at the exhibition is striving to achieve the same goals.
- Choosing the right staff for your exhibition.
It is of great importance to staff your booth with the persons that are most appropriate for the job. If your booth has attracted potential customers, it is up to these people to keep them interested and gradually selling your product to them. Visitors will not only remember the look of the booth, but also the staff. Therefore, the behaviour and appearance of the staff is very important.
- Targeting the marketing.
When contacting your desired visitors before the trade show, and informing them about where you will be located and what you will be demonstrating etc., the chance of them visiting your booth will increase.
- Pre-show communication with first time visitors
Many people visiting the trade show will be first-timers, which is a great opportunity for the organization. By targeting this group, you do not only assist them at their first visit at a trade show, but also increase the chance they will visit your booth. This can be done by advertising in pre-show sources, such as Facebook-

pages. *Pre-show communication is related to targeting the marketing as mentioned above.*

Universities and marketing

A university is just like any company. It is a corporation which benefits from having as many students as possible studying at their university. Therefore, it is of great importance that universities attract as many people as possible. University trade shows is a common type of trade show which attracts many possible students and universities. Since this is a very niche type of trade show, there is also competition between the universities at the exhibition. The universities therefore must make the best out of the trade show in order to captivate potential students. To do this the universities at the exhibition must adjust their marketing approach towards the students. However, being better than your competitors does not guarantee that your organization will be successful, if what you are offering provides the customer with only little value (Jenster & Sjøilen 2009). According to Dao and Thorpe (2014) there are nine major factors influencing and affecting the student's choice of university. These nine in order consist of

1. Facilities and services
The condition of facilities at the university, like libraries and laboratory's, and services such as health service.
2. Programmes
The different programmes available at the university
3. Price
The tuition fees and availability of financial aid
4. Offline information
Information sources like personal contact with the school, ability to visit the school and events.
5. Opinions
How the student is influenced by other people, such as siblings, parents and teachers
6. Online information
Information sources available online, like websites and forums
7. Ways of communication
How the university communicates with the students, like e-mails and phone calls.
8. Programme additions
Ways of expanding or adjusting the programme for one individual needs or taste. Examples of these are opportunity of international student exchanges and distance learning.
9. Advertising
How well the university uses advertising

According to Westring Sjöberg (2008) there are seven major factors affecting the choice of school.

- Reputation – How well known the school is
- How the student is influenced by parents
- How the student is influenced by siblings and friends
- Location – Where the school is located and accessibility
- Counselling – Ability to get assistance when choosing programme
- Admission score – how high grades which is required to get accepted to the school
- Marketing – how well the school works with advertising

The survey on universities and trade shows

This survey has been created to get an estimation on how universities can use trade shows better. The survey was active between the dates 2016-12-01 and 2017-01-03. The sample size of the survey had a minimum required population of 200 answers to improve validity of the survey. The total sample size of the survey at 2017-01-03 was 222 participants (n=222). The survey was internet based, and the answers were collected from Facebook groups which consisted of persons studying at universities or in some way have associations with universities (former students and to-be students). The answers from the survey has been put into diagrams which will be presented below. This data will be used to get understanding of how universities use trade shows.

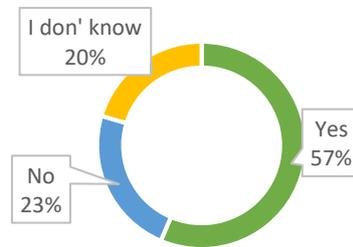
The following items were used in the survey and the replies were as following:

- Are you, have been or is to be a student at a university?
 - Yes 75% No 25%
- Have you visited a university trade show?
 - Yes 80 % No 20 %
- Did the university's participation affect your choice of university?
 - Yes 57 % No 23 % I don't know 20 %
- Do you believe universities should use trade shows as a marketing source?
 - Yes 76 % No 11 % I don't know 13 %
- Which factors are most important for a university at a trade show? (Ability to choose two answers)
 - Brochures and other information - 90
 - Free items (pencils, sweets, coffee etc.) - 40
 - The representatives from the university - 142
 - The location and time of the trade show - 48
 - The look of the booth - 102
 - Other - 10
 - I don't know - 12

Analysis

There are many different aspects of trade shows for universities to consider before, during and after a trade show. Exhibit marketing is a great opportunity for universities to use a marketing source. Westin Sjöberg (2008) presents several important factors that can influence a student's choice of university. Some of those include reputation of the school, opinions from other people, such as parents, siblings and friends. Dao and Thorpe (2014) also mentions several factors that can affect a student when choosing university, where many are similar to the ones Westin Sjöberg (2008) mentions. Some differences are how well the university provides information to the students and the facilities of the university. One factor both researchers have in common is how well the organizations works with advertising and marketing.

Did the university's participation affect your choice of university?

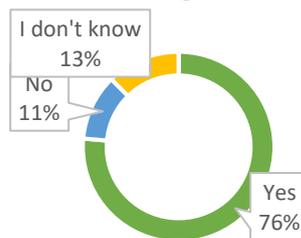


According to the survey used in this paper, the participation of universities had an impact of 57% of the respondent's choice of university. Because this makes the majority of the respondents, trade shows can be a good place for universities to market their organization. It is worth noticing that 23 % of the respondents that answered "no" cannot go unmentioned, due to 23% being relative high in relation to the 57% answering "yes". Therefore, focusing in factors that influence the choice of university is an approach that is beneficial for universities at trade shows. One way to do this is to adjust their marketing, and focus on those factors that potential students find valuable when choosing a university.

Marketing can be done in many ways. One way is to use relationship marketing. This concerns the relationship between an organization and another part, such as a customer, or in this case a student. Relationship marketing can develop stronger relationships than other aspects, such as selling high quality products. (Palmatier et al. 2006). An organization attending a trade show does not always have to focus on selling directly to a customer, but try to establish a relation with them, as mentioned by Sjøilen (2013). In this way, the organization, or university in this case, can indirectly sell (or try to market the university) by making the visitor feel they have some kind of relationship with the university.

Dao and Thorpe (2014) states that how well a university uses marketing is a factor that can influence the choice of university. As Westring Sjöberg (2008) mentions, the reputation of the school is also an influential factor when choosing school. Reputation can be built in many different ways, but one way to do it is by marketing. Rosson & Seringhaus (1995) mentions that how well known an organization attending a trade show is, the chance of success improves.

Do you believe universities should use trade shows as a marketing source?



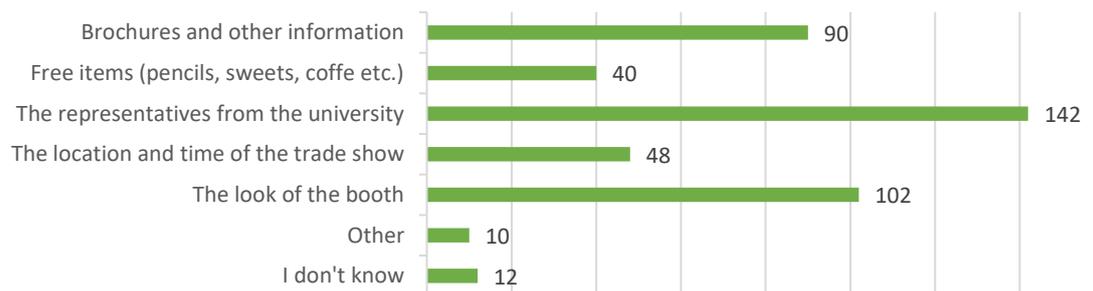
76% of the respondents believed that trade shows are a useful marketing strategy for universities. 13 % did not know and 11% did not believe that it is useful. Because of these findings, trade shows provide a good marketing opportunity for universities. These findings show that universities benefit from using trade show as a source of marketing. But in order to succeed with their trade shows, it is important for them to market the trade show itself.

Dallmeyer (2013) presents several factors that is important at a trade show. One of those are Pre-show communication with first time visitors, which is a way of marketing. Since many of the visitors at university trade fair are first-time visitors, the university can use it as a marketing opportunity. According to the survey, informational sources such as brochures is the thirist most important factor for a university at a trade show. This can be considered as both a way of communicating with the visitors by giving them information about the university, but also a marketing opportunity. Essentially, informing a potential customer about what the organization offer can be considered as a way of marketing.

Since there are many competitors at a university trade show it is important for the university to market their organization to attract visitors. Dallmeyer (2013) also shows that targeting the organizations marketing is important for trade shows. When a university attends a trade show, their natural target are potential students. Therefore, one way to target their marketing is by informing people that may be interested in studying at university. Examples of these can be unemployed or people that just finished studying at high school. If a person has been informed in an earlier stage about the university's participation at a trade show, the likelihood that that person visits them increases.

Dallmeyer (2013) states that one important factor to success with a trade show is the quality of the booth staff. This is also mentioned by Søylen (2013). The behaviour and overall appearance of the booth staff can influence the visitor's impression of the organization. As shown in the diagram above, the respondents believe that the representatives from the university is the most important factor when it comes to exhibit marketing for universities. The representatives do not only provide the visitors with information, for the also may establish relations with visitor.

Which two of these factors are most important for a university to focus on when attending a trade show?



In this question, the respondents were to answer which two factors they believe is most important for a university to focus on when it comes to trade shows. This gives an insight of which factors a university possibly could improve in order to increase the chance of success at a trade show.

Another important factor for the booth staff is to set up goals. If they do not work towards the same goals this may have a negative impact on the visitors of the trade show. The booth staff must develop a strategy on how they should behave at the exhibition. Setting up objectives is an important factor, as mentioned by Dallmeyer (2013).

As Andaleeb (1996) mentions, marketing can increase the level of trust a person have to an organization. If the representatives from the university uses marketing in a good way, the visitors will therefore have greater trust in them and the organization, and therefore will become more satisfied. As Søylen (2013) mentions, do not always have to focus on selling their product (or in this case, attracting people to the university), but try to establish a relation with the visitor. When focusing on relationship marketing, it is more likely to establish long-term relationships with the visitors (Palmatier et al. 2006).

The second-most important factor to consider at a trade show, according to the study, is the look of the booth. Rosson & Seringhaus (1995) states that the appearance of the booth plays a major role in the achieving a successful trade show. The booth is what catches a visitor's eye at a trade show and provides a first impression of the university.

There are many factors contributing to a successful booth. As mentioned earlier, the booth staff is one of them. If the booth staff looks professional and are committed to the

trade show, the organization will look more professional and serious. The layout and design of the booth is also of great importance. This can include the size of the booth, the colour, how appropriate the design of your booth is in relation to the industry and competitor, if the clothing of the booth staff fits the design of the booth and eventual TV-monitors, speakers etc. However, building a professional and appealing booth is both time consuming and expensive. But since the booth plays such a major role in a trade show, it may be worth spending some time and money. As Sashi & Perretty (1992) mentions, the more people who visit your booth at a trade show, the less the cost per contact will become.

“When someone walks past your booth, you have about 3 s to get their attention. That is much less than the time it takes to read a sentence explaining what your booth is all about” (Søilen 2013, p. 81)

Søilen (2013) suggests that simplicity is important when constructing a trade show booth. Because of the loud and bustling environment, design features on booths may not be absorbed by the visitor. Because many of the universities at a trade show operate in the same industry and most likely offer the same products, the chance of their booth looking alike is high. Because of this, it is valuable to work with pre-show marketing as mentioned earlier.

Conclusion

This study shows that there are many different factors that are important for universities to consider before and during trade shows. To attract as many potential students as possible, the university must focus on those values that influences the choice of university. It is important for the university to market their participation at a trade show before the exhibition by targeting the desired audience. The behaviour and appearance of the booth staff is a crucial factor to consider, since they are the ones who keep the visitors interested and represent the organization. The staff must set up objectives and work towards the same goals. The design of the booth is important, because it is often what gets the visitors attention. But design is not everything; simplicity is also relevant. If the university has marketed their participation before the show in an effective way, the knowing of the universities participation at the trade show will attract visitors.

Implications

The validity and reliability of this survey is based on the objectivity of the respondents. Since most of the respondents had some kind of association with universities, the answers possibly could differ if this was not the case. However, the questions were asked in order to avoid research biases. Examples of this is that the amount of questions were at a low level there were no leading questions. The study by Westring Sjöberg (2008) on factors that influence the choice of school was based on student's choice of high school/upper secondary school. Though it is not a university, I believe that the findings from the study still may be implicated to my research.

Future research

There is a lot of research that can be done on this subject. Examples of future research could possibly be to focus on how other organizations could use trade shows, or how the use of trade shows differ between nation and contexts.

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