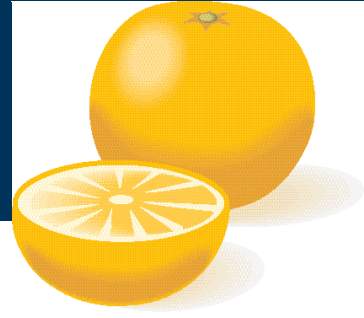


creative juices



If you fail at something, try again immediately. You will almost certainly fail but this time you will not have the unpleasant surprise. Now that has to count for something!

Exhibitions are perhaps the most elusive and most misunderstood marketing medium. They involve face to face contact, so they are perfectly natural and therefore easy. Aren't they? After all, Nature's easy, with those tidal waves, droughts, hurricanes, antibiotic resistant bugs and that pesky mould I can't get off my bathroom ceiling.

Exhibitions are simply modern extensions of the market; a means of buyer meeting seller that has been part of human behaviour throughout history. Why would they need any special thought or planning? At their essence they don't even involve the 5,000 year old development of writing, let alone the technology of the internet. As far as marketing media go, exhibitions are quite literally from the dark ages.

Hence, traditional exhibition training focuses on how to behave at the show. "You at the back of the stand, stop eating that sausage roll!" "Turn around and face your customers!" The aim is to make exhibitors conduct themselves in the "right way" on the stand. Maintain eye contact, firm handshakes, no reading newspapers or smoking, sensible shoes, lots of open questions and let's work those aisles! Which sounds more like the exhortations of a religious cult that's keen to attract new members than the most effective marketing tool in existence.

So guess what? Lots of exhibitors claim to fail, while others claim to succeed brilliantly. Although it's frequently difficult to assess against what criteria that success or failure is

measured. How sensible their shoes were and a bowl full of business cards at the show end? And yet there is no end of companies keen to exhibit for the first time and plenty who claim the medium doesn't work who continue to book stand space. Maybe they like failure.

The truth about exhibitions is unfortunately a little more complicated (damn, I hate when things are complicated). Exhibitions deserve the attention paid to other media and the first area to focus that attention on is objectives. Get some. Actually that's too difficult, get one. Remember the golden rule of objectives – specific, achievable and measurable. I know it's boring but it's how we get to the fun stuff.

Once you've got an objective you can select an exhibition and then, and only then, you can start to think about how you are going to achieve your objective. If you are going to market it will save you a lot of heartache if your cart and horse are in the right order.

PS Ignore any received wisdom about what exhibitions can and can't achieve. They can do anything any other media can do and more. Just have an objective to measure your results against.

PPS Ignore the sensible shoes rule. Just because!

Simon Burton of Exposure Communications