

Industry PR guru and show organiser, Simon Burton, delivers another snappy sermon

Rabbit, rabbit

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Simon Burton's exhibition industry career includes working with a leading organiser, contractor and PR agency. He established his own dedicated exhibition PR agency, Exposure Communications, in 2000 and launched The Exhibiting Show last year.

What is your favourite meal?
"Huevos rancheros."

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Something a bit different this month. No elusive metaphors, no witty asides, no focus on the bigger picture, no meandering arguments. You thought I said it was going to be different? Well it is.

Whatever I might passionately believe to be the virtues of adopting an integrated approach to exhibiting; wherever I might evangelise about the need for visitor experience to drive your approach; however strong my conviction that interactivity is essential to fully exploit an exhibition stand, it's all a waste of time, energy and money if you don't actually approach visitors.

The difference between phenomenally successful exhibitors and those who bemoan their lack of success is very, very straightforward. The successful exhibitors will have effectively approached and spoken to visitors. That's it. Nothing cleverer, more sophisticated or more complex than that. The magic bullet is simple. Talk to them.

I have lost count of the number of times I have visited shows and pretty much walked the entire exhibition floor without being approached. And I'm not just referring to the sandwich-eating, cigarette-smoking, huddled-at-the-back-of-the-stand disasters we all love to laugh at. I'm talking about

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apparently sophisticated companies on professional looking stands, with supposedly experienced stand staff, who don't know how to engage a visitor in conversation.

The research is frightening. Fewer than one in 10 stands approach visitors. What do you think they are going to do? Rush onto your stand and beg for a product demo? Respond to a 'can I help you?' with 'yes', I'd like to buy 300 of whatever it is you're selling?

If your competitors are taking leads at a show and you're not, it's pretty damn certain that your lack of success isn't because of your stand position, or the need for the organiser to deliver more visitors, or the venue catering or the colour and size of your graphics. Exhibitions are about people, and after the visitors the most important people are the ones staffing your stand. If they ain't any good, the chances are your stand won't be either.