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AFCOM: Increase Exhibitor ROI

After 9/11, AFCOM's Data Center World experienced a decline in attendees, exhibitors and its net square footage. Exhibitors complained about rising costs and poor ROI. "My goal was to increase exhibitor ROI by lowering exhibitor costs and increasing attendance," says Jill Eckhaus, CEO of AFCOM.

Eckhaus worked closely with Tradeshow Logistics to define actions would facilitate reaching her goals. One of her first steps was to negotiate contractor costs and reduce exhibitor service rates—especially material handling and shipping rates.

By surveying its members, who are also its primary attendees, AFCOM learned that these constituents wanted to see more computer hardware on the show floor. AFCOM responded by having the exhibit space sales team target hardware companies.

Not only did having more hardware suppliers attract more attendees, it added additional freight, resulting in increased material handling revenue. Eckhaus applied these revenues to her marketing efforts—which in turn helped increase attendance. AFCOM has continued to track and measure its performance since 2003. Since then, it has:

⌚ Increased attendance by over 60%.

- ⌚ Doubled nsf of exhibit space and the number of exhibitors at its spring show.
- ⌚ Increased nsf of exhibit space by 79%, and the number of exhibitors by over 92% for its fall show.
- ⌚ Been named to Tradeshow Week's list of 50 Fastest Growing Tradeshows for the second year in a row.

AAP: Increased Exhibitor Satisfaction

The 2002 AAP post-show survey revealed exhibitors wanted lower costs and improved services and operations. AAP worked with TradeshowLogistics to apply a PLAN/ACT/REVIEW methodology to achieve this goal.

The team systematically set objectives that would remedy the exhibitor service issues. To lower exhibiting costs, material handling and shipping changes were reduced. To improve services, AAP developed a customer service initiative. AAP also streamlined the show service ordering process by offering an online ordering system where exhibitors could specify and pay for all show service vendors with one credit card transaction. To ensure better communications and to promote these new programs, AAP established new lines of communication: newsletters, e-mails and phone calls.

The customer service initiative was established in 2003. That year, post-show exhibitor evaluations revealed exhibitor satisfaction jumped from a 55% performance rating to an 83% performance rating. "There is nothing complicated about the Plan/Act/Review process that we follow. What is unique is the way that we work together with our general contractor as one team working toward the same objective " says Katie Roski, Exhibit Meeting and Service Coordinator AAP has continued to apply the PLAN/ACT/REVIEW strategy. Currently, its exhibitor satisfaction rating is at an all-time high of 90%--and the number of exhibitors has increased by 19%.

Submitted by Judith Fleischer, LGS Communications