

# Top Ten Most Costly Mistakes Companies Make When Hiring A Trade Show Presenter

by William Hall



There is a lot at stake when you hire a professional presenter for a trade show. Avoid these mistakes and you'll save time, money and headaches.

## 1) NOT GETTING REFERENCES OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Any presenter can look good on a demo tape. This is where they put their best foot forward. The real proof of how good your presenter is going to be is when they get on the trade show floor. And to find out what happened there, you have to get references from their former clients. This is by far the most important step you can take to ensure you're getting a great presenter, and it is usually the most overlooked aspect of the hiring process.

At a recent trade show, a presenter arrived late for the second day. On the third day, he arrived late ... and drunk. Now, details like this are not going to show up on his resume, and they're not going to be featured on his video. So what can you do? Ask for the names and numbers of their past 3 or 4 clients. If they can't provide you with any clients, or the clients they do provide you with are several years old, be wary. What happened in the intervening years when the presenter didn't (or couldn't) get references? In any case, talk to people who have hired your presenter before. They'll tell you if the presenter is great, merely competent, or maybe even if you should pass on the presenter. Yes, it is a little more work, but, taking the time to make a couple of phone calls could save you a lot of grief on the trade show floor

## 2) LACK OF FLEXIBILITY

Schedules change every day on the trade show floor. Lunch may have

to be moved, an extra show may have to be added. If your trade show presenter isn't willing to adjust, then it's going to affect your message, leads and profits. A presenter should be working on your schedule, not theirs

Asking your presenters if they are willing to be flexible isn't going to get you the information. No one looking for a job is going to answer "No" Instead, ask your presenter to give examples of having to be flexible during a trade show. If they can't come up with any, chances are they weren't.

Sometimes you don't even need to ask if someone is inflexible—they'll spell out how ridged they are in their contract. For example, one company that provides presenters to tradeshows charges extra if there isn't a 15 minute break between presentations. While this make sense most of the time (after all, an overworked presenter isn't doing you much good), sometimes if the booth is really busy you may need to get in a show before fifteen minutes are up. Someone who is watching the clock isn't watching out for you.

## 3) PRESENTER IS A PARROT, NOT PRESENTER

Your presenter should be able to do more than just recite the words of the script. If you wanted that, you could set up a cardboard cutout of a smiling presenter and let a tape recorder run. Just because someone has a good voice and can narrate a slide show, doesn't mean they have an understanding of your message. And whether or not a presenter has a true understanding of the material will be clear to your audience, and a good voice can't make up for someone who truly is not invested in the success of

your booth. So make sure before you get to the trade show floor that your presenter understands what they are saying. Discuss the presentation with them, and encourage them to ask questions. Ask them to break down the presentation in their own words.

You can't always get a sense of how well they understand the script during the interview/audition (most jobs I get come via the demo tape or a referral and an interview (usually by phone)). Don't assume that because they can keep up with the script in the ear prompter means they understand the material.

By the way, this is a good reason to hire a presenter who has experience writing or punching up trade show scripts. If they can assist with the writing, it means they have a greater understanding of your message.

## 4) PRESENTER IS NOT A TEAM PLAYER/NOT A STAKEHOLDER IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PRESENTATION.

Is your presenter more interested in a check than the success of your trade show presentation? Again, this is not something they are going to spell out on their resume ("Special Skills—taking your money"), but you can still ask about it before you hire them. Ask how they see themselves in the over all process of the sales cycle. Ask them how successful their last show was. See if they focus on them themselves ("I pronounced all the big words correctly!") or their client ("They exceeded their expectation of generating leads."). And this is another question to ask the presenter's former clients to get a sense if they are truly invested in the success of your booth.. (another way to phrase this

might be, ask them how successful their last show was? That way you'll be able to see what how they measure success.)

#### 5) PRESENTER DOESN'T CARE ABOUT ATTENDEES AFTER THE PRESENTATION IS OVER.

When your presenter is on the trade show floor between shows, do they personally direct interested attendees to the right staff member to answer questions. Or do they say "Talk to someone in the logo shirt?"

A good presenter realizes that they represent the company at all times, not just when they are on stage. If they are in contact with attendees between shows, they need to be professional, polite, and invested in the success of you getting sales and leads. They need to know who to direct inquiries to. If not, you lose a potential customer and sale.

Again, this isn't one of those shortcomings the presenter will list on their resume. You need to ask them, and their references they provide, about how they deal with attendees.

#### 6) PRESENTER NOT FULLY INVESTED IN SUCCESS OF ALL ASPECTS OF THE BOOTH

A great trade show presenter looks to see if all aspects of the company's booth are working to best advantage, not just their performance. For example, at a recent trade show, a presenter noticed that in between shows the screen was blank. Instead of counting the minutes until he went on again, he offered to create a few simple Power Point slides that informed passers by when the next show was. Granted, not all presenters are proficient in Power Point, but they should have the initiative to pick up scrapes of paper littered in the booth, or be willing to hand out giveaways. Before you hire them, ask your presenter what they consider their job in the overall look and success of the booth.

#### 7) PRESENTER HAS "THAT'S NOT MY JOB" SYNDROME

While it might be inappropriate to expect a presenter to be involved in heavy lifting of equipment, you might reasonably request them to stop by a breakout room or company party if there is a chance their presence might continue the sales process. A great presenter, one that gives you the best value for your money, understands that business may need to continue off the trade show floor. Before you hire, ask if they are open to this. If they balk, you may get a good presenter, but not a great one.

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#### 8) YOU DON'T GET TO PICK THE PRESENTER, THE COMPANY SENDS YOU WHOEVER IS AVAILABLE

Large companies that provide narrators and presenters are more interested in getting you a warm body than someone who is the right fit for your job. If you can't select who is going to represent your business on the trade show floor, the success of your presentation is going to suffer.

#### 9) PRESENTER CAN'T MAKE LAST MINUTE CHANGES TO THE SCRIPT/CAN ONLY DO ONE VERSION

Things change all the time on the trade show floor, sometimes at the last minute. A script that was approved right up to the day of the trade show may suddenly get cut or altered. Marketing or sales may decide a new piece of information must be inserted at the last minute to respond to competitors announcements at the show.

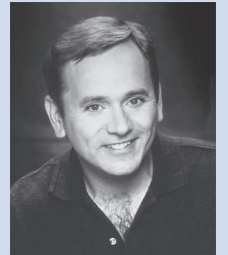
Most presenters will either have difficulty with last minute changes or at best perform them competently. A great presenter, one who really knows the flow of your message, will be able to assist in the crafting of the last minute changes. And if your presenter can be given the job to change the script, that leaves you to deal with other chores.

This is the advantage of hiring a presenter who has experience adjusting scripts. If a script needs changes (and they always seem to), a presenter who can assist in the changes is worth ten times more than the presenter who sits around waiting for the new pages. A presenter with writing experience is one of the best investments you can make.

#### 10) PRESENTER IS MORE MEMORABLE THAN YOUR MESSAGE.

Sure, that pool player who does all the trick shots may gather a big crowd, but when the crowd leaves will they be thinking more about the amazing display of cue work than the company's product or message. Don't fall into the trap of thinking big crowds equal big numbers of qualified leads. Also, novelty acts might spend their time between presentations handing out THEIR promotional material, not yours.

William Hall has been performing in tradeshow since 1995. He's been hired by HP, Microsoft, Sony, Oracle, Sun Microsystems, Apple, National Semiconductor, Cisco, Artisan, Hologic, Anystream, LynuxWorks and InfoCyclone as well as others.



Contact William:  
www.williamhall.net  
1-888-696-3463  
whsf@mindspring.com