

Event Audits Can Help Select the Best Tradeshows

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In the ongoing search for revenue growth, today's advertisers/exhibitors are making strides toward an integrated marketing mix—print, online and face-to-face. But while print and online data are relatively easy to quantify, event data remains somewhat elusive. That is where the independent event audit proves its value again and again.

Audits have been a standard tool for making print advertising decisions; and Web site audits are fast becoming the norm to determine traffic volume and ad delivery. Nonetheless, many exhibit managers have not been exposed to print or online audits, and while some believe in the importance of event audits, many others have never seen one.

“The online world has led to instant gratification with marketers wanting to see results of their online advertising in real time,” explains Glenn Hansen, president and CEO of global media auditor BPA Worldwide. “That whole sense of urgency and metrics carries over to anyone who has responsibility for either in-print, online or in-person. Trade shows are no longer operating in their own silo when it comes to measurement—everything is being looked at.”

What is an audit? A trade show audit is an analysis by an independent, third-party certified auditor of verified show attendance and demographic data that is gathered during the registration process. An audit is census-based, allowing for a full review of the entire database.

Most importantly, event audits—which are completely independent of event management—are standardized so that users can make accurate comparisons between two or more events. The Exhibition & Event Industry Audit Council (EEIAC) has taken further steps by certifying event auditors who meet or exceed the Council's established standards.

Glenda Brungardt, program manager for Hewlett Packard, exhibits at more than 100 events annually, believes that event audits are an invaluable resource. “My first impulse [about an unaudited show] is to wonder, ‘What are they hiding?’” Brungardt says. “If a show is unaudited, I assume that their published attendance figures are inflated. I ask for an audit statement every time I evaluate a show. I think they are critical to the selection process.”

While the event audit provides a solid foundation, it is only one part of the exhibitor's decision process when assessing a given show. The addition of research and other metrics brings the picture into even better focus. Exhibit Surveys, Inc. (ESI) is the industry leader when it comes to providing trade show survey information. Surveys are sample-based and typically provide more in-depth analysis of attendees, including buying power, audience activity and strategic planning.

“The demand for reliable measurement is extremely high from the corporate side for all media platforms,” reports Skip Cox, Exhibit Surveys president. “Without sound data—combining audit and research—you can not have a sound measurement, which is what advertisers and exhibitors are looking for.”

In addition to its event survey metrics, ESI, in conjunction with the International Association of Exhibitions and Events™ (IAEE), the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) and the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), has developed a set of pre-event planning and post-event measurement tools for exhibitors. These tools aid exhibitors in their decision to exhibit or return to the show, provide guidance with respect to their marketing investment in areas such as booth size, number of personnel, products/services to be displayed, measure their performance and potential for ROI from exhibiting. Be sure to attend Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual Meeting & Exhibition to find out more about the ROI Toolkit.

Of course, it is not just exhibitors who should be interested in event audits. Many of today's show organizers are committed to helping exhibitors get the most from their trade show investment. Informed show organizers are using a consultative sales approach with their exhibitors to demonstrate how audit and survey data can lead to decisions which maximize the exhibiting experience.