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BPA WORLDWIDE RESEARCH STUDY:
Determining Exhibitor ROI At
B-to-B Tradeshow Events

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In line with BPA Worldwide's ongoing commitment of providing maximum assurance of attendance data accuracy at face-to-face events—the global auditor of media undertook a research study to measure the perceived value of independent event audits and how they are utilized when marketers are deciding to exhibit at any given business-to-business event.

The study had three main objectives:

- Determine the key ROI drivers for event exhibitors
- Determine extent to which a detailed audit report of verified attendance including demographic data (or lack thereof) would compel or impede exhibitors to add an event to their plan
- Determine extent to which exhibitors hold show organizers accountable for delivering on promises of audience quantity and quality

The study's entire methodology, implications and conclusions are presented below in full detail.

BACKGROUND

BPA offers independent audits of face-to-face events to show organizers on a global scale. While the service has been accepted in other parts of the world, namely the UK, Continental Europe and Asia, BPA quickly recognized a disconnect between US-based event organizers and their exhibitors in terms of utilizing independent event audit data. In most cases, show organizers in the US were aware of event audits but believed a show audit led to unnecessary costs and intrusive processes. As far as organizers were concerned, their internally-derived registration or attendance figures were more than adequate to bring to market. Add in the fact that exhibitors simply were not asking for audits and it is easy to see why audited attendance data was not widely used.

However, as the global economy continues down an uncertain road, marketers within all media platforms are being held more accountable for each

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BACKGROUND (continued)

and every spending decision. When analyzed in terms of overall marketing spend, face-to-face events made up 15% of marketers' budgets in 2007 (according to data from Forrester Consulting Services on behalf of American Business Media). Only marketing communications (17%) and online advertising (16%) drew more ad dollars than trade shows and events. And while events trailed slightly in terms of ad dollars spent in the marketplace, Forrester reports 60.9% of marketers considered face-to-face exhibiting as the best means to effectively build brand image, and 62.9% indicated in-person events are considered the best tactic to generate qualified leads.

As a result, the need for accurate, independently audited attendance data in the marketplace is paramount. Event audits are the obvious answer to both organizers—who can use audited data to set their show apart from their competitors—and exhibitors—who can use attendance demographics to choose the right event, staff appropriately and provide accountability to senior management.

KEY FINDINGS

First and foremost, it is clear that the number of tradeshow and event attendees has decreased in the past decade. In fact, 40% of the survey respondents indicate that traffic to exhibits has decreased in the past year (2008).

That point is further backed by data from Exhibit Surveys, Inc. that shows “traffic density” (the theoretical number of people who could have occupied every 100 square feet of paid space for the duration of an exhibit) has shown a consistent downward trend to approximately 2.3 attendees in 2007 from a high of over 3 a decade earlier. However, ESI reports “audience interest factor” (the percentage of attendees who stop, talk or acquire literature at exhibits) has increased significantly to near 80% in 2007 from an interest factor of around 50% during the same period above.

These statistics state a clear case for event audit data. While overall attendance

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

may be down at tradeshow, organizers can show that quality is being sustained, i.e. the key buyers and decision-makers continue to attend events in spite of the overall decline in attendance (those not attending were of lesser value to exhibitors).

Decision to Exhibit

Attendee audience quality in terms of purchase influence/buying power (46%) is rated the number-one factor when deciding to exhibit at a given event, followed closely by a show's past success (44%) and topic/theme/content focus (41%). Significantly, attendee audience quality in terms of purchase influence/buying power is more important among senior titles—CMOs (61%) and VP/Director of advertising/marketing (55%)—compared to management titles, including marketing managers (34%) and exhibit/event managers (41%).

Among smaller companies, attendees' purchasing/buying power rated as the most important factor when deciding to exhibit. Large companies, with over \$100 million in total revenues, reported a show's past success as more important than attendees' buying power.

A number of exhibit/event managers and event coordinators (28%) indicate show selection is a "group decision" involving sales, marketing, product development, senior management and other titles. While CEOs typically have the ultimate responsibility for deciding which events to attend, many other titles have a "vote" during the decision-making process.

Investigatory Tools

The process of choosing to attend a given show involved a number of different tools at the exhibitors' disposal. Historical performance/exit surveys (63%), exhibitor-supplied promotional materials (59%), input/references from other exhibitors (58%) and tradeshow/event audits (41%) were, by far, the highest ranked tools used for decision support. To a lesser extent, respondents mentioned other tools, including customer input, internal metrics and market/internet research.

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

Broken out by title, the survey revealed exhibit/event managers use tradeshow/event audits (61%) more than other titles. CMOs, meanwhile, put the most trust in input/references from other exhibitors (68%); although, significantly, 50% of the responding CMOs use independent audits to investigate events and tradeshows as well.

Predictably, larger companies—making a great investment in exhibiting and, presumably, greater need for accountability—use tradeshow/event audits (55%) compared to smaller companies with lower exhibit marketing spend (29%).

Importance of Independent Audits & Accountability

When asked, 47% of all respondents reported an independent trade show audit is either “extremely important” or “somewhat important” in verifying the quality of tradeshow attendance. Exhibit/event managers (62%) believe audits are more important than other titles; however, all titles find audits are relatively important in the decision-making process.

Similarly, the importance of audits is relatively consistent across small, mid-sized and large companies.

In keeping with the perceived importance of audits, the vast majority of respondents also believe event organizers should be held at least somewhat accountable for delivery of audience in terms of quality promised (90%), title quality (84%) and attendees’ quality of buying power (82%). Across all titles, and among CMOs in particular (71%), respondents believe tradeshow organizers should be very accountable for audience quality. Similarly, across all company sizes, respondents hold show organizers very accountable for attendee profile.

Benefits of Exhibiting

Survey respondents indicated that exhibitors derive a number of benefits from trade shows and events. Across all titles, the benefits that ranked highest included lead generation, increasing awareness, and building relationships among both prospects and current customers. However, as might be expected, there was some deviation in perceived benefits when comparing the various

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

titles. For example, CMOs viewed higher-order benefits—developing new relationships (65%) and building/expanding relationships with existing customers (41%)—as the top payoffs at a tradeshow. However, sales managers (42%) and exhibit/event managers (46%) indicated lead generation as the top benefit.

Company marketing budget size also plays some role in the perceived benefits of tradeshows. Smaller companies—those with revenues of less than \$1 million annually—see tradeshows as a way to generate leads (56%), but larger companies view them as a means to leverage relationships they already have.

Assuring & Measuring a Show's ROI/ROO

Respondents rate exhibit positioning on the show floor (94%), marketing promotions before/at the show (85%) and tradeshow booth design (91%) as the top-tier factors to help assure exhibitors' ROI/ ROO at events. Staff training (74%), planning (79%) and event audits (60%) are among the second-tier factors to assure ROI/ROO.

Among higher titles—CMO (53%), VP/Director of advertising/marketing (56%)—exhibit positioning on the show floor ranks as the most important to assure ROI/ROO. For managerial titles, marketing promotions, booth design and show planning rate as the most important factors. Independent event audits score highest among exhibit/event managers (29%). In terms of company size, respondents are fairly consistent when ranking marketing promotions before and at the show as the best way to assure ROI/ROO. Event audits, meanwhile, are valued significantly more by large companies (28%) vs. small (22%) and mid-size companies (8%).

When it comes to measuring exhibitors' ROI/ROO, the number of qualified leads (82%), booth traffic (74%) and costs vs. return analysis (59%) are the tools most frequently utilized. Exit surveys (9%) ranked at the bottom of the list. These same findings are consistent across all titles surveyed. For smaller companies, cost vs. return analyses (75%) rise in the hierarchy of measurement approaches. This may be due to the fact that smaller companies have smaller exhibit budgets

KEY FINDINGS (continued)

and, as a result, are more conscious of the return on their investments vs. exhibit costs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

BPA, in conjunction with Stein Rogan + Partners, distributed a 19-question, web-based survey to a purchased list of 5,112 contacts at small, medium and large companies that exhibit at tradeshow in the US. The same survey was distributed to an additional 1,500 exhibitor contacts in cooperation with the Trade Show Exhibitors Association (TSEA). A total of approximately 6,600 surveys were distributed.

The study was fielded from November 10 through December 8, 2008. Between 376 and 444 tradeshow exhibitors completed each question, with 376 surveys completed in full. As an incentive, exhibitors who completed the entire survey were entered into a chance to win one of two \$250 gift certificates.

The total respondent sample represents a mix across several sales and marketing titles. Title breakdown is as follows:

- Marketing Manager: 17%
- VP/Director of Advertising/Marketing: 16%
- Exhibit/Event Manager: 16%
- Exhibit/Event Coordinator: 8%
- Sales Manager: 7%
- Chief Marketing Officer (CMO): 5%
- Other (CEO/President, Director of Exhibits/Tradeshows, Owner/Partner/Principal, Marketing Specialist, Account Executive, Sales Specialist, Director of Product Management, Director of Operations, Creative Director, Consultant, Director of Marketing, Director of Business Development, Director of Corporate Communications, Director of Sales): 31%

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (continued)

Research also shows respondents work at a relatively even mix of large, medium and small companies:

- Less than \$1 million: 8%
- \$1 million — \$5 million: 22%
- \$5 million — \$10 million: 13%
- \$10 million — \$20 million: 15%
- \$20 million — \$50 million: 11%
- \$50 million — \$100 million: 6%
- Over \$100 million: 25%

In addition, the majority of respondents' marketing budgets are less than \$5 million as shown below:

- Less than \$500,000: 61%
- \$500,000 – \$1 million: 17%
- \$1 million – \$4.9 million: 17%
- \$5 million – \$10 million: 2%
- \$10 million + : 3%

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the data collected during the survey, a number of implications regarding the value of independent event audits and where they fit in exhibitors' decision to attend a show can be drawn, including:

- Companies are planning to exhibit at fewer shows next year, suggesting that they will be more selective in which shows they do exhibit.
- Key criteria that influence the decision to exhibit include:
 - Audience quality in terms of purchase influence

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS (continued)

- Past success of a show
- Event audits show increased importance in the minds of exhibiting companies.
 - Overall, nearly 50% of respondents say an independent audit is either “Extremely/Somewhat Important” in verifying quality of event/tradeshow audience
 - That figure rises to 61% for event managers
- Event and tradeshow organizers should be held accountable for audience as defined by quality promised and purchasing power.
- While event audits are a significant influence across titles, they are even more important to both the gatekeepers and the final decision-makers.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion to be drawn from all of the data gathered is the fact that, overwhelmingly, across all titles and company sizes, respondents are demanding accountability from their event organizers in terms of purchasing power and titles. These are the very same metrics that independent, third-party event audits can offer.

Audited event data can work to the benefit of both tradeshow organizers and exhibitors. Since face-to-face events are considered the most expensive among all media platforms, exhibitors require trustworthy attendance data on which to base their decisions and formulate their ROI—especially in a down economy.

Using data from an independent, third-party event audit, organizers can drill down into their event’s attendance figures and identify exhibitors’ target markets. Organizers can also use event audits to prove that, in spite of economic conditions, key buyers continue to attend their show. Independent event audits are a win-win proposition for the entire events industry.

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Event and Tradeshow Marketing

Using a 5-point scale with 5 being "Extremely Important" and 1 being "Not at all Important," how important is an independent audit verifying quality of attendance when deciding which shows to add to your marketing plan?

- 1 (Not at all important in my decision)
- 2 (Somewhat unimportant in my decision)
- 3 (Neither important or unimportant in my decision)
- 4 (Somewhat important in my decision)
- 5 (Extremely important in my decision)

14.

On a 5-point scale where 5 means "Very accountable" and 1 means "Not at all accountable," how accountable should event and tradeshow organizers be for the following? (Please select ONE best response for each category)

	1 (Not at all accountable)	2 (Somewhat unaccountable)	3 (Neither accountable nor unaccountable)	4 (Somewhat accountable)	5 (Very accountable)
Delivery of audience in terms of title quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of audience in terms of purchasing influence quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of audience in terms of buying power quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of audience in terms of quality promised	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15.

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Event and Tradeshow Marketing

Which industry or industries do you work in? (Please select all that apply)

- Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences
- Telecommunications
- Financial Services
- Retail
- Energy
- Government
- Transportation/Utilities
- Legal
- Manufacturing and Process industries (non-computer)
- ISP or ASP
- Aerospace
- Insurance/Real Estate
- Construction/Architecture/Engineering
- Data Processing Services
- Education
- Marketing/Advertising/Entertainment
- Research/Development Lab
- Business Services/Consultant
- Computer Manufacturer
- Computer/Network Services/Consultant
- Computer Related Retailer/Wholesaler/Distributor
- Other (please specify)

18.

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Event and Tradeshow Marketing

What was your company's total gross revenue for 2007?

- Less than \$1 million
- \$1 million to \$5 million
- \$5 million to \$10 million
- \$10 million to \$20 million
- \$20 million to \$50 million
- \$50 million to \$100 million
- Over \$100 million

19.

Thank you for your participation. In order to be entered into the drawing for ONE of TWO \$250 Apple Gift Cards, please enter your email address below.

20.

Thank you for your time