



Crowds, banners, color, music, noise: An atmosphere this overwhelming can grow wearying after a while, making it all the more important for exhibitors who tend booths to keep their cool and treat even casual browsers as their best customers. As an exhibitor, remember that you are seen not as an individual, but as the embodiment of your company.

With Prospective Customers

At a trade show, it's the nature of the beast for people to make snap judgments when they pause at a booth. This means that it's doubly important for you to use good business etiquette as you demonstrate your product. When meeting potential buyers:

- Dress as if you were meeting an important client back at the office
- Always stand when talking
- Shake hands
- Express interest in the person
- Give him or her your undivided attention

The trickiest part of your job is when you're faced with the task of balancing several customers at once without offending any one of them. Have business cards at the ready, and use them to momentarily placate any visitors awaiting their turn. Much in the manner of putting someone on hold on the telephone, utter a quick "Please excuse me" to the person you're talking with, turn to the bystander, and hand him or her a card and say, "Would you mind waiting a bit? I'll be right with you." If you see that a booth mate is free, direct the prospect to him or her. Or, if possible, quickly set up an appointment to meet later in the day.

Even if you're making small talk with a potential customer, it's not a good idea to invite another prospect to join in unless your intuition tells you otherwise: The best tack is always to give undivided attention to one person at a time. The same rule applies to product demonstrations. If someone is standing by observing, that's fine- but you should direct your demonstration to the person you're dealing with at the moment. At the same time, make it clear to the other person that you'll attend to him or her as soon as you have finished.

With Other Exhibitors

If you attend trade shows regularly, more than likely you'll be acquainted with many of the booth-tenders from other companies. While you'll no doubt want to catch up with them, and perhaps make plans for the evening, remember that you're not at a high school reunion. The less time you spend schmoozing with old friends, the more time you'll have to meet with potential customers.

For the sake of your fellow booth mates, be punctual when it is your turn to take over the post. Getting sidetracked at a huge show is easy, and keeping people waiting can cause a ripple effect for some time afterward.

Following Up

A handwritten note to each prospective customer you talked with will have more impact than a typewritten one, which could look suspiciously like a form letter. Tell the recipient how nice it was to meet him, and that you hope the interest he expressed in your product will someday result in an order. A reference to a non-business topic you discussed- a new grandchild, for example- personalizes the letter further and lets it stand out from the norm.

"Which way to the snack bar?"

Considering the number of people streaming by your booth, it is inevitable that you'll be asked for directions to restrooms, snack bars, the lost and found, and, yes, the often-elusive

information booth. The very fact that you've staked out a space in a gargantuan hall marks you as a fixture of sorts, if only temporarily. As a consequence, in the minds of the ebbing and flowing army of booth-browsers, you know the lay of the land.

The wise booth-tender will make sure he or she can politely provide the needed answer, even if the directions are to a competitor's booth. On the first day, make yourself familiar with the layout of the floor by taking a walking tour, with the show directory as your guide. Then keep the directory close at hand for the rest of the show. When people who find themselves without a directory ask the way to a specific company's booth, look up its number and respond cheerfully. Your kindness to a stranger might open up a conversation that could lead to interest in your product.

For more information on [Emily Post Business Etiquette Programs](#) contact Director of Sales and Relationships, Dawn Stanyon at Dawn@emilypost.com.