

# TRADE SHOW MARKETING

By Frank Maselli



Trade shows are one of my favorite prospecting methods. They can be an effective part of a broader “target marketing” strategy, and they can be cheap, tremendously fun and very rewarding.

Every town in America has some type of trade show, conference or convention going on each day. These range from small luncheon gatherings of local professionals and regional meetings to national conventions in cities like Las Vegas, Washington D.C. and New York. You can find opportunities at every level, but trade shows are particularly powerful when you can uncover a hidden treasure: a group or organization that other advisors aren’t pursuing.

### **The Goals**

The goals of trade show marketing are simple. They include:

1. Meeting new people and collecting potential business leads
2. Gathering critical intelligence on your target market
3. Working your way into the group as a valued participant and insider rather than as an opportunistic salesperson

### **Money Radar**

Do you have a money radar? Do you have that sixth sense for uncovering wealth or spotting business opportunities that others don’t see? Every advisor targets doctors and attorneys, but I really love to find the unknown groups that no one thinks about. You can find them in unlikely places, and identifying these groups is as simple as just keeping your eyes and ears open.

For instance, on a recent flight to Las Vegas, I struck up a conversation with my seatmate who was going to a national convention for industrial sandblasting. I’d never heard of this industry and was eager to learn more. It turns out that this is an exploding sector consisting of closely held, family companies with tons of money. This translates into very wealthy owners who may need your help with succession planning, buyouts, mergers, consolidations and a host of massive liquidity events.

I learned that the industry is centered in the Gulf region where these companies sandblast barnacles off oil platforms and service boats. The typical advisor would never prospect an industry like this. It’s just too arcane and buried too deep.

My seatmate invited me to the convention as his guest, and I found it filled with people, equipment and services from companies I never knew existed. The members were fantastic and very eager to share their stories. If I were still an advisor I could have picked up

20 clients that day and rented a booth for less than a thousand bucks!

### Start Locally

To begin looking for opportunities with overlooked groups, check with the hotels in your area that have conventions or meeting spaces. If your town is big enough, you might even have a "Meetings and Convention Bureau." The website of such a bureau will often have lists of who's coming to town. Alternatively, you might want to build a relationship with the catering or meetings managers at hotels. Pick any of the groups that interest you and begin to do some homework.

You're looking for current wealth or growth potential, consolidation or buyout opportunities, and groups in transition. Most of all, you're looking to identify groups that will let you participate as a member or an associate. Rent a booth if you can, sponsor a lunch, or even bring in a speaker who can provide value to the group. Advisors often ask me to speak at trade shows on generic business development or leadership topics. They get credit for hosting an excellent program and their booth traffic soars!

### Booth Science

There is an art and science to trade-show booth management. At large shows, you won't be able to match the major players in size or grandeur, so try for something small and intimate. Be an island of calm in a crowded sea of confusion. I might have a computer with some financial tools or a simple retirement calculator. This could be a fun and interactive way to get a conversation started.

Your giveaways should be memorable and match the brand identity you're trying to convey. Maybe your firm has branded items that include your logo, such as golf balls, hats, mugs, bags or umbrellas. They will probably charge you for them, but it takes no effort.

If you're on your own, don't be a cheapskate. Your gift items make up a critical investment in your image. One way to capture names at a low cost is to use smaller gifts but have a drawing for a high-end item like an iPad.

You can use gifts and items that the group finds particularly useful and desirable. For instance, I recently had a booth at the local pen show. (The demographics of fountain pen collectors would make you drool.) I gave away small moleskin notebooks. These are high-quality items, and people loved them. Plus, the collectors had a chance to test out their new pens right there.

### Build Your Own Show

Think about creating your own private "trade show" wherever wealthy people gather. My daughters love to ride horses. Every Sunday at their barn, there's some

kind of jumping show, and you can't swing a water bucket without hitting big money.

If you see this sport somewhere in your marketplace, consider sponsoring the refreshment booth at your local barn's horse show. You would be the most popular person in the whole place! It would cost you next to nothing. The downtime between events would provide perfect conversation space. You get to interact with families in a fun, relaxed atmosphere and meet multiple generations.

Then go one step further. Hire a professional photographer to take pictures of little Sarah or Chloe prancing around the ring. Gather e-mails and send the photos to the participants with your compliments. Offer gift subscriptions to "Young Rider Magazine" for anyone who signs up at your booth. Again, you capture a lead and get a monthly, positive touch point.

Folks, this is what we call "creative marketing," and it's a guaranteed home run! Over time, you might even build a relationship with the top trainers and breeders and immerse yourself in a world of wealth. Keep in mind that this kind of activity is very scalable. You can begin to penetrate a whole universe of potential clients and have zero competition.

### Have Fun!

Trade shows can be a blast, especially if you like interacting with fascinating people, sharing ideas and learning about different industries or professions, while picking up a few new clients in the process. There is no better venue available. Then remember, it's not just the show attendees you're interested in. You also want to connect with and engage the other booth vendors as well. You're literally surrounded with potential clients!

For more information on trade show marketing, visit [www.nimlock.com](http://www.nimlock.com). They build all kinds of booth displays, and they publish a blog that might help you get started.

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