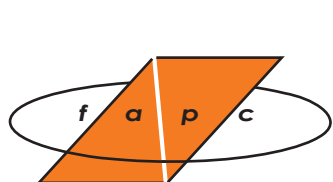


Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center



FOOD TECHNOLOGY FACT SHEET

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How to prepare for participating in a food show

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Introduction

Food shows are an effective and popular way to show products to a high number of potential buyers and clients. Many distributors host these shows annually or biannually to help introduce new products, special deals and increase business from current and new clients. Depending on the type of show, attendees will mainly consist of buyers from various chain and individually owned retail venues, restaurant owners, managers and culinary school students. The format is usually a collection of booths that food brokers or individual companies lease for the duration of the one or more days of the show. In that booth the food company or broker sets up a colorful display that highlights certain products, including but not limited to giving out tasting samples, product recipes and product specification information to give to potential buyers as they walk through the show. A representative from that booth's company also is always at the booth to answer questions and network.

It is important for a food company to participate in food shows, introducing new products to many important buyers in the food industry through one-on-one contact. This will allow these buyers to taste and see the products first-hand. It also will enable networking with others in the industry and potentially gain sales leads. By being able to see current food trends and packaging from other participants in the show, ideas for future marketing and product improvements can be gained.

The Display

Following are a few tips to attract as many potential buyers and clients to the booth during the food show:

1. *Look your best.* You and your product are on display for all buyers to see. You are essentially interviewing for a new job. Wear appropriate attire representative of the type of show. In addition, it is advantageous to wear something that displays your logo, which can include polo shirt, apron or just an advertising button that pins to your shirt.
2. *Incorporate colors in your display from your logo.* Subliminal is everything. Use fabric, flowers, baskets, etc. to perk up your booth without interfering with your product. Sometimes shows have themes, so decorate appropriately.
3. *Get creative.* You are in competition and want to catch the eye of those attending the show to come to your booth. It takes a little bit more than just setting your product on the booth table.
4. *Show ideas of how the item can be used in multiple ways if possible.* What might work for one client might not work for another.
5. *Make sure your company/brand name is easily seen.* Make sure everyone knows who you are and can find you if they need to come back to your booth.
6. *Have plenty of business cards on hand to give to potential customers.* They may not show much interest at the show, but they may contact you at a later time.
7. *Have a notepad to write down names and information to contact possible leads.* This is important to have to be able to follow up with potential new business and begin a contact list. A notepad is necessary in writing down any special requests or other important information.

Show item checklist

This checklist of items to bring to the booth can vary from show to show, and each individual show may have different rules, but the following are the basic items:

1. Health certificates and any other necessary documentation.
2. Clean towels.
3. Proper serving utensils and toothpicks for the public to taste samples safely.
4. Thermometer for checking temperatures of hot or cold food.
5. Gloves.
6. Extension cords if electricity is needed.
7. Display props.
8. An ample amount of product for sampling.
9. Coolers and holding units to keep food hot or cold prior to sampling.
10. Business cards.
11. Any signage, promotional materials and handouts with product information.
12. Notebook and pens.
13. Plenty of display trays, pans, etc. in order to replace as necessary to keep the products looking fresh.

How to sample

The opportunity to have a large amount of decision makers taste a new food product is common at a food show and the food vendor should be ready to do so in the best way possible. The food show attendees will be able to see everything that goes on in the display booth, so keep it clean. Look at display trays and pans, and change them out regularly to keep things neat and clean. Monitor temperatures to keep hot food hot and cold items cold. Abide by health regulations; this includes display areas. In other words, sample like a professional. How the sampling is done will show how the company does business.

Be prepared to answer questions

Following is a list of common questions food companies should be prepared to answer from attendees at the show:

1. How much is your product? At a foodservice or restaurant show, it is more appropriate to give an approximate range by cost per serving or cost per ounce. Keep in mind there may be some additional mark up by the distributor and the salesperson on top of the amount you sell the item.
2. What is the suggested retail price for this item?
3. How long have you been in business?
4. Who else is currently using or selling this product?
5. Are you using a food broker?
6. How accommodating can you be to me?
7. How is your product better/different than product X?
8. Why should I buy from you?
9. What other ideas do you have for your product besides what you are showing me now?
10. Do you have any promotional materials to help move your product?

Follow up

What is done immediately after the show is just as important as the time at the show. Follow up with any sales leads and contacts obtained within three days after the show ends. If possible, thank them for stopping by the booth. Follow through with any promises made to clients at the show, and send additional samples or any other requested information.

Conclusion

Participating in a food show can help kick start a company if done with professionalism and a little bit of planning. Keep these rules in mind to make the most of one-on-one time with many buyers at a food show. These tips will help make sure that the time spent at a food show will be productive and a good investment for the future of a growing food company.