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Trade shows and innovations

Opposites



Trade shows provide opportunities for companies and brands to present their products and services to the customers and the public and to set themselves apart from the competition. One of the questions most frequently asked by trade show visitors is: “What’s new?” Much of what is advertised as an innovation is often merely a rehash of an existing product. In the loud “shouting” environment of trade shows, this increases the sensory overload and thus the strain on the people even more. On the other hand, trade shows offer an opportunity to personally present innovations to a worldwide audience at a given time and place.

It often is in the nature of people to tell each other many things when they haven’t met in a long time. Less, however, can also be more in this case. Might a more quiet approach be more impressive? And an oasis of quietness will surely be perceived as pleasant by trade show visitors. On the other hand, there are opportunities to present products in action, and make a great attraction for visitors. There is therefore a system of loudness and quietness in which an effective balance must be found. The same applies to the lighting concept consisting of bright or dimmed light. This is all reflected by the design of the exhibition stand ranging from activity zones to secluded conference booths.

Another controversial question is whether an exhibition stand should be open or largely closed, which also mirrors a part of the company culture and the objectives of the exhibitor. Even an “open” company may purposefully select its visitors. This, however, always means excluding specific groups that might become customers at a later stage. Therefore, an appropriate degree of sensitiveness is certainly required. In this phase, innovations sometimes are not yet suitable for the general public or they might be products and services that are, in principle, not intended for the general public. However, it is not the nature of innovations to remain secret forever, and in our current age of information technology, it is also impossible to keep them secret for an indefinite period of time. We are only able to influence the point in time when they will be made public.

Most companies work towards the great day of their Première. Setting a target date is a positive way to increase pressure on the respective company to at least complete the prototypes. In this respect, the entire process of the introduction of an innovation must be taken into account. Optimal timing before and after the trade show becomes an essential factor for success. A clever announcement, perhaps by launching a prototype photo, optimally staged prototypes, and a timely roll-out are a great strain on nearly everyone involved in the innovation process (also see article “Das Labyrinth der Innovationen”, Febr. 2010). Consequently, nearly all staff members and all sectors of a company are involved.

In addition to time considerations, the place of presentation requires a high degree of attention, particularly considering that we are in global markets and that these cannot be visited simultaneously with a limited number of prototypes during a “big bang”. Depending on the degree of innovation and the sensation level, a worldwide conference via the Internet can indeed serve as a trade show alternative. However, not every company nor every new product such as the presentation of a new mobile phone catches widespread and general attention. In such cases, it is usually more economical to present the innovations to the specialist audience in a targeted manner. Subsequent road shows should be considered a complementary marketing activity. With reference to the spatially limited conditions, the streams of visitors must be directed and guidance must be provided at the trade show booth itself as well as in retail. In this connection, the innovation should be especially emphasized and be located in the centre for easy access. However, the innovation often goes unnoticed because of the aforementioned sensory overloads. Therefore, it must be overemphasized and moved right into the centre of attention.

The answer to the question whether a company should present itself loudly or quietly mainly depends on its own company culture and the character of its innovation. There is no golden path, but only a path that leads to the customer. And for this purpose, trade shows are a very appropriate tool. Trade shows are as exciting as the innovations themselves, especially if the trade show organisers are capable of offering the visitors and exhibitors a platform for success.

Innovations need trade shows, and trade shows need innovations.