The uncertainty of trade shows in 2021

Blog Post

As you prepared the marketing budget for 2021, trade shows probably put a big question mark on your plan...

We sat late last year discussing this particular item while preparing our 2021 budget.

Trade shows hit a huge speed bump with all the restrictions caused by Covid-19. We just didn't know if people were going to attend or if exhibitors would participate. In talking to partners and customers we found that this was a variable that was up in the air.

We have already heard from mayor exhibitors that have decide to skip trade shows in 2021 and focus on virtual presentations of their products and services. We have also heard from trade show organizers that are still working on preparing their shows and advertising their dates and venues. They are all in for in-person events. However, last years experience showed us that trade shows can shift quickly to virtual shows. Furthermore, dates have been changed to push shows further down the calendar year in hope of better Covid-19 numbers.

Trade Shows

2020 brought the format of the virtual trade show.

Some were very successful, some had issues trying to figure out how to give their exhibitors and attendees an experience worth their time and money. Some exhibitors decided to create virtual venues within their companies and invite their customers and potential customers to visit with them in the virtual environment. One thing was certain, most major companies restricted the travel of their personnel to attend or participate in trade shows. Many restricted the visits to their facilities completely.

In the Converting industry some of the conferences and shows have announced their dates for 2021, such as Converters Expo South, Label Expo, World of Wipes, Converters Expo, Pack Expo, ICEC USA, among others. Yet some have held back such announcements to see if an in-person trade show is possible or if they should prepare a virtual event.

Virtual Trade Show

Here's what we know.

The trade show industry is pushing for the in-person experience and is keeping in touch with marketing managers to offer the spaces available. Marketing managers would like to have these trade shows happen, their take is that it is still the best way to have a personal interaction with customers and a great launching platform for new products. However, exhibitors are still weighing in the pros and cons of showing up at these shows, considering that some of the major customers still have restrictions on travel for their personnel. The bottom line seems to be that companies who have their budgets committed to the shows will exhibit. Those that don't, will probably wait until next year.

So far, trade shows have pushed their dates back in 2021, and some have already postponed farther into 2022. This is significant in the pulse of the industry, specially in relation to the converting sector. Just as exhibitors and attendees, trade show managers are hoping that the pandemic situation gets better. With this in mind, they will keep planning and scheduling shows betting on the chance that we will be able to attend these shows safely.

Can shows continue being virtual? Yes, they can. But, they will have to up their game in what they offer the exhibitors and attendees. It's all about offering great content and experience, which will require investing in technology necessary for virtual expos. This will require greater knowledge of the virtual technology by the trade show industry. Can the exhibitors go on their own without trade shows? Yes, they can also. However, just as the trade show industry needs to improve on their offer with increased knowledge, so will the exhibitor that wants to do their own virtual experience for their customers.

One thing is certain, in-person trade shows will not have the big groups of people milling around booths, at least if they are following the recommendations of the CDC. Good thing is that it seems the a majority of the US population will be vaccinated by summer of 2021.