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## When the show's over, bring that booth home

By Jim Burke

What happens at Vegas trade shows doesn't have to stay in Vegas -- if companies will pull out their props and let the road-show parade itself back home. When the show closes, those high-octane trade show graphics and fixtures can shine on as interior marketing if companies realize the many ways to use them in daily business.

Trade show properties should be flexible, robust and interesting enough to lead multiple lives - - as displays in the headquarters' lobby, as living art deco for the cafeteria, as a practical way to augment training centers, or on the road as mobile sales/demo space.

Much of the media and property created for trade shows can be parlayed into daily marketing capital, letting companies gain extra mileage from their investments by leveraging properties in events such as user-group or sales meetings. The key is for companies to realize that their exhibit design firm is actually an interior-design partner that's already demonstrated its ability to solve a unique corporate marketing challenge.

Interior design, clear messaging and pliable architecture are the essence of what exhibit design firms do. They're experts at creating exhibits that are not just visually compelling but also engineered to be economical to own and flexible enough to be reused in different venues and in different ways.

The greatest impact could happen right at home -- trade show marketing is designed to project and protect your corporate brand, so let the people who work for your company see the brand that they're building. Most employees don't see the products that their work supports. They may serve in accounting or human resources and never see the final product or the brand imaging behind it.

Also, the engineers and marketing team work doggedly to prepare for a major event but many stay behind once the lights go on; they don't get to experience the end result. Trade show design firms are notorious for this -- working day and night creating the elements that go into an awesome display, but never getting out on the trade show floor to see how it really comes off.

Trade shows are typically the stage for major product launches that the company has been focusing on for months. There's a lot of hard work, stress and buildup that suddenly jumps on a plane with a handful of team players to Vegas for the week, while most everyone else waits to hear how it all turned out.

Where's the excitement in that? Where's the aura of a job well done? The answer is easy: Bring it home. It doesn't take much to reward the folks who stayed behind. Just a 10 foot by 10 foot booth-in-a-box exhibit unfolded from a crate will start a cafeteria buzz that lets people know what they're a part of. The logistics are easy, if you plan ahead -- and it saves storage costs.

Other companies use elements of their trade show properties to stage user-group meetings and mobile product demonstrations. Graphic messaging easily turns a bland hotel workspace into a focused environment that speaks to customer needs. Portable workstations are designed for lightweight transport and can be managed as part of a rental program by some design firms. This is a cost-effective solution that may combine rental inventory with custom components to create unique environments for different groups of users or different sales programs during the year.

Turnkey rental programs are a good example of the marketing leverage that's available to companies who collaborate as partners with their design firm. As a partner, the design firm can provide trade show management programs that help to organize production, logistics and storage for all aspects of exhibition services. This is how the leveraging and lateral movement of trade show properties happens best.

When a company lets its design firm know what general business plans are in the works for the year, many possibilities for lateral movement beyond trade show environments can be put into play. It becomes quick and easy to set up an otherwise elaborate exhibit in corporate lobbies and cafeterias when partners know in advance that the opportunity is available. A well-developed trade show exhibit program offers far-reaching opportunities to support and strengthen the corporate brand image.

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