

Powering the learning and earning curve

By **ROB SALISBURY**

ATTENDING product trade shows and expositions is a great way to learn first hand about leading edge innovations from industry leaders and product line experts.

For delegates at conference venues or the public who go to convention centres or hotels, the atmosphere of shows and expos is an exciting plethora of activity and conversations.

As a society of consumers, our personal and professional interests often inspire and motivate us. In an era of high tech and low touch, we are consuming products, services and information at an exponential rate.

The good news is that attending expos and tradeshow amplifies our learning process upwardly, as show attendees can make more informed decisions about products and services that are being showcased when they are right at the coalface.

The bad news is that a growing percentage of business people have become so digitally addicted to technology in research or shopping on line, that 'click and view' can consume a major portion of their productive days and evenings.

Getting out of our office and home can enhance the research and learning experience. Here are a few tips to ensure attending local or overseas events are worthwhile for you:

► KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Plan ahead: Take advantage of free tickets or cheaper early bird rates, as many events are announced a year ahead with preferred rates and free VIP sessions.

Register: Confirm your reservation or attendance with organisers early, as organisers may send advance information about educational workshops to save you more money or let you attend private showings or closed door sessions for free.

Research: Review the list of companies who will be at a show or expo so you can make the most of your time at their booth. This can save hours of wandering up and down aisles or in missing companies who are showcasing their goods or services.

Schedule: Find out if there will be educational forums, seminars, breakout sessions, early bird breakfasts or lunches offered as a part of your attendance.

Attend on purpose: Arrange one to one meetings: Ask good questions about what exhibitors are doing to make the most of their experience at the event. Get their business card and any other materials they may have to enhance your experience in stopping at their booth or stall.

Arrive early: Avoid the crowds and see as many booths and vendors as possible. Exhibitors are ready and willing to chat in the early hours of day one and are naturally less enthusiastic during the last few hours of the last day of a show.

Content is King: Gather information and resources. Find out what new products and

services are available to help grow your business or increase productivity, profitability or in finding new alliances for your profession or to benefit your company.

Network: Talk to show managers, association executives, seminar leaders or industry experts for their perspectives on local, national or international trends.

Contact: A name badge will help introduce you to vendors at booths. Bring dozens of your contact or business cards so that you can easily be contacted (if you want to) by the exhibitors after you leave their booth.

► AFTER YOU GO

Follow up: Contact those you met or found beneficial to you. The expense of tradeshow and expos is judged most by the vendors and organiser. Companies will continue to participate when they see a return on their time and expo investment.

KIT: Keep in touch with tradeshow exhibitors or the organisers. Let them know that you appreciated their efforts with an e-mail or phone call if relevant.

Alliances: When an opportunity presents itself, a strategic alliance, new agency or partnership can be a win win for all involved.

Summary: Make a date with yourself over a coffee or tea to note some of the main points you learned or people you met after attending.

In an era of voicemail, out of office auto replies and digital disconnection, attending trade shows and expos can be an excellent way to power up your learning and earning curve.

Worst case scenario, you will get some exercise by walking around and talking to decision makers as a potential buyer and investigative consumer.

● **Rob Salisbury is a former two-term President of the National Speakers Association, Sydney Chapter. He is a corporate trainer, conference speaker, and industry MC who has been involved with over 1850 events throughout Australia, New Zealand, SE Asia and the US.**

