



The Modern Technology **Marketers Guide** to Industry Events

and why they should be part of your content marketing mix

AI EXPO
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Introduction:

To techies who are up to date on all the latest trends in marketing, it might seem like the humble event sponsorship is a bit old hat. We've heard it all before: "It's expensive, it's a lot of work, and the pay-off just doesn't seem to justify it. Besides, in this digital age, there are tons of other, cheaper ways to get brand exposure, right?"

Yes, the upfront cost of sponsoring or attending an event, like a conference or a trade show, can be high. But, the truth is, most sponsors and exhibitors are not squeezing every ounce of value out of the event that they possibly can, most think it is enough to design a nice stand and show up.

By truly understanding the opportunities that event sponsorship presents, and capitalizing on every one of these opportunities, you can turn event sponsorship into a highly lucrative enterprise for your tech company.

Still skeptical? Let us prove it.

Chapter One

Why events should be a part of your tech marketing mix

In all the hype around the latest marketing fads, it can be easy to forget about event sponsorship, or think of it as a bit passé. But events like AI Expo still play a vital role in tech marketing.

Here are **4 VERY STRONG REASONS** why events should be part of your tech marketing mix.

1. Facetime

Marketing technology has certainly come a long way in the past several years. There are apps that post to social media for us, chatbots that can respond to prospects' questions for us, even AI assistants that can nurture a lead for us via email.

Sure, these technologies are fantastic, they can work around the clock without needing breaks or holidays, and they save us from a lot of the boring admin tasks, so we can focus on the fun stuff.

But, while these technologies are good for maintaining connections with prospects and leads and keeping your business front of mind, there simply is no substitute for a good old-fashioned face-to-face interaction when it comes to building relationships and trust.

Speaking directly with an individual about their very specific circumstances, and showcasing your products and solutions in a highly personalized way, is still one of b2b marketing's most powerful tools.

And the data supports this: according to a Forbes Insights survey of 760 business executives, face-to-face meetings were preferred for complex decisions and sales when lengthier discussions might be needed.

And according to The ABM Value of B-2-B Report, 76% of b2b marketers surveyed said event sponsorship created awareness and generated leads.



The report also provided evidence that leads generated during events are particularly strong, with b2b marketers attributing 46% of their yearly revenue to events.

Events also give you the opportunity to do some real-life A/B testing, allowing you to truly gauge the effectiveness of your message not just with clicks and opt-ins, but also with facial expressions and verbal feedback.

Here, you can speak to hundreds of your targets, see in real-time what aspects of your message are working and what aren't, and adjust accordingly, where else can you do that?

For companies with a subscription-based model in particular, keeping current customers happy and making them feel like they are part of a community is crucial to your bottom line.

Events provide a way to reconnect with these existing customers. You can also use the opportunity to educate them about any upcoming upgrades or to give them a sneak peek into new releases, direct them to partners or integrators on the show floor, all of which go a long way to cultivating that last crucial stage of the buyer journey delight.



2. Puts you in front of your target audience

When deciding to sponsor an event, your biggest consideration is going to be the attendance list. It makes sense, therefore, that the leads you generate at an event would be particularly strong – after all, what is an event but thousands of your targets all physically gathered in the same place at the same time?

And they're not just present; they are also highly engaged, actively learning, and looking to improve their current operations.

Industry events like AI Expo also tend to attract the decision-makers; those that will have the final say in whether or not they should implement your technology into their business.

3. Creates brand awareness and increases reach*

When you sponsor an event, you can negotiate how and where your brand is mentioned. You may be able to get naming rights for a specific part of the event, like a Pavilion or a breakout session, your logo might be featured on the opening slide at every presentation or on the event's app or exhibition guide. Just think of the impressions your brand will be making upon the minds of thousands of members of your target audience!

And don't forget the media exposure. Prior to the event, there will have been an extensive outreach program promoting the event on social media, in magazines and newspapers, on the radio, via email and possibly even on television commercials. Your brand will have also been mentioned to other companies considering sponsorship packages, further cementing your influence and authority.

There will be extensive media coverage during the event too. At the AI Expo 2023, for example, the event will have a social media reach of 9.4 million. There will also be 50 media passes distributed, and 250 media clippings generated, which results in a media coverage reach of 9.6 million people, to the value of \$5.94 million.

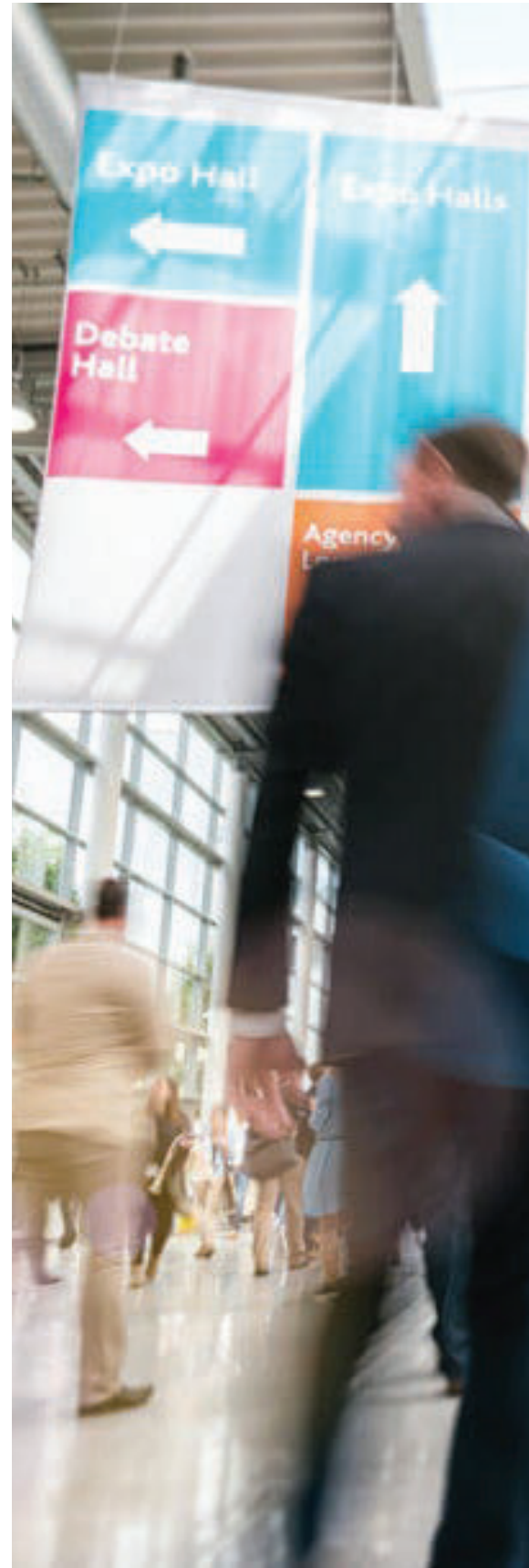
Bet that sponsorship fee is starting to sound like a steal, isn't it?

*According to our marketing plan

4. Builds authority and credibility

The tech space is crowded. To stand out from the pack, you don't just need an excellent product or service; you also need good brand equity.

Presenting at an event is a powerful way to build this equity. Not only is your company's name being associated with a positive event, but also if a speaking spot is included in your sponsorship package, this provides the perfect opportunity to establish your authority and cultivate credibility to a large audience of key decision-makers.



Chapter Two

Use technology to change the face of your event presence

New technology has already affected just about every aspect of events, from registrations, to personalized programs, to lead collection, to product showcasing.

Here are some ways you can use technology to create memorable customer and prospect experiences at your next event.

Virtual reality

Virtual reality (VR) is already playing a big role in events, and with the continuing proliferation of relatively affordable VR headsets by Samsung, Google, Facebook, HTC and Microsoft, we expect it will only grow.

Using VR, you can provide a totally immersive digital experience, transporting attendees to a whole other world, and giving them an experience that is sure to stick with them for a long time.

Enhance your speaking slot

At Intel's CES 2017 event, CEO Brian Krzanich made waves by delivering a keynote speech to an audience of 200, fully equipped with VR headsets. As Krzanich spoke, the audience was able to inspect solar panels, watch a live basketball game and fend off zombies right from their seat.

You can be sure no one's going to be looking at their phones during that presentation.



Broaden your audience

Soon audience members won't even have to be in the room to enjoy a presentation, broadening the capacity of an event far beyond the seating limits of a venue.

In 2014, Topshop treated five competition winners to a virtual reality experience that gave them virtual front-row seats at Topshop's London Fashion Week live catwalk show. With streams from the front row and backstage, they were given even more access to the show than the official attendees who were physically present at the event.

Could you use VR to engage with audiences who can't attend the event?

Create the experience

The immersive nature of VR makes educational experiences all the more engaging, helping to implant that information in attendee's minds all the more firmly.

NRMA Insurance demonstrated this with their Crashed Car Showroom. Using virtual 3D technology, visitors were able to experience what it's like to be a crash test dummy, in a bid to teach people about the safety features of their cars, and helping them to make better informed purchasing decisions.

Showcase a product

With VR, you can demonstrate and showcase your product in ways far beyond what is possible from the trade booth. You can, for example, show attendees how your product would perform in the field, rather than in the abstract environment of a convention center.

IKEA Berlin have created an interactive VR showroom that lets users actually decorate a room, allowing them to configure furniture, select fabrics and even change the wall color, so they can visualize what the final result will look like in their homes. This helps customers feel more confident about their purchase, and more satisfied with the product once it is assembled.





Use **gamification** to attract attendees to your booth

In a crowded convention center, it can be difficult to stand out. With VR, you can cash in on the entertainment factor to draw attendees to your booth.

The US Air Force has done this to great effect in their mobile Air Force Performance Lab, using VR gamification to attract teens and young adults.

Designed to highlight the various career opportunities available in the Air Force, visitors are able to compete in a series of challenges that test spatial and mechanical skills, dexterity, situational awareness, logic and reasoning, and physical strength.

Chapter Three

How to select the right event to sponsor

Sponsoring an event is a reasonably large investment. To maximize your benefit, it is important, therefore, to carefully consider which events might provide you with the best possible ROI.

Here are some of the key questions you need to ask yourself and the event organizer when trying to decide which are the best events to sponsor.

What events will your target market be attending?

The first thing to do is reacquainting yourself with your target personas demographics, and compile a shortlist of events these personas are most likely to attend.

Don't feel like you have to limit yourself to the big events, either – smaller, more specialist events may be just as beneficial if they cater to the right target market and tick all the other boxes.

Once you have your shortlist, drill down into the numbers. Event organizers will have a highly detailed breakdown of the attendee demographics; be sure to interrogate these thoroughly, and find out what percentage of attendees match your target personas. **Ask questions like:**

- Where are the attendees located?
- What industries are represented?
- What job titles do they hold?
- What percentage of attendees are decision-makers?



Who else is sponsoring the event?

Confirming there are other brands in your 'space' is a good indication that the chosen event does in fact cater to your target market. You could even work backwards, by looking at which events your competitors sponsor and seeing whether these events might also be good opportunities for you.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with sponsoring the same event as a competitor; in fact, it is probably a good idea to make sure your brand also has a presence with that audience.



What kind of value and exposure will you be getting?

It's not just the size of the event that matters; it's also about the wider exposure you'll get in and around the event. Bear in mind that the number of attendees is not necessarily an indicator of how many people will actually be exposed to your brand. Depending on your sponsorship package and what sort of visibility comes with it, this number might be higher or lower.

And a lower number isn't necessarily a bad thing either, if the aim is to reach a very targeted subset of the audience. For example, while a keynote address is likely to have a much bigger audience than other speaking events, a speaking opportunity at a conference might be a better opportunity of showcasing your particular expertise to a more specialized subgroup. Again, think back to your personas and your objectives for sponsoring the event.

There will also be pre and post-event marketing and PR from the event organizers themselves, which might afford some valuable exposure for your brand too; though, again, the degree to which your brand will be exposed will largely depend on the package you opt for.

Ask event organizers about the reach of previous events, and try to get a sense of what kind of reach specific package benefits will provide. If, for example, one package includes a sponsorship announcement through all the event's social media channels, how many people are likely to see it? Having a good idea of the impact of specific benefits will help you to decide whether a certain sponsorship level is worth it or not.

How much does it cost?

This is less about the face value of what an event sponsorship costs, but a determination of what kind of value for money you are getting. Every dollar you spend should be working for you in one way or another, and good event organizers understand this, and will want to create an offering that helps you reach your goals.

Exposure is, of course, a huge part of this, but think about other bonuses you might be getting as well, such as the type of VIP benefits or number of conference passes that are included.

Are there any red flags?

If there's even a whiff of unprofessionalism, steer clear. This includes things like:

- **Not having a set venue or date yet:** This is always a big red flag as it means the event could potentially fall through. A poor venue location can be another event killer, as it can potentially have a detrimental effect on attendance.
- **An inadequate sponsorship prospectus:** A prospectus should clearly lay out what's in it for the sponsor. If it's too brief, too focused on what attendees will get out of the event (rather than what sponsors will), or has too few details about demographics, marketing and PR reach, and other information vital to sponsors, then that's an indication that perhaps the event organizers don't know how to help you get value out of the event.
- **A lack of year-round marketing:** A good event will keep generating buzz all year around, and not just immediately before, during and after the event. More consistent communications create a longer-term community around the event brand, which increases audience trust and, in turn, attendance at the main event.

The last thing you want is a poor event experience becoming associated with your brand.



Chapter Four

How to get the most value out of the event

You've now selected some key events that will be the most beneficial to your company; great job! But it's not time to relax just yet. There's still a lot of hard work ahead of you to ensure the event is successful.

Use your booth to create a positive brand experience

In order to connect with your target audience and generate leads, it's not enough to simply plaster logos all over your booth. You have to:

- Draw attendees to your booth, and,
- Create a positive and memorable brand experience.

Here are some tips and ideas to get the creative juices flowing:

Design your booth mindfully

When it comes to designing your booth, consider what would be most appealing to your personas. What might draw a young, hip crowd might not work so well for an older, more sophisticated demographic, so think carefully about who your customers are and what design choices and color schemes they might like.

Don't go overboard with graphics, tech, slogans and furniture; we have found that less is more, and booths are more inviting when they're less "busy".

Having said that, ensuring your booth has great lighting is a great way to draw the eye and generate interest.

Here's **3 ways** to make sure you get maximum ROI out of your event.



Make your product the star

In between the labor of picking out colors and getting banners printed, it can be easy to forget what should in fact be the central focus of your booth: your product.

Think of creative ways to showcase your product in a way that creates a positive experience for your targets. Is the product interactive? Can you demo it in an interesting way (e.g. by using virtual reality)? Could you create a game or competition around it?

Not only do these tactics make people want to stop and check it out, it also helps them learn about the product in a highly memorable way, so that it stays front of mind long after the event is over.

Entice attendees with free giveaways

Giveaways are not only a great way to draw people to your booth; they are also a fantastic way to increase brand familiarity and they're doubly effective if the product is useful, looks good and is enjoyable to have.

While pens and USB drives are a perennial favorite, thinking outside the box will help you stand out from the crowd and may even make people go out of their way to visit your booth!

Some ideas for irresistible giveaways include:

- **Lip balm and hand lotion:** Perfect for long days spent in air-conditioned conference halls.
- **Hand sanitizer:** Considering the large volume of people at events, helping to decrease people's chances of catching a bug will be appreciated. Plus the little bottles slip easily into handbags, backpacks and briefcases.
- **Touchscreen cloths:** Laptops, tablets and smartphones abound at conferences, so this is bound to be one giveaway people won't want to miss out on. Their shape and size also lend themselves to attractive designs.
- **Mobile phone chargers:** We've all had that sinking feeling when we realize our phone battery is dangerously low and there's not a charger in sight. Be the event savior by providing free mobile chargers, which are certain to get used long after the conference is over.



1. Set-up draw-cards

Giveaways are just one way to draw attendees to your stand. Here are some other creative ideas to help draw a crowd:

- **Wi-Fi hotspot:** At a big venue, with a high volume of people, the Wi-Fi can often be patchy. Providing a Wi-Fi hotspot at your booth is a great way to draw people to your booth and capture lead information.
- **Mobile charging station:** If you've ever seen a mobile charging spot at an airport, you'll know just how popular they can be. Mobile charging stations also force people to linger, giving you an opportunity to network and make connections.
- **BYO barista:** Sometimes a caffeine fix is the only thing getting you through the day. Creating branded cups and lids is a great way to advertise your brand throughout the conference, as people walk around with their coffee in hand.
- **Photo booths:** Photo booths are always a crowd favorite, and they're a good way to associate your brand with a fun experience. The photos are also something people are likely to post on social media, giving your brand some bonus impressions.



2. Do your research

One of the key benefits of an event is the fact that hundreds, possibly even thousands, of your targets are all gathered at the same place at the same time. Yet, despite having this rare opportunity, many sponsors fail to truly capitalize on this. Instead, they rely on serendipity, hoping the right people will just happen by their booth.

Even when serendipity does strike, and decision-makers from target accounts do happen by the booth, they are simply fed a generic sales pitch that may not necessarily speak to the specific challenges their business is facing. This approach means a lot of big fish are potentially slipping through the net.

It's important; therefore, to do your homework, and ensure you know which of your target accounts are going to be at the event. While event organizers can't supply a detailed attendee list with names and contact details to sponsors, they can often supply a list of the companies that have employees attending. The AI Expo Expo, for example, uses a networking tool that allows exhibitors and sponsors to arrange meetings prior to the event. This helps exhibitors to pinpoint who exactly they would like to reach out to, from an audience of 3,000 attendees.

Once you know which of your key accounts will be there, you can use that information to craft a pitch specific to those businesses that addresses how your product or service can help with their particular challenges and goals. Then, it's a simple matter of reaching out to those key accounts prior to the event, and seeing if it is possible to set up a meeting with someone from the business.

A little pre-preparation can go a long way to ensuring you generate some strong leads from the event.

3. Create bespoke experiences for important accounts

If there are particularly big accounts that will be attending, it makes sense to go above and beyond to reach out to these accounts, particularly considering what they might be worth to your business.

Use your sponsorship package to your advantage by creating VIP experiences for these top accounts. This might include access to the VIP room, a table at the gala dinner, an invitation-only presentation, a VIP booth tour, prioritized seating at your sessions, or a customer lunch, dinner or cocktail event. This will help ensure lots of face-to-face time with key decision makers, and help you develop strong relationships that are more likely to lead to conversion.

4. Leverage your executive team

If you're hoping to get some one-on-one time with some executives, your own executive team is absolutely one of the biggest assets at your disposal. Think about it. As a CXO, whom would you rather meet with: a junior salesperson, or an executive-level peer, with the authority and know-how to talk about more unique ways to solve a particular business challenge?

Having your executive team execute face-to-face marketing has been shown to be highly effective, so if you can get them in attendance, and interacting with your most important accounts (perhaps during some of the special events you've organized for them), you'll not only ensure a full meeting calendar, but you'll also increase your chances of generating some strong and potentially highly valuable leads.

Ensure your executive team is also well armed with facts and conversational tidbits prior to each meeting to facilitate more fruitful exchanges.



5. Create a comprehensive content plan around the event

It might seem at first glance that event sponsorship is all about outbound marketing: getting your logo on TV commercials and on banners, getting a shout-out on the press release, etc. But event sponsorship also represents a great opportunity for inbound marketing too.

In fact, so much, that we decided it needed its own chapter: how events fit into your content plan.

Chapter Five

How events fit into your content plan

Sponsorship packages naturally come with promotion, such as on-site signage, seat drops in conferences, and acknowledgement by MCs during keynotes and other sessions. The event will also be running their own content marketing campaign throughout the event, on social media, and via their blog and website, where, as a sponsor, your brand is also likely to appear several times. These impressions have a cumulative effect and can wind up being highly valuable, particularly if you share the event's posts with your own networks too.

But that doesn't mean they can't be even more valuable.

By coordinating your own content marketing efforts alongside the events, you can truly maximize your exposure, and therefore your ROI, from the event.

Pre-event

Pre-event content marketing is primarily about two things: generating buzz, and preparing for the event.

Generating buzz

Capitalize on the buzz being generated around the event by generating buzz yourself. After all, buzz is mutually beneficial; as a sponsor, the more successful the event is, the more value you get out of your sponsorship.

Here are some of the ways to generate buzz:

- **Email marketing:** Want a packed-out session or booth at the event? Well, for that to happen, people need to know you'll be there first. With marketing automation, you can segment your database and create targeted pre-event email blasts to ensure you're giving people information that is actually relevant to them.
- **Social media:** Create more buzz around your event by promoting and marketing your event regularly through Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Don't forget to tag the event organizer and include any event hash tags. Use social media automation to schedule announcements about your sessions or demonstrations to remind people to add them to their programs.



Preparing for the event

Getting maximum value out of the event is all about preparation. Set your content marketing campaign up for success with these steps:

- **Influencer outreach:** Connect with influencers in your network who will be attending, and use the event as an opportunity to create content around your brand, whether that's a blog post or video interview, for the influencer to promote during the event.
- **Downloadable content:** Provide even more value for attendees by creating downloadable ebooks or whitepapers. These can be used as rewards for attendees who provide their contact details at your booth, or they can be co-branded with the event organizers and pushed to attendees during the event.
- **Event teasers:** Help build anticipation for the event with video teasers, giving attendees a glimpse into what they might expect from the event (and giving your brand some good PR in the meantime). This might be a behind-the-scenes look at your company, a story about using an innovative technique to help solve a customer's problem, or an interview with the company representative who will be speaking at the event, giving a preview into the topic they will be discussing.

During the event

It's all hands on deck! Don't let your content marketing campaign fall by the wayside during this hectic time; ensure resources are dedicated to it to keep it on track.

During the event, content marketing is all about being a thought leader and active member of the community, and making valuable connections.

Being an active part of the community

Remember, you're not just there to sell your product. You're also there to learn, and show that you are an active part of the community. So get out there, mingle, and make sure it's not all about you!

- **Attend sessions:** Be sure at least one member of your team is attending all industry-relevant sessions at the event. Live tweet some key insights from the sessions, and, if resources allow, live blog too, or at the very least take copious notes that can later be turned into blog posts.
- **Behind-the-scenes sneak-peeks:** Post photos during the booth assembly, from backstage at the sessions, from the exhibition floor or from the VIP dinner. You could even use Instagram Stories or Facebook Live to show live footage of product demonstrations or other events.
- **Promote your booth, sessions and giveaways:** It shouldn't be all about you – but it can be about you a little. Be sure to send out reminders of sessions at least one hour before they start to score some last-minute attendees, and publicize any giveaways or conference promotions.

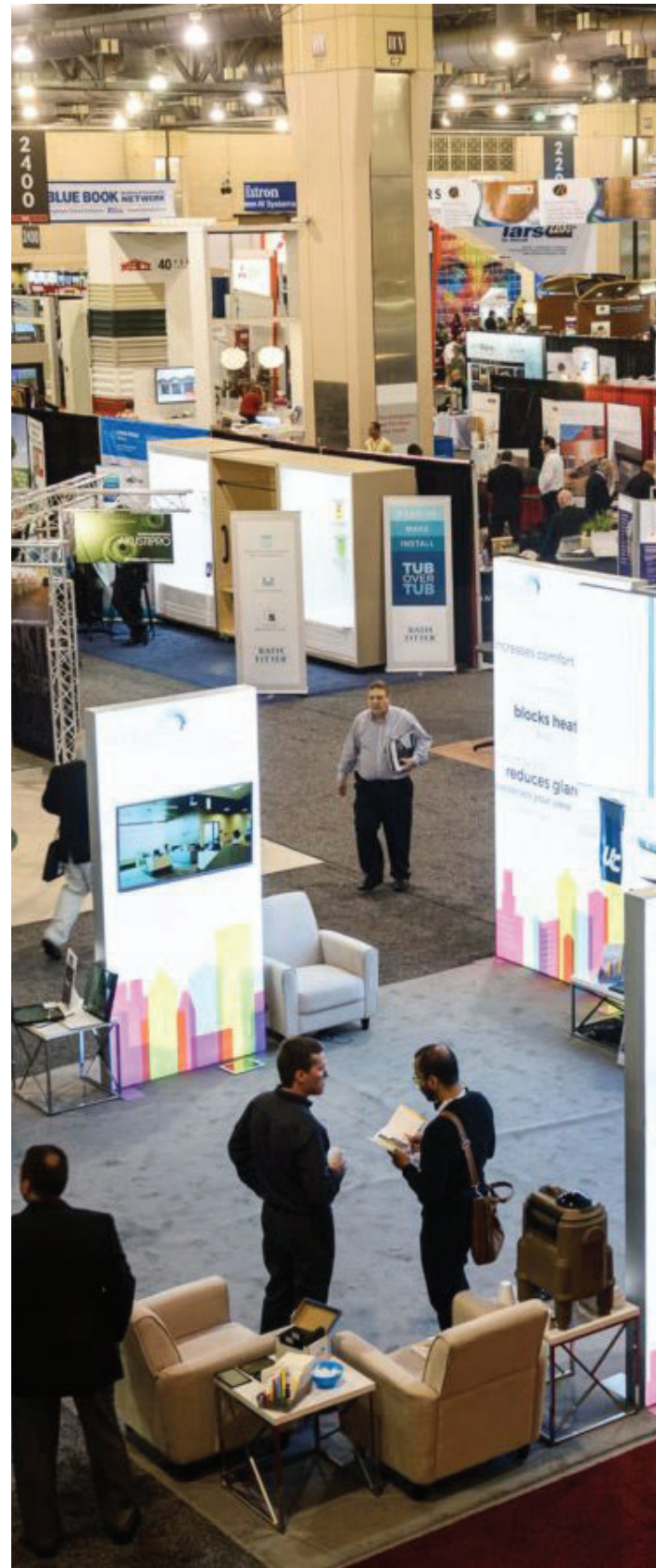
Being a thought leader

A key part of event sponsorship is establishing your brand as a thought leader; both during and after the event. Use the opportunity to build trust and authority, which will go a long way towards winning business.

- **Use any speaking sessions to deliver value to attendees:** It's considered poor conference etiquette to use a speaking session to simply speak about how fantastic your company is. Be sure that you speak with the audience in mind, and present something of value to them.
- **Film sessions:** Get maximum value out of any speaking sessions that come with your sponsorship package by ensuring every session is filmed. If possible, coordinate with the event organizers to organize a professional production company to do the filming, for better production value. Use the footage to create an informative video that can be posted online after the event.
- **Reward leads with downloadable content:** Reaffirm your thought leadership by using free valuable content as incentives for attendees to give their details.

Making connections

- **Be part of the conversation:** Interact with other attendees on social media by retweeting and replying back to interesting comments and questions.
- **Interview attendees:** Instead of just putting the hard sell on attendees, why not use the opportunity to do some valuable research? Ask attendees if they'd be willing to participate in a short interview or survey about the challenges their business is facing, and what they're hoping to get out of the event. This information could be used to inform the business or be incorporated into other pieces of content.
- **Create a landing page for lead collection:** While most events have scanning technology, it is still good practice to have a screen with a landing page where people can enter their information themselves.





Post-event

Phew! What a whirlwind. You educated attendees, made some great connections, and hopefully learned a few things yourself. Now it's time to leverage all that information into a conversation that continues well after the event.

Create content based on the latest insights: Distil all the information you learned from sessions and attendees into trends and key insights for blog posts, ebooks, white papers and reports, to help keep your audience at the forefront of the industry. This could be done in partnership with the event organizer.

Develop content based on your company's session: Could the session be extended into an educational webinar? Could you interview your company's representative for some deeper insights into the topic?

Nurture engaged, but non-sales-ready leads: Using marketing automation to nurture engaged leads with content is an essential part of getting long-term ROI out of your event.

Conclusion

An event presents a business opportunity unlike any other. When you consider the type of exposure your brand gets through an event like AI Expo, there is the potential for a very high ROI; particularly if you're thinking about how to maximize every chance to get in front of your target audience.

Just remember to:

Do your homework: Think carefully about which events your targets are most likely to attend, and focus your efforts on those.

Be prepared: Don't just rely on the event organizer's efforts or serendipity to get your message to targets. Ensure you've got all your bases covered; booth design, product demonstrations, valuable content, account research to give you the best chance at generating leads.

Be proactive: Be proactive about connecting with attendees, both online and in real life. Events are all about starting conversations.

Have fun!:

Events don't have to be all work and no play; enjoy getting the chance to learn about the latest innovations, mingle with your peers, and let your hair down!

A nighttime aerial view of a city, likely Austin, Texas, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings illuminated with lights. The sky is dark, and the city lights create a vibrant, glowing effect. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Want to **find out** how to generate leads in Texas and the U.S.?

The AI Expo is the best business-to-business trade exhibition and conference in Texas; with over 3,000 attendees. Find out how you can generate leads from AI Expo's unique blend of Enterprise, government, SMB and start-up visitors.

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