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MAINE.
ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

# TRADE SHOW PREPARATION GUIDE

## A RESOURCE FOR MAINE BUSINESSES

camoin associates

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# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

Trade shows can be one of the most valuable business development opportunities for Maine businesses. In a short period of time, a trade show can help a business meet qualified buyers, understand market trends, learn from competitors, and build relationships that may be difficult to develop through cold outreach alone.

However, trade shows also require time, money, and preparation. A business that attends without clear goals, a strong pitch, or a follow-up plan may leave with business cards but few meaningful opportunities. This guide is designed to help Maine businesses prepare before the event, make the most of their time during the show, and follow up in a way that turns conversations into next steps.

The guide builds on Maine DECD's **trade show infographic**, providing additional guidance for businesses at varying levels of trade show experience. It is organized into two tiers:

**Tier 1: First-Time or Early-Stage Trade Show Businesses:**
For businesses that are new to trade shows, are still building confidence, or are deciding whether to attend, exhibit, or make a larger investment in future shows.

**Tier 2: Seasoned Trade Show Businesses:**
For businesses that have participated in trade shows before and want to be more strategic about customer targeting, market expansion, lead follow-up, and return on investment.

Each tier includes guidance for both ways businesses may participate in a trade show:

**Attending** means walking the floor, networking, attending sessions, meeting potential buyers or partners, and learning from the event without investing in a booth.

**Exhibiting** means having a booth or formal presence at the show to promote the business, meet prospects, and generate leads.

Across both tiers, the guide follows four key phases of trade show participation: choosing the right show, planning ahead, making the most of the event, and following up afterward. Interactive resources are included to help businesses apply the guidance to their own trade show decisions.

## Choosing Your Path

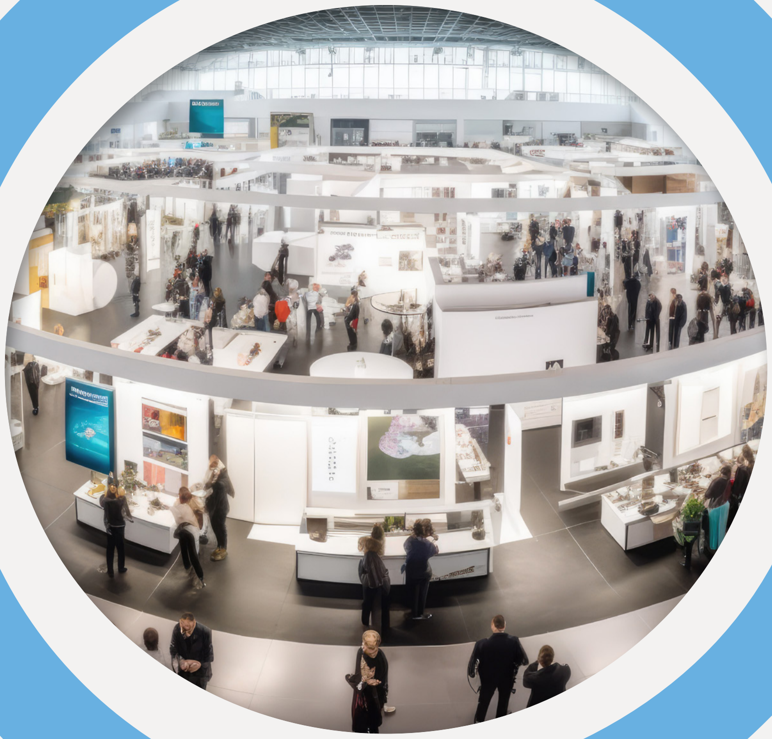
The fastest way to get value from this guide is to start in the right place. Use the table below to find the path that matches where your business is today. You can read the other sections when you are ready to explore additional tips and tricks. Many first-time attendees graduate to Tier 2 within a year or two.

**Not sure which tier fits? Take the seven-question self-assessment in Worksheet 1 in the Interactive Resources section.**

| If your business is... | Start here |
|---|---|
| New to trade shows and planning to walk the floor | **Tier 1: Attending** |
| New to trade shows and preparing for a first booth | **Tier 1: Exhibiting** |
| Experienced with trade shows, but attending to research a market | **Tier 2: Attending** |
| Experienced with trade shows and exhibiting to grow sales | **Tier 2: Exhibiting** |

**TIP:** Never been to a specific trade show before? Be an attendee and walk it first. One low-cost trip teaches you the floor, the buyer flow, and the unwritten rules, and Maine businesses routinely report their second-year booth performed far better because they walked it first.

# FIRST-TIME OR EARLY-STAGE TRADE SHOW BUSINESSES



# TIER 1

# First-Time or Early-Stage Trade Show Businesses

## Purpose of This Section

This section is for businesses that are new to trade shows or still learning how to use them effectively. The focus is on building confidence, setting realistic goals, and choosing a manageable level of participation.

## What Tier 1 Businesses Will Focus On

- Understanding the event before attending
- Setting 2–3 realistic goals (e.g., meeting 3 new customers or suppliers)
- Preparing a clear business introduction
- Knowing who to prioritize (type of business, what type of connection to make)
- How to engage in conversations
- Taking useful notes
- Following up with contacts after the event

## WHAT A TRADE SHOW IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

A trade show is a temporary gathering of an industry's buyers and sellers in one room for two to five days. A buyer who would ignore a cold email will give your booth 90 seconds because the social contract of the show says they will. But a show is not a passive channel — a booth with no pre-show outreach produces roughly half the qualified conversations of one with it. It is not a place to close a complex deal in one meeting, and it is not low-cost. A 10x10 exhibitor booth with travel, freight, and staffing often costs $12,000–$35,000 depending on the trade show.

### Five myths first-time exhibitors tend to believe:

- "Build a great booth and they will come." Floor traffic is driven by pre-booked meetings, not booth looks.
- "Anyone who stops is a lead." Half of the visitors are not your buyer. Quality beats quantity.
- "We'll figure out the pitch on the floor." A rehearsed 30-second opener is the difference between a 90-second and a 5-minute conversation.
- "We'll follow up when we get back." Leads worked within 24–48 hours convert at 2–3x the rate of week-later follow-up.
- "The booth pays for itself in floor orders." Most B2B deals close weeks later. Judge a show by qualified pipeline, not floor orders.

# BEING AN ATTENDEE

## How to Choose A Trade Show

Walking a trade show as an attendee, badge in hand and no booth to staff, is often the highest return opportunity a first-time Maine business can make. The cost is a fraction of exhibiting, and the learning compounds into a smarter booth investment the following year. Use the filters below to decide which shows belong on this year's calendar.

### Filter 1: Who is your Audience?

Start by reviewing the exhibitor list. Most trade shows publish an exhibitor list and floor plan on their website, often **60 to 90 days** before the event. Many shows also keep the previous year's exhibitor list online, which can be useful if the current list is not yet available.

The exhibitor list is one of the best public indicators of whether the show attracts the right audience. Review the list and count how many exhibitors appear to sell to the same type of buyer your business is trying to reach. If roughly **30 or more exhibitors are focused on similar buyers, the show is likely to attract your target market.** If only a few exhibitors appear relevant, the buyers you want may not be well represented.

A full attendee list may be harder to access before registering, so use other public information to understand the show's audience:

- **Speakers and education sessions:** Review who is presenting and what topics are covered. Speaker titles and session topics can help show whether the event is designed for your target buyers, industry partners, technical experts, media, or another audience.
- **Agenda and show description:** Look at how the organizer describes the event and its audience. Pay attention to whether the show includes networking events, buyer programs, matchmaking sessions, or other opportunities to meet potential customers or partners.
- **Sponsors:** Sponsors can be a useful signal of who the show is really designed to reach. The companies investing in visibility at the event often reflect the show's core audience and market focus.

### Filter 2: Buyer Geographic Reach

Before choosing a trade show, look at where the buyers are coming from and whether those markets are realistic for your business to serve right now.

Think about buyer geography in four circles:

- **Circle 1: Home Market** — Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont
- **Circle 2: Nearby Growth Markets** — Boston, New York City, the Mid-Atlantic, and Eastern Canada
- **Circle 3: Larger Expansion Markets** — the Southeast, Midwest, and Texas
- **Circle 4: Export or Long-Distance Markets** — the West Coast, Europe, and Asia-Pacific

For your first trade show, focus on shows that attract buyers from Circle 1 or Circle 2. These markets are closer, easier to follow up with after the show, and more likely to lead to realistic sales opportunities.

### Filter 3: Cost Reality

A walking trip for one person typically costs $1,500 to $5,000. This includes registration ($300 to $1,500), travel, lodging, and meals. Consider your goals for the trade show and if your budget can absorb the cost if zero deals result.

**STATE SUPPORT**

Maine DECD, Maine International Trade Center (MITC), and other state agencies coordinate state pavilions and trade missions for several priority sectors. Partnering with the state delegation often pays for itself in delegation-only networking events like private receptions and buyer introductions. Contact the Business Development team at least twelve weeks before a planned show. Monitor state web pages for potential grant opportunities.

## Planning for a Trade Show

Walking attendees who plan ahead produce two to three times the value of walking attendees who improvise. The plan below covers the four weeks before the show.

### 30 Days Before the Show: Register and Set Goals

Register early to avoid higher badge prices and limited availability. Then, identify two or three specific goals for the event. These may include the number of target booths to visit, the number of buyer or distributor conversations to have, or one key market or competitor question the business wants to answer.

### 21 Days Before the Show: Build a Target Booth List

Review the exhibitor list and identify 8 to 15 booths that are worth a planned visit. Note each booth number, location, and reason for visiting. Use the show map and schedule to plan when to stop by each booth, especially if certain exhibitors are likely to be busy during peak hours.

### 14 Days Before the Show: Confirm Travel and Request Meetings

Finalize travel, lodging, and ground transportation. For larger trade shows, nearby hotels often sell out early or become more expensive closer to the event. At this stage, businesses should also reach out to three to five priority contacts to request short meetings. Keep the message brief, specific, and clear about why a conversation would be useful. Many trade shows offer interactive digital apps before the show. These can allow you to plan contacts and reach out to exhibitors and attendees to set up meetings.

**TOOL #1: FIRST-TIME ATTENDEE CHECKLIST**

Before attending, prepare:

- Event registration
- List of priority booths or contacts
- Short business introduction
- Business cards or digital contact information
- Questions to ask buyers, suppliers, or exhibitors
- Simple note-taking system
- Follow-up plan

### 7 Days Before the Show: Complete Final Preparation

- Print or save the show map with priority booths marked and planned visit times noted.
- Pack business cards, a notebook, pens, and any materials needed to support conversations.
- Confirm any pre-scheduled meetings, including the booth number, meeting time, and day-of contact information.
- Build in at least 60 minutes each day to organize notes, record follow-up items, and capture key takeaways while conversations are still fresh.
- Consider social media posts announcing your trade show attendance.

# Attending the Trade Show

The show floor can be crowded, loud, and fast-moving. The goal is not to collect as many business cards as possible, but to come away with useful conversations, market insights, and clear next steps. A walking attendee can stay focused by using four simple practices.

01

## Walk the Floor Once Before Starting Conversations

On the first day, spend the first hour or two walking the floor before stopping for longer conversations. Use this time to understand the layout of the event, identify where key exhibitors are located, observe which booths are drawing the most attention, and note how competitors are presenting themselves.

This first walk-through helps businesses adjust their plan for the rest of the show and decide where to spend the most time.

02

## Use a Quick 90-Second Screen at Each Booth

Not every booth will be worth a long conversation. At each target booth, take a moment to look at the booth message, the products or services being promoted, and the role of the person you are speaking with.

Start with one simple qualifying question, such as:

- "Are you involved in buying or sourcing decisions?"
- Better for attendees - "What challenges are you helping your customers solve?"
- "Who would typically evaluate a product or service like ours?"

If the answer points to a useful connection, move into a deeper conversation. If not, be polite, thank them for their time, and move on.

03

## Prepare Three Versions of Your Pitch

**10-second pitch:** A short introduction that explains who you are, what you make, and who it is for. For example, "We are a Maine seafood processor making frozen lobster meal kits for regional grocers that want a premium private-label product."

**30-second pitch:** A slightly longer version that adds why the product or service matters. This may include a specific customer need, a key market opportunity, a sales point, or a credibility marker. Avoid broad terms like "innovative," "leading," or "world-class" unless they are supported by specifics.

**Two-minute conversation:** Use this time to shift from selling to learning. Ask questions that help determine whether there is a real opportunity, such as:

"What does your current solution look like?"

"What would need to be true for you to consider a product like this?"

"Who else would be involved in that decision?"

04

## Take Three Useful Notes per Conversation

- **Name, company, role:** If you cannot remember it tomorrow, it never happened. If using an event app, make booth notes and/or scan event badge for future reference.
- **One specific takeaway:** Not 'they were nice,' but the specific need, frustration, or comment that distinguishes this conversation from the next ten.
- **Next step:** Sample request, follow-up email, intro to a colleague. If there is no next step, the conversation is closed.

End each day with a 30-minute review. Sort notes into three piles: people to follow up with, market intelligence to write up, and competitors to revisit on day two. Sessions and networking events are part of the trip; pick two or three that connect directly to a goal and skip the rest.

# Follow up & Evaluation after the Trade Show

The week after a trade show is when much of the value is created. Strong follow-up helps turn conversations into next steps, while a short written debrief helps the business decide whether the show was worth the time and cost. Both should be completed within ten business days, while conversations and lessons learned are still fresh. Block time on your calendar for follow-ups before you leave for the event so that you will have ample time post-show.

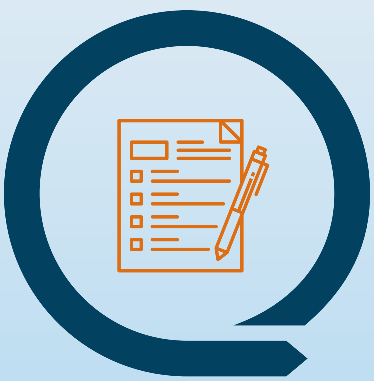
## Follow Up with Key Contacts Within 48 Hours

For every contact worth a second conversation, send a short, personalized email within 48 hours of the show ending. Reference the specific conversation so the person remembers who you are and why you are reaching out. Include one clear next step, such as sending a sample, scheduling a call, sharing product information, or making an introduction.

Avoid generic follow-up messages. A note that only says "great to meet you" is less likely to lead to action.

## Connect on LinkedIn within Five Business Days

For useful contacts, send a LinkedIn connection request within five business days. Include a brief note that reminds the person where you met and what you discussed. This creates a second point of contact and makes it easier to stay visible after the show.



## Complete a Written Debrief Within Ten Business Days

Prepare a short written debrief while the experience is still fresh. This does not need to be long; two pages is usually enough. The debrief should summarize what the business learned about buyers, competitors, pricing, trends, and market opportunities.

It should also answer two practical questions:

- Is this show worth attending again next year?
- Should the business consider exhibiting at this show in the future?

The written debrief is one of the most useful outputs from attending a trade show because it turns individual conversations into business intelligence that the team can use later.

## Decide Whether to Exhibit Next Year

Use the show you just walked to make a decision about a booth in year two. If pre-show research suggested 30 useful conversations and the walk produced 30 useful conversations, the audience fit is real and exhibiting is on the table. If the floor was thinner than expected, walk a second year before committing to a booth.

# BEING AN EXHIBITOR

## How to Choose A Trade Show

Exhibiting at a trade show is a larger investment than attending, so choosing the right show matters. A booth can be valuable when the event attracts the right buyers, but it can be costly if the audience does not match the business's product, market, or sales goals. Before committing to a booth, businesses should use a more detailed review process than they would for attending.

### Confirm the Audience Fit

Start by reviewing the show's exhibitor list, attendee information, and any available buyer or sponsor lists. Identify at least 25 companies or buyers that clearly match the business's priority audience. These should be specific names, not general categories.

If the business cannot identify enough relevant buyers or partners, it may be better to attend the show first rather than exhibit. Audience fit is the single most predictive variable for exhibiting ROI.

### Estimate the Full Cost

The booth fee is only one part of the cost of exhibiting. Businesses should estimate the full cost before making a decision, including booth space, travel, lodging, shipping, booth materials, electrical service, samples, giveaways, lead capture tools, and staff time.

For many shows, a small booth can cost significantly more than the listed booth fee once these additional expenses are included. For example, a 10x10 booth at a major show with one staffer, travel, lodging, freight, electrical, and giveaways runs $12,000 to $35,000. National shows can exceed $75,000. Building a full budget early helps avoid surprises and gives the business a clearer sense of how many leads, sales, or partnerships would be needed to justify the investment.

### Consider a State Pavilion First

For first-time exhibitors, joining a state pavilion can be a practical way to reduce cost and increase visibility. The State of Maine often organizes state pavilions at several major shows and expositions. A pavilion space may cost less (a pavilion slot typically runs 30% - 60% the cost of an independent booth) than an independent booth and often includes shared infrastructure, coordinated marketing, and traffic generated by the state's presence at the show.

For businesses exhibiting for the first time, a state pavilion may be a good step between walking the floor and investing in a standalone booth.

### Use a Readiness Checklist

Before deciding to exhibit, businesses should ask:

- [ ] Is the product packaged and ready for commercial conversations?
- [ ] Can the business absorb 5 to 20 new accounts in the next 90 days?
- [ ] Are there two trained people available to staff the booth?
- [ ] Has someone from the company walked this show before?
- [ ] Can the company absorb the cost if zero deals close?

**If any answer is no, walk the show this year and exhibit in a future year.** The goal is to make sure a business is ready to take full advantage of the opportunity before making a larger investment.

# Planning for a Trade Show

A successful first booth requires planning well before the event begins. Businesses should start at least 90 days in advance, especially if they are developing booth materials, ordering samples, scheduling buyer meetings, or coordinating travel. The timeline below outlines the minimum preparation needed to make the booth useful, organized, and focused on business outcomes. The work in weeks one through six is mostly invisible from the show floor, and it is what separates a profitable booth from a vanity booth. Participation in a state pavilion may involve a grant application and related paperwork, so begin planning at least 90-120 days in advance.

## 90 Days Before the Show: Confirm the Decision and the Budget

Confirm the trade show, booth size, and full budget. The budget should include booth space, travel, lodging, shipping, booth materials, samples, giveaways, branded apparel, lead capture tools, and staff time.

At this stage, the business should also define two or three written goals for the show. These may include a target number of qualified leads, buyer meetings, distributor conversations, sample requests, or follow-up opportunities. Assign one internal lead who is responsible for coordinating preparation and making decisions during the event.

## 60 Days Before the Show: Prepare the Booth and Outreach Planning

- Confirm the booth setup or state pavilion participation. This includes booth dimensions, electrical needs, internet access, lead retrieval tools, audio/visual needs, signage, and product display requirements
- Build a target account list of 25 to 75 buyers from the exhibitor and attendee lists
- Draft the pre-show outreach sequence: Email 1, Email 2, LinkedIn message, phone script
- Order samples, packaging, and giveaways. Allow three weeks for custom items

### TOOL #2: FIRST-TIME EXHIBITOR CHECKLIST

Before attending, prepare:

- Two to three written, measurable goals
- Target account list (25–75 buyers)
- Pre-show outreach: email, LinkedIn, phone
- Booth, freight, and electrical booked
- Samples and giveaways ordered
- Lead capture tool with qualification fields
- Rehearsed 10- and 30-second pitch
- 30-day follow-up plan with named owners

## 30 Days Before the Show: Start Outreach and Practice the Pitch

Send Email 1 to the target list. The message should be short, specific, and focused on why a meeting would be useful.

Hold the first internal pitch rehearsal with all booth staff. Everyone staffing the booth should be able to clearly explain what the business does, who it serves, and what type of customer or partner it is trying to meet. The team should also practice using the lead capture tool so that notes and follow-up items are recorded consistently.

Finalize the booth schedule, including staffing rotations, breaks, confirmed meetings, and time for daily note review.

## 14 Days Before the Show: Complete Outreach and Finalize Content

Call top-priority targets who have not responded. Publish the 'we'll be at booth X' announcement on LinkedIn and send an email to existing customers or partners who may be attending. Run the second pitch rehearsal with a fresh external listener to give feedback on whether the message is clear and compelling.

## 7 Days Before the Show: Complete Final Preparation

Confirm freight arrival, hotel bookings, travel details, and staff schedules. Print or save the booth schedule with confirmed meetings, staff assignments, and key contact information.

Brief the team on attire, talking points, booth expectations, lead capture, and follow-up procedures. Run one final pitch rehearsal so that staff feel prepared and consistent before the show begins.

# SIZING A REALISTIC GOAL EXAMPLE CASE STUDY

A realistic trade show goal should start with the size of the audience and then narrow down to the number of likely business opportunities.

For example, a specialty food producer may expect 12,000 attendees to pass through its hall. If 3% of those attendees visit the booth, that creates about 360 booth conversations. If 30% of those conversations are with the right type of buyer, the business has about 108 qualified leads. If half of those leads agree to a follow-up conversation, about 54 prospects enter the sales pipeline. If the business typically closes 12% of qualified prospects, that could result in 6 to 7 new accounts within 90 days.

If each new account is worth an average of $18,000 in first-year revenue, those 6 to 7 accounts could generate approximately $108,000 to $126,000 in first-year sales. Compared with an all-in show cost of $28,000, the projected first-year return would be about 3.9 times the investment.

Worksheet 2 walks through this calculation step by step so businesses can test their own assumptions before committing to a show.

# Exhibiting at a Trade Show

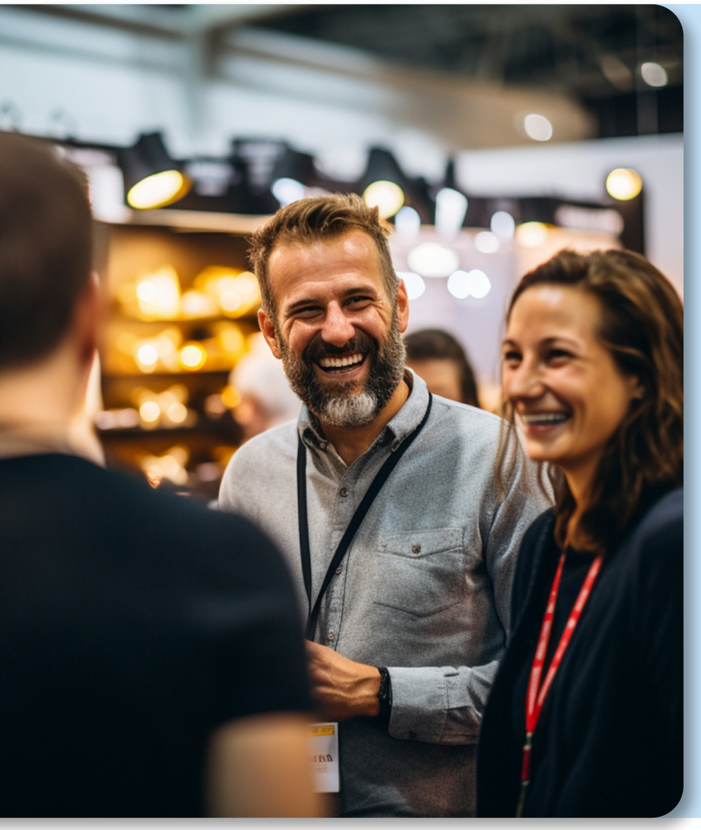
A booth should do more than look professional. It should help the business start useful conversations, identify qualified leads, and gather information that supports future sales. First-time exhibitors can make the most of their booth by using a clear approach for engaging visitors, prioritizing conversations, and capturing follow-up information.

## Stand in the Aisle, Not Behind the Table

Staffers behind tables, on phones, or talking to each other signal a closed, unapproachable booth. Stand at the front edge of the booth. Make eye contact with people in the aisle and smile. Open with a short, friendly line that gives the visitor a reason to stop.

## Prioritize the Right Conversations in 90 Seconds

Glance at the badge. Ask one disqualifying question. If the visitor is in your priority audience (buyer, distributor, strategic partner), transition into the 30-second pitch and then into discovery. If they are not, be gracious and brief. A 12-minute conversation with a non-buyer is 12 minutes a qualified buyer walked past.



### WHO TO PRIORITIZE: THE 90-SECOND TRIAGE

A trade show floor is six audiences sharing one building. In priority order, those audiences are as follows: buyers and direct purchasers (highest), distributors and brokers, strategic partners, peers and competitors (market intelligence), press and analysts, and service providers selling to you (organize these meetings into a one-time window so they don't consume buyer hours).

**When someone approaches your booth:**

- Glance at their badge to understand their company, role, and attendee type
- Ask one qualifying question: "Are you involved in buying or sourcing decisions for your company?", "What prompted you to stop by?" or "What brings you to this aisle?"
- If yes, move into your 30-second pitch, then discovery. If no, be gracious and brief so you don't lose three buyers walking past.

## Capture Every Qualified Lead the Same Way

Every qualified lead should be recorded using the same process. This makes follow-up easier and helps the team compare opportunities after the show.

Before deciding to exhibit, businesses should ask:

- Name, company, role, badge scanned or card collected.
- Two-line note on what was discussed and what specifically interested them.
- Qualification score: A (decision-maker, near-term need), B (influencer, mid-term), C (interested but no timing), D (out of profile).
- Specific next step with an owner and follow up date.

## End Each Day with a 30-Minute Debrief

At the end of each day, spend 30 minutes reviewing what happened. Each staff member reports the top three conversations of the day. Use this time to review the lead log, confirm qualification scores, and prepare for the next day's scheduled meetings.

One person should write a short daily summary that includes:

- Total conversations
- Number of qualified leads
- Top three insights
- Top three risks or issues
- Priority follow-ups for the next day

The team should also monitor samples, printed materials, and giveaways throughout the show.

**TIER 1 PRO-TIP:**
Try to preserve enough inventory so that the booth remains fully prepared through the final day. Reserve at least 25% of materials for Day 3. Running out by midday two is one of the most common Tier 1 mistakes.

# Follow-up & Evaluation After the Trade Show

The value of exhibiting is created after the show, when booth conversations are turned into follow-up meetings, samples, proposals, and new customer relationships. A strong follow-up process helps ensure that qualified leads do not get lost once the team returns to regular business operations.

## Days 1 to 3: Review and Prioritize Leads

Within 24 hours of the show closing, the show lead assigns a priority rating for every captured lead A, B, C, or D.

- **A Leads:** Decision-makers with a clear near-term need
- **B Leads:** Strong prospects with potential future opportunity
- **C Leads:** Interested contacts, but with limited timing or unclear fit
- **D Leads:** Contacts that are not a strong fit for active follow-up

A and B leads should be assigned to a sales lead with a clear next step. This may include a calendar hold, a personalized follow-up email, or a call request. C leads can be added to a longer-term follow-up (90-day nurture sequence). D leads should receive a brief thank-you, but do not need to remain on the active sales list.

## Days 4 to 10: Complete the First Follow-Up Wave

- Every **A Lead** receives a personal call or video meeting request from the sales lead.
- Every **B Lead** receives a personal email with a relevant sample, case study, or asset.
- Every **C Lead** receives a lighter follow-up message (nurture email) to keep the relationship warm.

The business should also hold an internal debrief during this period. The debrief should summarize what worked, what did not, which leads are most promising, what was learned about the market, and what should change before the next show.

## Days 11 to 30: Move Qualified Leads Through the Pipeline

In the weeks after the first follow-up wave, the business should continue outreach to A and B leads. This may include second-touch emails, LinkedIn messages, sample shipments, product information, pricing discussions, or follow-up meetings.

By day 30, the team should hold a pipeline review. Every A lead should have a clear next step on the calendar. Every B lead should either be moved up to a higher-priority opportunity or placed into a longer-term nurture sequence. This helps the business avoid spending time on leads that are unlikely to move forward.

## Track ROI at 30 Days, 90 Days, and 12 Months

For first-time Maine exhibitors, a well-run mid-major show typically produces 30 to 120 captured leads, 8 to 25 A or B leads, and 2 to 6 new accounts within 90 days. First-year ROI of 2.5x to 5x is a reasonable benchmark.

For a first-time exhibitor, a well-run mid-sized show may produce 30 to 120 captured leads, 8 to 25 strong A or B leads, and 2 to 6 new accounts within 90 days. A first-year return on investment (ROI) of 2.5 to 5 times the all-in show cost can be a reasonable benchmark, depending on the industry, product, sales cycle, and average account value.

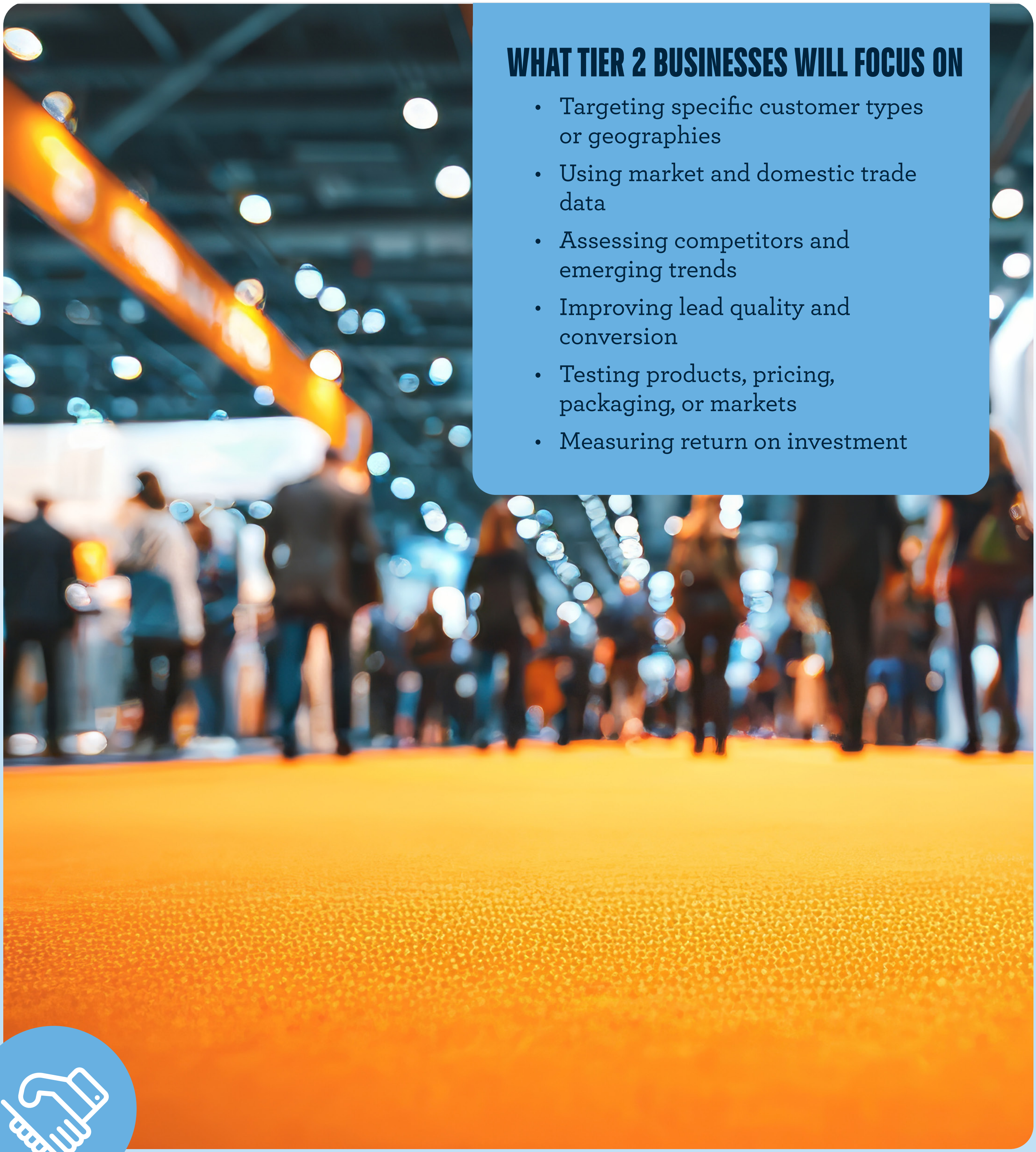
# SEASONED TRADE SHOW BUSINESSES

## TIER 2

# Seasoned Trade Show Businesses

## Purpose of This Section

This section is for businesses that have attended or exhibited at trade shows before and want to increase the return on their investment at future events. The focus is on being more strategic, targeted, and results-oriented so each event delivers greater business value.



### WHAT TIER 2 BUSINESSES WILL FOCUS ON

- Targeting specific customer types or geographies
- Using market and domestic trade data
- Assessing competitors and emerging trends
- Improving lead quality and conversion
- Testing products, pricing, packaging, or markets
- Measuring return on investment

# BEING AN ATTENDEE

## Choosing A Trade Show

For an experienced business, attending a trade show should be more than an exploratory trip. It should be a focused opportunity to build relationships, gather market intelligence, meet with priority buyers or partners, and decide whether the show is worth a larger investment in the future.

A Tier 2 business should choose which shows to attend based on expected return, not just general visibility or perceived opportunity.

### Evaluate the ROI of Attending without a Booth

Attending without a booth can be a strong strategy when the business has a clear target list and a calendar of pre-scheduled meetings. In some cases, a walking trip can produce a meaningful sales pipeline at a much lower cost than exhibiting.

Before deciding whether to attend or exhibit, estimate the potential value of 15 to 25 pre-booked meetings. Then compare that potential pipeline value with the full cost of attending, including travel, lodging, meals, registration, staff time, and follow-up. For many businesses, a walking trip may cost $2,000 to $5,000 per person, which can be significantly less than exhibiting.

### Know When Attending May Be Better Than Exhibiting

For an experienced business, attending may be the better option when:

- The show's buyer base is concentrated enough that 20 to 30 pre-booked meetings can cover the priority targets.
- The most valuable conversations are likely to happen in lounges, hotel lobbies, or over coffee rather than booth-floor demos.
- The trip is reconnaissance for a possible booth investment the following year.
- Distributor and broker conversations are the primary objective. Distributors are easier to meet at their own booths or through scheduled conversations than by trying to bring them to yours.

### Review Each Show on a 12-Month Basis

Businesses with 3-5 shows on the annual calendar should review every show on a rolling 12-month basis. Each show should be evaluated based on cost, quality of meetings, qualified leads, new accounts, market intelligence, and follow-up outcomes. If a show produces weak results for two years in a row it may be time to remove it from the calendar, attend only every other year, or shift from exhibiting to walking.

# Plan the Trade Show Calendar Like an Exhibitor

A Tier 2 walking attendee plans the show's calendar as carefully as an exhibitor plans a booth. The goal is to create a written meeting plan that fills much of the available time with scheduled conversations (60%-80% of available hours), while still leaving room for floor walking, sessions, networking, and unexpected opportunities.

A strong plan should include priority contacts, meeting times, locations, goals for each conversation, and follow-up responsibilities.

## Build A Target Account List

Before the show, develop a target list of 60 to 250 accounts, depending on the size of the event and business goals. The list should include named contacts, geographic data, fit scoring, and current incumbent or known competitors. Sources include show exhibitor and attendee lists, LinkedIn Sales Navigator, industry association directories, capital movement signals, and Maine DECD or Maine International Trade Center intelligence.

## Use A Pre-Show Outreach Sequence

Start outreach before the show so the business is not relying on chance conversations once it arrives. A simple outreach sequence may include:

- **Email 1 (30 days before the show):** Send a short, personalized email. Keep it under 90 words. Reference the show, explain what the business does, why the contact is relevant, and ask for a 15-minute meeting.
- **LinkedIn connection (25 days before the show):** Send a LinkedIn connection request with a brief note referencing the email and the upcoming show.
- **Email 2 (15 days before the show):** Send a second email with a clear subject line that references the show. Include one specific reason the contact may be interested in meeting.
- **Phone call (10 days before the show):** Call the highest-priority contacts who have not responded. The goal of the call is to schedule a meeting, not to make a full sales pitch.
- **Calendar invite (5 days before the show):** Send calendar invitations for confirmed meetings. Include the meeting location, your phone number, and any helpful day-of details.

Benchmark Metric: For a well-targeted outreach list of 75 to 125 prospects, a strong outcome is 10 to 25 booked meetings, with 60% to 80% of those meetings taking place. The number of meetings that actually happen is one of the most important indicators of whether pre-show outreach is creating real pipeline opportunities.

## Build a Competitor File

Before the show, prepare a short competitor file for the companies the business wants to learn more about. This does not need to be lengthy; one page per competitor is usually enough. Include the following in each file:

- Headquarters location
- Approximate size or headcount
- Estimated revenue, if available
- Product categories
- Pricing position
- Distribution footprint
- Recent news or announcements
- Booth location at the show

The business should also identify two or three specific questions or assumptions to test with the competition on the show floor. For example, the team may want to understand how a competitor is positioning a new product, what customer segment they appear to be targeting, or how their pricing compares with the market.

# Attending the Trade Show

For an experienced business, attending a trade show should be a structured use of time. Each hour should support a specific purpose, such as a scheduled meeting, competitor research, a session, a networking event, or a planned break. The goal is to leave the show with useful business leads, stronger market knowledge, and clear decisions about future trade show investments.

## Day 1: Complete an Orientation and Competitor Walk

On the first day, spend the first hour walking the floor to observe competitors. Take notes on:

- Booth size and location
- Headline messages and product positioning
- Products or samples on display
- Pricing signals, if visible
- Staffing levels and staff engagement
- Product demonstrations or traffic flow
- Booth activity and line length
- Giveaways, printed materials, and promotions
- Media, buyer, or partner activity around the booth

The competitor walk is one of the highest-value uses of show-floor time. It helps a business understand how others are positioning themselves, what messages are common in the market, and where there may be opportunities to stand out.

## Days 1 to 3: Focus on Pre-Booked Meetings

For Tier 2 attendees, pre-booked meetings should drive the schedule. The most valuable conversations usually begin with discovery before moving into a pitch.

Businesses should be prepared to ask clear questions, such as:

- “What does your current solution for this look like?”
- “What would need to be true for you to consider adding a product or service like this?”
- “Who else in your organization would be part of that decision?”

These questions help the business understand whether there is a real opportunity, who is involved in the decision, and what next steps may be needed.

## Capture Trend Signals Throughout the Show

In addition to meetings, use the show to identify patterns in the market. These signals can help the business refine its positioning, pricing, product strategy, or target customers. Pay attention to:

- **Repeated language:** When five competitors all use the same descriptor ('regenerative,' 'AI-enabled,' 'single-origin'), the category or phrasing may be becoming standard language in the market.
- **Pricing movement:** If new competitors are clustering around a price point the business used to own, that may signal increased competitive pressure. If competitors are pricing above the business, there may be room to test higher-value positioning.
- **Channel signals:** Watch how distributors, brokers, and other sales partners are talking about the category. Their interest, hesitation, or movement away from a category can be an early signal of where the market may be heading.
- **Adjacent-category invasion:** Pay attention when businesses from nearby categories enter the show. For example, a snack brand at a beverage show or a software company at a manufacturing show may signal changing buyer needs or future consolidation across categories.

## End Each Day with a Written Debrief

At the end of each day, spend 45 minutes writing a short debrief. This should be more than a verbal recap. It should create a running record of what the business learned and what needs to happen next.

The daily debrief should include:

- Confirmed pipeline opportunities
- Competitor activity observed
- Trend signals captured
- New questions to investigate on the next show day
- Follow-up items that should not wait until after the show

# Follow-Up & Evaluation After the Trade Show

A Tier 2 walking trip should produce three deliverables within two weeks of the show: a pipeline follow-up plan, a competitor and trend brief, and a recommendation for next year's trade show calendar. Each one is a written artifact, not a verbal report.

## Complete a Pipeline Follow-Up

Within 48 hours, score every meeting and meaningful floor conversation using the same A/B/C/D system used for exhibiting:

- **A Leads:** Strong fit, decision-maker or near-term opportunity
- **B Leads:** Good fit, but timing or decision authority is less clear
- **C Leads:** Some interest, but limited urgency or fit
- **D Leads:** Not a strong fit for active follow-up

A Leads receive a personal call from the sales lead within 24 hours. B Leads receive a personalized email within 48 hours, with a specific reference to the conversation. C Leads enter a 90-day nurture sequence. D Leads receive a polite thank-you but should not remain on the active sales list.

## Prepare a Competitor and Trend Brief Within 10 Business Days

Within 10 business days, prepare a short written brief summarizing what the business learned from the show. The brief should include:

- Top three competitive shifts observed
- Top three emerging trends in the category
- What this changes about your positioning, pricing, or product roadmap
- Two questions for the leadership team to answer in the next 30 days

This brief helps turn show observations into business decisions.

## Update the CRM within 10 days, Track ROI at 90 days

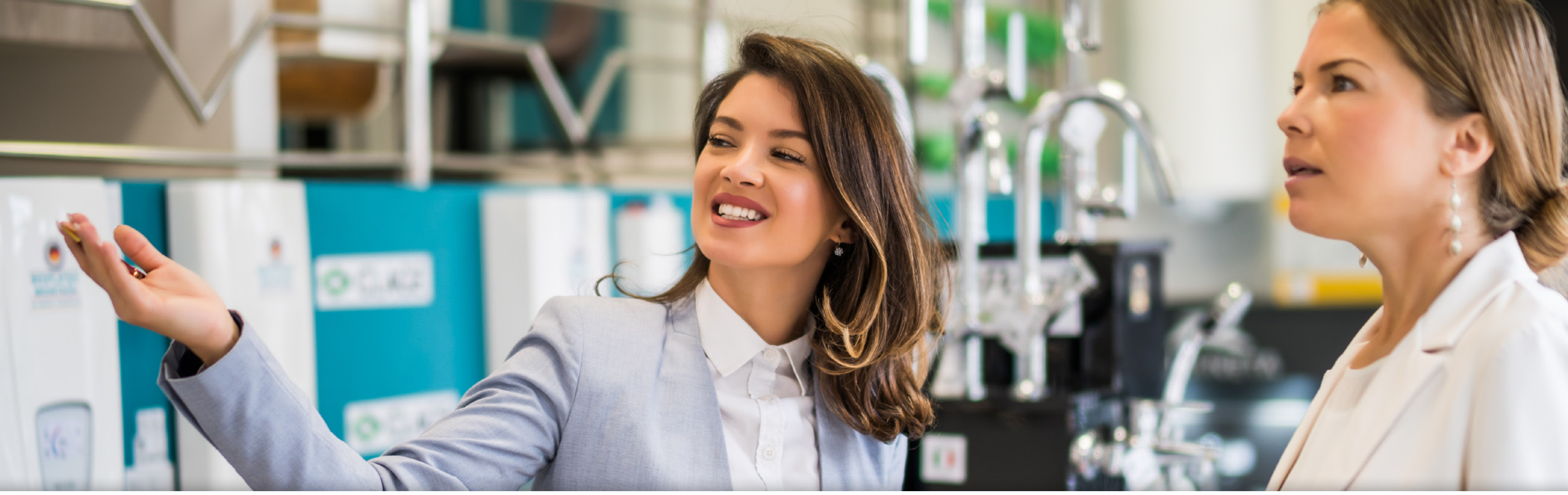
Within 10 business days, every captured lead should be entered into the business's CRM or lead tracking system. Each record should include the account name, primary contact, show name, fit score, and next step.

Every A and B lead should have a scheduled follow-up task within 30 days. The business should then review ROI at 30 days, 90 days, and 12 months. The 30-day review is an early check, the 90-day review should guide the next calendar decision, and the 12-month review should show the full value of the trip.

## Decide Whether to Attend, Exhibit, or Skip Next Year

At the 90-day mark, decide whether the business should attend, exhibit, or skip the show next year. This decision should be based on the pipeline value created, the quality of the contacts made, the competitor intelligence gathered, and the usefulness of the trend insights.

Write the decision down with a short rationale. This creates a record the business can use when making the same decision next year.



# BEING AN EXHIBITOR

For an experienced exhibitor, trade show decisions should be managed as part of a broader business development portfolio. Businesses that exhibit at several shows each year should regularly decide which shows are worth keeping, which shows may warrant a larger investment, and which shows should be removed from the calendar.

The decision should be based on performance, not habit.

## Choosing a Trade Show

For a Tier 2 exhibitor, return on investment should be one of the primary measures used to evaluate each show. Calculate first-year ROI for every show in the trade show portfolio. The calculation should compare:

**Revenue generated:** Closed revenue tied to the show within 12 months

**Total cost:** Booth space, freight, booth build, travel, lodging, staff time, samples, lead capture tools, and pre-show outreach.

Anything the show required should be included in the cost. This gives the business a more accurate view of whether the show is creating enough value to justify continued investment.

### Use a Sunset Rule

If a show produces less than 1.5 times first-year ROI for two consecutive years, the business should consider removing it from the calendar. A third year should not be treated as a default second chance. It should only be considered if there is a clear reason to believe the show's value will change.

In many cases, the better decision is to reallocate that budget to a show, market, or customer segment with stronger demonstrated potential..

### Recognize Strategic Exceptions

Some shows may still be worth attending or exhibiting at even if the short-term ROI is limited. These exceptions should be intentional and limited. Examples may include:

- **Defensive presence:** The business needs to be visible because absence could be interpreted as a retreat from the market or category.
- **Pipeline diversification:** The show produces consistent B and C leads in a new geography, customer segment, or product category, even if immediate ROI is modest (break-even ROI).
- **New product launch:** The show aligns with the timing of a new product, service, or market announcement.

These exceptions can be valid, but they should not become the default. A Tier 2 portfolio with more than one or two exceptions in any given year is a portfolio drifting away from business discipline.

# Planning for a Trade Show

For an experienced exhibitor, the most important work happens before the show opens. The booth matters, but the pre-show outreach plan and booth calendar often determine whether the event produces results.

## Build a Target Account List: 60 to 250 accounts

Develop a target list of 60 to 250 accounts, depending on the size of the show and the business's goals. Sources may include the show's exhibitor and attendee lists, trade show app, LinkedIn, industry directories, existing customer referrals, recent investment or expansion announcements, and information from state or regional economic development partners.

The target list should include:

- Account or company name
- Industry or NAICS code
- Geography
- Estimated size or revenue
- Primary and secondary contact
- Known current supplier or competitor, if available
- Outreach status
- Pre-show meeting time, if scheduled
- Fit score from 1 to 5

## Use a Pre-show Outreach Sequence

Begin outreach at least 30 days before the show. A simple sequence may include

**30 Days Before the Show:**
Send a short, personalized email. Keep it under 90 words and make it specific to the account.

**25 Days Before the Show:**
Send a LinkedIn connection request with a brief note referencing the email.

**15 Days Before the Show:**
Send a second email. Keep it to two sentences and include one specific reason the contact may be interested in meeting.

**10 Days Before the Show:**
Call priority contacts who have not responded. The goal is to schedule a meeting, not to make a full sales pitch.

**05 Days Before the Show:**
Send calendar invitations for confirmed meetings. Include the booth number, a photo or clear identifier for the person they are meeting, and a phone number for day-of changes.

## Prepare Data Conversation Cards

Give each booth staffer a single laminated card with five data points that can be used to start conversations. These may include trade flow data, industry production trends, recent capital investment signals, workforce data, pricing trends, or other market information relevant to the buyer.

Each data point should be written as a conversation opener and include the source. This helps booth staff ask stronger questions and speak more credibly with buyers.

## Practice the Pitch and Lead Capture Process

Hold at least two internal rehearsals before the show, including one with someone outside the immediate team who can provide fresh feedback. Every booth staffer should practice the pitch, discovery questions, and lead capture process.

The team should also agree on how leads will be qualified before the show begins. Any disagreements about what counts as an A, B, C, or D lead should be resolved during rehearsal, not on the show floor.

# Exhibiting at a Trade Show

For experienced exhibitors, booth operations should be built around pre-arranged appointments, structured observation, and consistent lead capture. Walk-up traffic still matters, but it should not be the only source of value.

## Use a Calendar-First Approach

The booth lead should manage the schedule and make sure pre-booked meetings receive priority. Staff should be assigned to cover both scheduled meetings and walk-up traffic. Rotations should include breaks, so staff remain focused and effective throughout the day.

A tired booth team is less likely to engage well, qualify leads accurately, or capture useful follow-up information.

## Capture and Qualify Every Leads

Every qualified conversation should result in a lead record. At minimum, each record should include::

- Name, company, and role
- A short note on what was discussed
- Qualification score
- Specific next step
- Owner of the next step
- Follow-up date

Businesses should use the show's lead retrieval system or a phone-based scanning tool (e.g., iCapture, Cvent LeadCapture, Captello) with custom qualification fields. Business cards collected without notes or next steps are not a reliable lead capture system.

## Complete a Structured Competitor Walk on Day One

Similar to being an attendee, on the first day, assign time for a structured competitor walk. Observe and record:

- Booth size, design, and location
- Staffing levels and seniority
- Headline message and product positioning
- Products, samples, or materials on display
- Pricing signals, if visible
- Demo or tasting flow
- Line length and visitor engagement
- Giveaways and printed materials
- Media activity, press visits, or other visibility signals

This information can help the business understand how competitors are positioning themselves and where there may be opportunities to adjust messaging, pricing, or product strategy.

## Hold a Daily Debrief and Adjust

At the end of each day, hold a 30- to 45-minute team debrief. Since they will be tired, offer praise for standout interactions, celebrate progress and listen to team members' assessment of the day. Review the top conversations, update lead scores, identify follow-up needs, and adjust the next day's pitch, staffing, or meeting approach.

Adjustments between day one and day two can be the difference between participating and a meaninful pipeline..

# Follow-Up & Evaluation After the Trade Show

Tier 2 follow-up is the engineering of revenue from the booth's output. The 30-day post-show sprint is structured, owned, and measured. The single biggest predictor of trade show ROI is whether the team executes a structured follow-up sequence in the first 10 business days. Tier 2 closes that gap deliberately.

## Days 1 to 3: Review and Prioritize Leads

Within 24 hours, every lead should receive a final A, B, C, or D score.

- **A Leads:** Routed to the sales lead with a calendar hold and personalized follow-up prepared
- **B Leads:** Assigned for personalized outreach within 48 hours
- **C Leads:** Added to a 90-day nurture sequence
- **D Leads:** Sent a brief thank-you and removed from the active sales list

This step ensures the highest-value leads receive attention first.

## Days 4 to 30: Use Multi-Channel Follow-Up Sequence: A & B Leads

Within 24 hours, every lead should receive a final A, B, C, or D score.

- **Days 1 to 2:** Send an email or make a call referencing the specific conversation and proposing one clear next step.
- **Day 5:** Send a relevant case study, sample, product sheet, data point, or other information that responds to the buyer's stated need or concern.
- **Day 14:** Send a short LinkedIn message from the booth staffer who spoke with the contact.
- **Day 28:** The sales lead should call with the goal of confirming a specific next step, such as a sample, pilot, discovery call, pricing conversation, or store visit.

## Tracks ROI at 30, 90, and 365 days

The 30-day ROI review is an early check. The 90-day review should guide next year's trade show calendar decision. The 12-month review should confirm whether the show created enough value to remain in the portfolio.

Each review should be written down. Over time, this creates institutional knowledge about which shows, markets, messages, and customer segments produce the strongest results.

## TIER 2 PRO-TIP: Build the Trade Show Flywheel!

Each show should make the next show smarter, more targeted and more productive. Pre-show outreach lists can become target account lists. Target account lists can become CRM records. CRM records can become next year's outreach plan. Booth conversations can inform product development, pricing, and customer targeting. Competitor observations can improve positioning.

Tier 2 exhibiting works best when each show feeds the next one, rather than being treated as a separate, one-time event.

# INTERACTIVE RESOURCES

WORKSHEETS • CHECKLISTS • TRADE SHOWS • GLOSSARY

# WORKSHEET 1: TIER SELF-ASSESSMENT

Answer the seven questions below. Count one point for each yes. Your total places you in a tier.

| # | QUESTION | YES/NO |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Have you exhibited at three or more trade shows in the last 36 months? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 2 | Do you have a written pre-show outreach process used at the last show? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 3 | Do you use a CRM (HubSpot, Salesforce, Pipedrive, Zoho) to track post-show leads? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 4 | Can you report ROI on the last show in dollars and pipeline value? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 5 | Do you build a target account list before the show and book meetings in advance? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 6 | Do you assign specific lead-capture roles before the show floor opens? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |
| 7 | Do you do a written post-show debrief within ten business days? | ☐ Yes \| ☐ No |

## Scoring Note:

- 0 to 2 “Yes” — start with Tier 1
- 3 to 4 “Yes” — read Tier 1, then move directly into Tier 2
- 5 to 7 “Yes: — start with Tier 2; treat Tier 1 as a refresher for new staff

# WORKSHEET 2: GOAL SETTING & ROI PROJECTION

Show Name & Date: ______________________________

Booth Investment (all-in): ______________________________

Primary Goal: ______________________________

Secondary Goal: ______________________________

Stretch Goal: ______________________________

| STEP | VARIABLE | YOUR NUMBER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Expected attendees in your hall over the run of the show | = |
| 2 | Estimated booth visit rate (2–5%) | % |
| 3 | Total expected conversations (step 1 × step 2) | = |
| 4 | Buyer fit rate (25–40%) | % |
| 5 | Qualified leads (step 3 × step 4) | = |
| 6 | Follow-up acceptance rate (40–60%) | % |
| 7 | Pipeline leads (step 5 × step 6) | = |
| 8 | Your close rate from other channels | % |
| 9 | New accounts (step 7 × step 8) | = |
| 10 | Average first-year account value | $ |
| 11 | Projected first-year revenue (step 9 × step 10) | $ |
| 12 | Projected first-year ROI (step 11 ÷ booth investment) | = |

# WORKSHEET 3: ELEVATOR PITCH BUILDER

## 10-Second Pitch (under 25 words)

We are ________________________________________ (who you are),

making ________________________________________ (what you make or do),

for ________________________________________ (who it is for).

## 30-Second Pitch (under 75 words)

Add the problem you solve or gap you fill ________________________________________

Add the hook (specific number, customer name, credibility maker): ______________________________

Two discovery questions for the conversation:

1. ________________________________________

2. ________________________________________

## Rehearsal Log

| ROUND | LISTENER | THEIR FEEDBACK | EDITS MADE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 - Internal | | | |
| 2 - Friendly Stranger | | | |
| 3 - Time Pressure | | | |

# WORKSHEET 4: TARGET ACCOUNT LIST (TIER 2 STARTER)

Tier 2 lists typically run 60 to 250 rows. Use this template as a starting point in a spreadsheet.

| ACCOUNT | NAICS | GEO | PRIMARY CONTACT/ROLE | TOUCH STATUS | FIT (1-5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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# WORKSHEET 5: LEAD SCORING RUBRIC (BANT + FIT)

Score every captured lead within 48 hours of the show ending. B = Budget. A = Authority. N = Need. T = Timing. Fit = geography, volume, and category alignment on a 1 to 5 scale.

| LEAD NAME/ COMPANY | B (Y/N) | A (Y/N) | N (Y/N) | T (Y/N) | FIT (1-5) | SCORE A/B/C/D | ACTION BY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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## Score Key:

A = decision-maker, budget confirmed, timing within 90 days, fit 4–5. Personal call within 24 hours

B = influencer or decision-maker, timing within 6 months, fit 3–4. Personal email within 48 hours

C = curious buyer, no clear timing, fit 2–3. 90-day nurture sequence

D = out of profile. Polite thank-you only.

# WORKSHEET 6: COMPETITOR SCOUTING SHEET

Competitor: ______________________________________________ Booth: ____________________

| OBSERVATION | NOTES |
|---|---|
| Booth size and design | |
| Headline message on back wall | |
| Product on the table | |
| Pricing signals | |
| Staffing — who and how many | |
| Demo / tasting flow | |
| Line length and dwell time | |
| Giveaways and collateral | |
| Press visits observed | |
| What this changes for us | |

# WORKSHEET 7: ROI CALCULATOR

## Show Costs (all-in)

| COST CATEGORY | AMOUNT |
|---|---|
| Booth space | $ |
| Booth build / rental / design | $ |
| Freight and drayage | $ |
| Electrical, AV, internet | $ |
| Travel and lodging | $ |
| Per diem and meals | $ |
| Samples / giveaways | $ |
| Lead capture technology | $ |
| Staff time (fully loaded hourly × hours) | $ |
| Pre-show outreach (internal + external) | $ |
| Sponsorships | $ |
| Total show cost | $ |

## Show Outcomes

| OUTCOME | RESULT |
|---|---|
| Total qualified leads | = |
| A / B / C count | A: B: C: |
| Closed revenue at 30 days | $ |
| Closed revenue at 90 days | $ |
| Pipeline value still active at 90 days | $ |
| Closed revenue at 12 months | $ |
| First-year ROI multiple (closed revenue 12 mo ÷ total cost) | = |

# WORKSHEET 8: 90-DAY PRE-SHOW TIMELINE CHECKLIST

Check off each item as it is completed. Items unchecked two weeks before the show are red flags.

## T-90 Days

- ☐ Show, role (exhibitor vs walker), and budget confirmed
- ☐ Booth space and category locked
- ☐ Two to three written goals defined
- ☐ Internal show lead assigned with authority
- ☐ Project plan opened with milestones, owners, weekly check-ins

## T-60 Days

- ☐ Booth builder briefed or state pavilion slot confirmed
- ☐ New collateral, banners, table coverings, sample packaging ordered
- ☐ Travel and lodging booked
- ☐ Marketing briefed on pre-show, at-show, post-show content
- ☐ Target account list built (Tier 2: 60–250; Tier 1: 25–75)
- ☐ Pre-show outreach sequence drafted (emails, LinkedIn, phone)

## T-30 Days

- ☐ Email 1 sent to target list
- ☐ LinkedIn connection requests sent to named contacts
- ☐ Samples, packaging, and giveaways ordered (custom items: allow 3+ weeks)
- ☐ Shipping and drayage confirmed with show freight handler
- ☐ First internal pitch rehearsal completed
- ☐ Booth staff briefed on lead capture tool

## T-14 Days

- ☐ Email 2 sent to non-responders
- ☐ Calendar invites sent for confirmed meetings
- ☐ Pre-show phone calls completed for top-priority A targets
- ☐ "We will be at booth X" announcement published on LinkedIn and other channels
- ☐ Customer-list email sent announcing presence to existing accounts
- ☐ Second internal pitch rehearsal completed with an external listener

## T-7 Days

- ☐ Freight arrival confirmed with drayage contractor
- ☐ Booth-floor schedule printed with all confirmed meetings
- ☐ Backup business cards and data conversation cards printed
- ☐ Daily debrief schedule finalized (who, where, what gets captured)
- ☐ Team briefed on dress, pitch, and lead capture process
- ☐ Final pitch rehearsal completed

# WORKSHEET 9: POST-SHOW FOLLOW-UP TRACKER

Update within 10 business days of the show ending. Empty cells past the deadline are pipeline leaks.

| LEAD NAME | SCORE | TOUCH 1 DATE | TOUCH 2 DATE | TOUCH 3 DATE | STATUS | NEXT STEP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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# COMMON MISTAKES & RED-FLAG CHECKLIST

Run this list four weeks out, two weeks out, and the morning of the show.

## Strategy & Planning Mistakes

- ☐ No written goals, or goals not measurable (High)
- ☐ Wrong show selection — the audience does not include your buyers (High)
- ☐ Exhibiting when walking would have been the higher-return choice (Medium)
- ☐ No pre-show outreach to target accounts (High)
- ☐ Budget set without staff time, freight, and samples included (Medium)
- ☐ No assigned show lead with authority to decide (Medium)
- ☐ Product not ready for commercial discussion at the show (High)

## Booth & Presentation Mistakes

- ☐ Booth headline message that buyers cannot parse from 15 feet away (High)
- ☐ Cluttered booth that hides the actual product (Medium)
- ☐ Staff sitting behind the table instead of standing in the aisle (High)
- ☐ Staff on phones or laptops during open hours (High)
- ☐ Booth understaffed during peak hours (Medium)
- ☐ No samples or product on the table (High)
- ☐ Running out of samples on day 2 (Medium)

## Conversation Mistakes

- ☐ Pitch not rehearsed; staff improvising (High)
- ☐ Talking more than listening with a qualified buyer (High)
- ☐ No qualifying question early in the conversation (Medium)
- ☐ Using internal jargon or unverifiable superlatives (Medium)
- ☐ Spending 20 minutes with a non-buyer while qualified buyers walk past (High)

## Lead Capture & Follow-Up Mistakes

- ☐ No lead capture tool; relying on business cards in a bowl (High)
- ☐ No qualification fields in lead capture (Medium)
- ☐ Follow-up not started within 48 hours (High)
- ☐ Generic, non-personalized follow-up email (High)
- ☐ Leads not entered into CRM within 10 business days (Medium)
- ☐ No post-show debrief written within 10 business days (Medium)

# TRADE SHOWS THAT MATTER FOR MAINE

A curated list by Maine priority sector. Dates, locations, and sponsorship structures change year to year; always verify with the show organizer.

## Seafood, Aquaculture, & Blue Economy

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| Seafood Expo North America (SENA) | Boston, MA · March | Largest seafood show in North America. Maine pavilion is a recurring feature. |
| Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Exposition (NACE) | Rotates · January | Regional aquaculture; strong for shellfish, finfish, seaweed producers. |
| Pacific Marine Expo | Seattle, WA · November | West Coast commercial fishing; useful for equipment and services suppliers. |

## Specialty Food & Beverage

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| Specialty Food Association Fancy Food Show | NYC (Summer) / San Francisco (Winter) | The premier specialty food show in the US. |
| Natural Products Expo East / West | Philadelphia / Anaheim | Natural, organic, and clean-label categories. |
| National Restaurant Association Show | Chicago, IL · May | Largest foodservice show in North America. |
| PLMA Private Label Trade Show | Chicago, IL · November | Entry point for store-brand programs. |

## Forest Products, Wood, Paper, & Pulp

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| International Woodworking Fair (IWF) | Atlanta, GA · August (biennial) | Furniture and architectural woodwork buyers. |
| Tissue World Miami | Miami, FL | Tissue manufacturing supply chain. |
| Forest Products Society annual conference | Rotates | Research–industry interface. |
| International Mass Timber Conference | Portland, OR · March | Mass timber and CLT supply chain. |

## Outdoor Recreation, Marine, & Boatbuilding

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| IBEX (International BoatBuilders Exhibition) | Tampa, FL · October | North American boatbuilding industry trade show. |
| Outdoor Retailer Summer / Winter Market | Salt Lake City, UT | Outdoor industry; relevant for Maine outdoor product manufacturers. |
| Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors Show | Rockland, ME · August | Home-state event; in-state brand presence. |

## Advanced Manufacturing, Composites, & Aerospace

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| IMTS — International Manufacturing Technology Show | Chicago, IL · September (biennial) | Largest manufacturing show in North America. |
| FABTECH | Rotates · November | Metal forming, fabricating, welding. |
| CAMX — Composites and Advanced Materials Expo | Rotates · September | Composites supply chain; marine, aerospace, defense. |
| Defense and aerospace primes supplier conferences | Various | For Maine defense and aerospace suppliers. Events - Maine APEX Statewide and Regional Defense matchmaking Events |

## Biotech & Life Sciences

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| BIO International Convention | Rotates · June | Largest biotech industry gathering; partnership and licensing. |
| Bio-IT World | Boston, MA · April | Life sciences IT, data, informatics. |
| SLAS — Society for Laboratory Automation and Screening | Rotates · January | Lab equipment and automation. |

## Technology, Software, and Cyber

| SHOW | LOCATION | BUSINESS VALUE |
|---|---|---|
| RSA Conference | San Francisco, CA · April–May | Cybersecurity industry. |
| SaaStr Annual | San Francisco Bay Area · Sept | SaaS go-to-market. |

A comprehensive list of trade shows, updated quarterly can be found at: https://www.maine.gov/decd/domestic-trade/business-growth-resources/trade-shows.

# GLOSSARY OF TRADE SHOW TERMS

| TERM | DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| **BANT** | Lead qualification framework: Budget, Authority, Need, Timing. |
| **Booth Lead** | Internal owner of the show, accountable for outcomes. |
| **Drayage** | Handling of freight from the dock to the booth, charged by weight or volume by the show contractor. |
| **EAC** | Exhibitor-appointed contractor — a vendor you bring in rather than the show official contractor. |
| **FAM Tour** | Familiarization tour — organized buyer tour, often coordinated by an economic development agency. |
| **Lead Retrieval** | Hardware or software used to capture badge data at the booth. |
| **NAICS** | North American Industry Classification System; standard industry codes for prospecting and analysis. |
| **Pavilion** | Shared exhibit area organized by a region, country, or association, typically reduced individual cost. |
| **Pre-show Outreach** | Structured email, LinkedIn, and phone sequence to target accounts before the show. |
| **SHOAPP / Show App** | Official mobile app of the show with maps, attendee lists, and meeting scheduling. |
| **Show Services Kit** | Exhibitor manual sent by the show with deadlines for electrical, internet, freight, and other services. |
| **State Pavilion** | Booth area organized by a state economic development agency. |
| **Suitcase Strategy** | Attending without a booth and conducting business through scheduled meetings only. |

# ABOUT CAMOIN ASSOCIATES

As the nation's only full-service economic development and lead generation consulting firm, Camoin Associates empowers communities through human connection backed by robust analytics.

Since 1999, Camoin Associates has helped local and state governments, economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses across the country generate economic results marked by resiliency and prosperity.

To learn more about our experience and projects in all of our service lines, please visit our website at www.camoinassociates.com. You can also find us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube.

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- Workforce Development & Talent Retention
- Prospecting & Business Attraction
- Economic & Fiscal Impact Analysis
- Target Industry Analytics & Strategy
- Real Estate Development Analytics & Advisory
- Entrepreneurship & Innovation
- Housing Needs Assessment

# MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Michael Duguay, Commissioner

www.maine.gov/decd

DECD and its partners work collaboratively to support business development through available resources that Maine has to offer. From millions of dollars in tax credits, reimbursements, research and development credits, to capital loans and even direct investment. Every year DECD helps Maine communities attract new investment, create jobs and grow their infrastructure with unique programs.

# MAINE'S DOMESTIC TRADE PROGRAM

This program supports Maine's entrepreneurs to access or expand into new markets across the country, leveraging market data and business growth tools.

www.maine.gov/decd/domestic-trade

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