Using technology to make your exhibition stand more successful

Exhibition stand design in the pharma sector is changing. Merely building the biggest display possible and sticking the company logo on it is no longer enough (and shame on any exhibition design company that ever thought it was!). Today, we live in an experience economy. So, to create a profitable exhibition experience, pharma companies have to use their displays to grab attention, attract footfall, and start relevant conversations if they want to capitalise on the potential of a captive and targeted audience at tradeshows and other events.

Helping our pharma customers make sure their next show is a resounding success, at Apex, we’ve pulled together a handy summary to help you use technology to give your exhibition presence a boost.

What is the point of an exhibition stand?

Exhibition stands are a fantastic way to get noticed and promote your pharmaceutical business to a captive and targeted audience. Among other things, they can help you to generate leads (during and long after the tradeshow is finished), raise brand awareness, network, and support a product launch. In fact, according to a report, live events such as exhibitions are the most effective marketing channel for most organisations.

However, all too often pharma companies think that simply showing up with a good looking stand and waiting for people to come to them is all it takes. And that’s why some exhibitors fail.

In the experience economy, you have to put the individual at the heart of everything you do. This is as true in the pharmaceutical sector as it is for consumer brands. So, to stand out from the crowd, your exhibition stand has to reach out and appeal to attendees in new and absorbing ways.

One of the best ways to do this is to capitalise on the power of tech. When it comes to creating a winning show presence, integrating technology into your next exhibition stand design could provide that much-needed return on investment. And, the good news is that there is an abundance of technology available to help you achieve your objectives. Here are just some of the most exciting examples:

Big data

Big data has been growing in importance for some years now. And that makes sense. Data is a precious commodity. The more information you capture, the easier it is to create exhibition stands that appeal to your target audience. What’s more, data can also be used to provide visitors with the info they seek, and to promptly follow up with people after shows. But the complexity of available tech needed to extract value from this information meant that only the biggest brands have been able to exploit it fully. However, with machine learning and AI making big data more accessible, it is rapidly becoming available to businesses of all sizes. Indeed, technology now exists that captures leads and integrates them into your CRM systems. So sales teams can stop worrying about the hard sell and focus on generating beneficial conversations with more prospects (just make sure any data you process is compliant with the GDPR).

RFID cards
RFID (radio-frequency identification) technology can be used to guide visitors around an exhibition stand while capturing their valuable data. To do this, attendees are issued a card, tag or wristband which they register with you. Once done, they navigate your exhibition stand, and by tapping their RFID card at different stages of their journey, are provided with interactive information that enhances their overall experience. So you take them on a physical and digital journey all at the same time. For extra wow-factor, RFID can be used in combination with plinths and products to trigger animation on a touchscreen.

Crucially, RFID records how long each delegate spends, and how much they engage with your stand’s touchpoints. This provides valuable feedback to your team about what they’re most interested in, so you can use this to tailor any follow-up sales activity.

**Live video streaming**

People are now using social media to live stream content. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter are all capitalising on this trend, giving businesses the chance to interact with their audience directly. In response, more and more businesses are using live streaming to reach out to people at trade shows and drive them to their stands. By communicating with these visitors in real time, they are not only boosting footfall, but also creating a buzz.

Savvy pharma sales and marketing teams are also using live streaming to engage with potential customers and other stakeholders who are not able to attend, and to support their PR and social media activity long after the exhibition is over.

**Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)**

AR and VR are changing the world of events; giving pharma brands an ingenious way to engage with potential customers. And, despite the hype, the virtual tradeshow isn’t going to replace real-world events just yet.

Instead, with today’s visitors seeking new experiences that evoke genuine emotions, using immersive technology makes you uniquely memorable. It gives people a reason to strike up conversations with you and experience the benefits of your product/services for themselves.

**Social media stories**

Social media “stories” are growing in popularity and are set to make a real impact over the next few years. Capturing the best moments from a day (and vanishing soon after), stories are a fun, bite-sized way to present video content. And encourage people to view them before they disappear.

With incredibly high open rates, social media stories can provide excellent exposure for your brand during a tradeshow. If you’re exhibiting, you can use them to create in the moment content, get people talking, and promote you on the day. What’s more, because they don’t last forever, you can also use stories to create temporary promos that can only be used at a tradeshow to boost engagement even further.

**Gamification**

You can use gamification, leaderboards, and apps to deliver a richer exhibition experience. For example, interactive LED floors can be used to create games which people play by stepping on certain things.

As well as creating a fun and engaging event, this tech can also share and collect that all-important
digital data. So, by investing in exhibition technology, your pharma sales team can focus all its attention on talking to visitors, while the technology feeds information back to your in-house team for further action.

Apps

You can also use apps and digital touchpoints to provide attendees with sales and marketing collateral (nobody likes having to carry around heavy bags stuffed with paper!). Attendees can also use apps to scan products and see info related to them. If they like what they see, they can use the app to have info emailed to them. You can even use this technology to share data for lead generation purposes and to boost communication before, during, and after the show. And more! Video, iPads, touch screen data capture, triggered motion sensor tech, interactive screens, holographics, and many other ingenious features and gadgets can also be used to interrupt the customer journey and connect with visitors in an immersive way.

For example:

- With a dynamic photo wall, show visitors can drag, pinch and zoom in on digital photos
- Object recognition tables are also growing in popularity, with attendees placing products on a touchscreen table to bring up interactive content relevant to the product
- Touchscreen photo booths can be used to take selfies to the next level. For example, visitors use the booth to take selfies with virtual props which are then overlaid on top of their photos (just like Snapchat filters). Photos can then be shared on social media to give your brand an extra boost

When it comes to distinguishing your pharma business from the crowd, integrating the latest digital innovations into your next exhibition stand can help to attract, astonish and amaze. And provide that much-needed return on investment.

In fact, if you haven’t caught on to the benefits of on-stand tech, you could be missing out to your competitors who have.

Three steps to a successful pharma exhibition stand design

While tech can help exhibitors to provide compelling, multi-sensory experiences for attendees, at Apex we never make our designs reliant on technology alone. In fact, while it is always available as an option, our core stand design still works - even if your budget doesn’t stretch to every gadget and bit of software. We can do this because of our innovative approach to designing every exhibition stand.

STEP ONE: Before we do anything, we make sure you understand why you’re attending a particular exhibition in the first place. While historically pharma businesses would often exhibit just because their competitors were doing so, today, reduced budgets and the need to demonstrate ROI mean you have to take the time to figure out what success looks like to you. If you’re not sure what your objectives are, or what your customers want, we can work with you to figure this out.

STEP TWO: No matter how good your products/services are, your exhibition presence won’t be a success if you don’t talk to anyone. So, your pharma stand must grab attention and stop people in their tracks. At Apex, we help you make the most of your booth by using colour, signage, and lights to deliver maximum visual impact, attract the eye, and draw attendees to you.
STEP THREE. There is no point in getting people to your exhibition stand if there's no incentive for them to talk to you once there. So, no matter how good your display looks, all your effort could go to waste if it's not a catalyst for conversations. So, we make sure that your stand not only looks fantastic, but that it also incentivises visitors to engage with your team.

About Apex

Apex is one of the UK’s leading event and exhibition agencies. A specialist supplier to the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries, we take the time to understand your communication goals. And, through creative exhibition stands, product launches, sales conferences, awards dinners, and PR events, help you to meet them.

Apex’s Exhibitions and Events teams have industry-specific knowledge and work in synergy with each other, and seamlessly with your other approved agencies. Apex works in all healthcare areas including ethical pharma, OTC and retail products, primary and secondary care communications, R&D and clinical trial events, nursing and NHS commissioning. Find out more about our work in this sector.

To find out more contact Apex today, or call on + 44 (0)1625 429370 to discuss your requirements in more depth.