見本市 さむらい

(Trade Show Samurai)

By,

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ROUGH DRAFT

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The following is a rough draft of **Trade Show Samurai: More Leads and Less Boondogle**

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Introduction

From time to time new techniques for handling old problems are developed that set a new standard for performance. Such techniques challenge age-old wisdom and are often surrounded by controversy and skepticism. Rarely are they well-received by all audiences, but eventually they work their ways into the mainstream and become the new conventional wisdom.

In the 1980's the Finnish Nordic skier Pauli Siitonen developed a skate-style ski technique that enabled him to win races. The new style was adopted by other competitive skiers and began to find its way into important races. At the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo nearly all the skiers used some form of the new style. The new style was so effective that it sparked controversy. At the Seefield's World Championships in 1985 they lined the course with plastic walls in an attempt to force competitors to use the traditional style of skiing. Today skate-style skiing is the accepted best practice for the sport.

Similarly, Olympic high-jumper Dick Fosbury, who was unable to compete using traditional techniques, develop a style of high-jumping by running diagonally towards the bar and jumping over with your back to the bar. The style quickly earned the nickname "the Fosbury Flop." His critics—and there were many—watched him take gold medals in the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City. Like Siitonen's skate-style skiing, the Fosbury Flop is now considered the proper technique.

Dr. C Hunter Shelden, a neurologist who noticed that people were getting their heads bashed in during car crashes, came up with the idea of installing retractable seatbelts. It took almost 20 years for them to become standard issue in automobiles and even longer for their use to be widely adopted. However, seatbelts have been proven to save lives more than any other piece of auto safety equipment.

Corporal punishment for children was once so widely accepted that even schools felt that it was okay to lay the smack down on an ill-mannered child. Today "Time-Outs" are the standard practice in spite of our nearly uncontrollable urge to unleash our fury on our children.

These stories all share similar characteristics. First, they seemed strange at first, but seem rather simple today. Next, they are met with controversy and criticism as people cling to the old methods that have been tried and true for so many years. And lastly, their impact was dramatic. So dramatic, in fact, that people familiar with the techniques would never dream of using the old techniques.

I believe the techniques in this book are as revolutionary as the Fosbury Flop. Unfortunately for me, however, generating leads at trade shows isn't an Olympic sport (yet). However, the Trade Show Samurai Arts will change the way you approach trade shows. Their effectiveness will put trade shows in a new light for you and your company and that light will make them a shining star in your overall sales strategy.

The Trade Show Samurai Arts are not complicated. Part of their beauty is their simplicity, and simplicity is why they are effective. However, knowing them isn't the same thing as being good at them.

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There are lots of parents who use the Time-Out technique with their children. However, there is a huge difference between an effective Time-Out and an ineffective Time-Out. If you have ever watched Supernanny you know what I mean. The show is filled with hapless parents trying desperately to tame their wild children using the "Naughty Chair". The technique often backfires as parents get overly emotional or skip critical steps in the process. A good Time-Out consists of a number of specific steps, body language and emotional states that must be followed consistently if it is to work. Skip a step and the whole process is for naught. Supernanny is constantly teaching, correcting and coaching until the parents get it right and transform their lives into unbridled familial harmony.

It's one thing to know how to do something; it's another thing to be good at it. Time-Outs work. However, if you suck at Time-Outs you will be back to beating your kids before you can say "Supernanny".

The Fosbury Flop works too. I know the Fosbury Flop, but I suck at it. I know how to skate on cross-country skis, but I suck at that too. Luckily I don't suck at putting on my seatbelt, but my father did and his inability to master that simple skill put him in the intensive care unit more than once in his life.

The Trade Show Samurai Arts are simple, I can teach them in less than a half hour and I often do teach them in less than a half hour in webinars. However, to master the skills you must understand why they are effective, follow them exactly, and practice.

The value that I impart as a Trade Show Samurai Sensei is not just the techniques, but the coaching, practice and encouragement that will make you a Trade Show Samurai. This book will show you how, even if I'm not there to show you the way. The impact on your life, at least the part of your life that exhibits at trade shows, will be nothing short of an Olympic Gold medal. Well, maybe a little short of that. But don't worry, we just need to figure out if trade show lead generation is a winter or a summer sport.

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The Wonderful World of Trade Shows

I remember the first trade show I ever attended. It was *Mac World* at the *Bayside Expo Center* in Boston. I was 14 years old and I was amazed at all the cool stuff. There were guys showing off their soupped-up Apple II computers that had been upgraded with as much as 50 kilobytes of RAM. I can still remember watching in fascination as dot-matrix printers printed detailed pictures of dragons in black ribbon ink. I'll never forget my introduction to the 3.5-inch floppy disk that held a whopping *1.4 megabytes of data*. I never dreamed that I would ever have files large enough to fill such media. It was nothing short of spectacular.

I attended other shows at the Bayside Expo Center. At the Dog Show I brought home beautifully-packaged cartons of Eukanuba dog food. Such premium products—for free! I carefully protected them from our dog lest he eat them and deprive me of their glory.

At the ski show I bought my first pair of skis. At the electronics show I salivated over car stereos. I brought home bags of samples, scores of tchotchkes, and dozens of brochures and catalogs. Exhibitors handed these items to me without hesitation in spite of the fact that I was clearly a child and the odds their respective companies receiving my patronage in the short or medium-term were slim.

In college I had a t-shirt company. I coordinated my visits home so I could stop at trade shows. One year I stopped in Memphis and attended a Screen-Printing Convention. It changed my life. I found new ideas, new suppliers and new business connections that allowed me to bypass the middlemen and increase my profits. I stopped at the Advertising Specialty Conference in St. Louis and had my eyes opened to the possibilities. Shortly thereafter I started selling the very tchochkes that I had grown to love. Little mirrors with company logos, squeeze balls, buttons and coffee mugs.

During graduate school I attended Direct Marketing conventions. I was a direct marketing student at Northwestern and I felt like the entire conference was designed specifically for me. I hung on every work uttered by the speakers, I spent time at every booth and again I collected reams of brochures and a back-aching bag fill with toys.

I once gained admission to the exclusive All Candy Expo at Navy Pier in Chicago. This show is a crown jewel of the trade show world. Every major confectionary and snack company passing out samples like crazy. I had more candy and junk food that I could stand. It was like the ultimate Halloween. I ate candy, I gave candy friends, I handed candy to strangers, I tossed candy in the trash.

The Midwinter Meeting in Chicago is the Dental Industry's Mecca. Wait in line long enough (over an hour) and receive a Sonicare electric toothbrush. That is, of course, if you are wearing the right badge that indicates that you are a dentist. After 20 minutes at the Midwinter Meeting you will be stocked up with enough tooth brushes, floss and toothpaste to last ten years.

Before long I was speaking at conferences. This was an honor. I spoke at technology and marketing conferences. I held sessions about Customer Relationship Management (CRM), direct marketing and I

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even did seminars about getting into colleges. It always felt great to be a speaker. It was like being some kind of insider. Like a mini-celebrity, the kind that people want to meet, but don't want an autograph.

Eventually, I found myself on the other side of the table. In addition to attending trade shows and speaking at them, my employment put me in a position to start actually exhibiting at trade shows. I participated or was put in charge of developing the trade show strategy.

My innocence was lost.

In all the frenzy of activity, I began to see a Dark Truth that began to taint the trade-show love affair I had enjoyed for so many years. The Dark Truth haunts me whenever I wander the halls of a trade show I attend. I attend a lot of shows. In the past six months alone I've attended or exhibited at ten shows- three of them were in China. All of them are cast in a pall of this Dark Truth. The Dark Truth is realization that in all their glory, trade shows are a *waste of money*.

In no other area of business have I witnessed such depths of irresponsibility enabled by utter ignorance. I've seen companies spend hundreds of thousands, and even millions of dollars on their exhibits. They build glorious temples that honor their products. Their staffs travel far and wide. They stay at beautiful hotels. They don logo-embroidered polos and khaki pants. They arm themselves with every manner of tchochkies to pass out, indiscriminately, to every passer-by. They stock the booth with ten-dollar glossy brochures— free for the taking by all show attendees, including competitors. They host lavish parties with headliner bands, they set-up in-booth cappuccino bars, they hire "booth-babes" who have no idea what they are doing. They hire Paris Hilton to sell craft supplies[1]. They construct giant indoor road tests for cars. They create drawings, raffles, contests and schemes to give away cash, products, vacations and gifts.

At doesn't stop there. After a long, hard, day of "working" the booth, the event staff goes off to indulge in personal luxuries including massages, expensive dinners, and a plethora of side-trips that include everything from amusement parks to fishing trips. Of course they must have room-service and of course they must spend top-dollar to buy forgotten items like power strips, photocopies and ball-point pens.

Trade shows are an uncontrolled orgy of reckless spending.

And to what end? After the union guys have packed your bags what does the business have to show for the expense? What is the return-on-investment? Usually nothing.

At the end of most trade shows most companies can't point to a single new customer. The justifications for the extravagance are all over the board, yet they rarely, if ever, include any concrete analysis showing new revenue generate against expenses incurred.

Sometimes there is a fishbowl of business cards. Sometimes the list from the badge-zapper[2] is passed off to the IT department so they will receive an email blast. These are weak justifications for such an

[1] Yep, this is true. I saw it with my own eyes.
[2] A Badge-Zapper is a scanner that captures company information from a barcode on an attendee's name badge.

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expenditure hemorrhage. Desperate for validation, the marketing and sales departments speak proudly of how "good" the booth looked or how many "good" things were said, or how they met with important clients.

The sad truth is that getting compliments rarely translate into revenue. The sad truth is they probably would have met with their good clients anyway; in fact, the really good clients often make purchase decisions *before* the show.

When sales and marketing is pressed for justification they often say things like "what would people think if we *didn't* participate at the show?"

"What *would* they think?" You might ask.

"Well," they say, "they'd be asking questions.

"Um, what kind of questions?" You inquire with genuine interest.

"The bad kind, hey did you catch that game last night?" they retort.

Whatever answers they give, they are good enough to talk themselves into repeating this annual ritual. Each year is more glamorous than the next, bigger booths, better products, bigger prizes, and fancier tchochkies. The cycle continues.

But let me stop myself there; before I get carried away on a rant that has no real purpose other than to criticize an otherwise remarkable industry and exciting marketing tactic. After all, this lack of accountability that I abhor is precisely the reason people keep coming back year after year. Lots of marketing decisions are made this way. Public Relations? Advertising? All are difficult to track.

However, people have an intuition about trade shows. They have a sense that they are valuable to the organization, and rightfully so, trade shows are a veritable gold mine. As much as I loathe seeing a wasteful show strategy, it breaks my heart to see a company decide against attending shows that have so much potential for them. The burden of an un-measurable expense becomes too real and companies' get frustrated with the ambiguity. I see it all the time. These companies don't need to quit the show. They need to build a strategy that works.

The Good News

For every company that exhibits at trade shows there is a show strategy that will work. No exceptions. If you have the resources to get yourself there in the first place there is a way to accelerate productivity beyond your wildest dreams. I mean it: *every* company, all of them, every last one. There is a strategy for all of them and I will teach it to you—right now!

Yes the Dark Truth is real. But I don't hold a grudge against the thousands of otherwise sensible and intelligent marketing and sales professionals who spew money into the industry each year.

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Exhibiting at trade shows is a deeply ingrained activity in many companies. They manage their entire year around the show dates. If the dates are moved up, panic ensues. If the dates are move back, there is an eerie calm and a false sense of relaxation.

Sales people look forward to the show. It is the one time they can see all their customers in one place and cut loose a little. Many of them have been attending the annual industry show for years. They catch up with friends, mingle with clients and check out the competition.

Trade shows can be an integral part of a company's culture and heritage. They are an annual milestone. They mark progress. They are a celebration.

The Path Ahead

So there's hope. Hope for you and your company that those fun and exciting trade shows can also be productive and profitable. Follow the instructions in this book and you are well on your way to what I call Trade Show Nirvana[3] that moment in time where everything in the booth is working like clockwork and leads are flowing in like Niagara Falls.

Unfortunately, the path to Trade Show Nirvana is a treacherous path. Trust me, I speak from experience.

Few business strategies are more difficult to change than a trade show strategy. Even branding is met with more appreciation. "You can change the logo, mister marketing guy, but don't cancel my banquet," they will murmur in the halls.

Cancelling the annual customer-appreciation dinner will not make you popular[4]. Asking the sales department to stay out of the booth is downright heresy. And the mere suggestion that you should stop passing out brochures and tchochtkes is enough to instigate a riot.

When it comes to trade shows people resist *everything*. They won't want to wear your silly uniforms; they'll insist that lead information can't be collected. They will criticize you for being too aggressive. They will snicker at your attention to detail. They will curse you behind your back when you ask them to refrain from eating in the booth. They will question your sanity when you remove all the chairs.

In spite of these challenges you must persevere. You must not falter, you must face the challenges. You must learn the ways.

You must become a Trade Show Samurai…

Trade Show Samurai

In the wake of September 11th I was the Vice President of Marketing at a company that provided financial data services. We were in the heart of the financial meltdown. Our consumer division had recently cancelled our IPO and was struggling. Our corporate customers were dropping like flies as the

[3] I realize that Nirvana is a Buddhist term and most Samurais were Shinto. But it is, after all, my book and I'll take liberties with world religions if I want to!
[4] I did that once…yikes!

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day-trading market all but ground to a halt. Marketing dollars were hard to come by. Nevertheless, in keeping with corporate tradition, we prepared for the annual Financial Market Data conference. It was the Securities Industry Association show—SIA.

I had participated in many shows, but this was the first time I was specifically charged with the task of developing the show strategy. I was determined to design a strategy that would eclipse the previous attempts and there were many. The company had been exhibiting at the conference for over *20 years*.

In most companies Marketing organizes the show and Sales staffs the booth. They often have a marketing person or two coordinating the installation and a PR representative on hand to entertain press inquiries. This was the way it had been at my company too.

I reviewed the results of the previous year. The budget was upwards of $350,000. Most of the money was spent on the hotel room tab alone. The company rented a hospitality suite and invited half the conference attendees to stock up on free booze and room service.

On the revenue side things were worse. Nobody could link a single dollar of revenue back to the show. There was no trace of single lead and none of the sales people could articulate the show's value. All of them enjoyed meeting their clients, going to parties, and living large in New York for a long weekend, however.

I had to ask the question that kept me up at night: why spend $350,000 when there are no concrete results?

People chimed in with things like "good will", "relationships" and the ever popular, "what would people think if we *weren't* at the show?[5]"

Taking a Step Back

I'm going to interrupt this undoubtedly fascinating personal anecdote to take a step back and look at the situation.

I'm a financial return-oriented person. I believe that marketing should always generate a positive return. So for someone like me, it is ever so tempting to pull the plug on an effort that clearly lacks a return-on-investment. The culture of the company was the only thing keeping this project alive, as is so often the case in companies that exhibit at trade shows.

In spite of the fact that millions of dollars spent over the years didn't produce a shred of evidence of actual value, did this trade show provide *potential* for a positive ROI? I believe the answer is yes! After all, the trade show was held in New York City, the epicenter of the financial world. The trade show's theme was financial data. There were thousands of attendees. All of these people have at least a modicum of interest in the topic. Many of them have a highly vested interest in the topic.

[5] This last question is the number one way people justify the show's cost.

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This was our business, our market and our prospects. Where else on the face of the earth does such a captive audience exist?

A trade show is a marketing marvel of the modern world. It does not have to be wasted. But so often it is.

The ROI of Christmas

Christmas is the biggest holiday of the year, at least commercially, in the United States[6]. If you're anything like me you spend far more than you planned for gifts, cards, parties, outings and food.

After Christmas, should I calculate my return on investment (ROI)? Should I add up the retail price of all the gifts I received and compare it to my total expenditures? Should I take into account the value of the shrimp I consumed? How much is a cookie worth? What if I don't like the cookies? What if my mom gives me socks? Should I discount the value if the item is now on sale? What if it's clearly a re-gift?

It is a silly question, isn't it? What kind of a jerk would track ROI on Christmas? If Christmas is your business that's one thing; but I'm a dad, a husband, a son, a co-worker, a friend, and a writer of short books.

The ROI of Christmas is measured in smiles and kisses and hugs. It's measured with pictures and pleasantries and pounds of body fat. It's measured with memories, tradition and family togetherness. Christmas is about warm fuzzies. Who cares how much it cost? It was worth it for the kids. We will try and be more frugal next year, we all say. Let's not worry about it now and enjoy ourselves.

The ROI of a Trade Shows is often measured the same way.

Trade Shows = Business Christmas

If Christmas[7] is the biggest event in our personal lives; trade shows may be the biggest event in our business lives. They are held in similar esteem and are measured in a similar way. I've found very few examples of a company that calculates an ROI on their trade show expenditures. Rather, they measure it like they measure Christmas:

"People really liked our booth."

"The party was a big hit; did you see the guys from Big Shot Company?"

"The caps we passed out were extremely popular, some people asked for extras to take home to their co-workers."

"It was really busy this year, much busier than last year."

[6] I'm using Christmas as an example because I celebrate it, not because I'm trying to alienate other faiths.
[7] Feel free to cross this out and substitute your own important holiday.

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"Can you believe we went through 1000 of those $10 brochures? We had to overnight another box of 500 for the last day!"

"People seemed really interested in our service; one guy even said it was better than Competitor, Inc!"

Comments like these are the equivalent of Christmas hugs and kisses. They are intangible "feel-goods" that prevent people from delving deeper into the potential the trade show has to offer.

Feel-Goods Feel Good

Going back to work after a trade-show high can be kind of a let-down. The management, marketing and sales people extend the high by telling tales from the trenches to all the customer service, operations, manufacturing, accounting, IT and other hapless souls who never get to go to a trade show. They sprinkle comments like those above into little anecdotes about the booth, the parties and the events. They are sure to mention how exhausted they are and how their feet were *killing* them so others in the organization will know that working the show was really hard and not at all fun. They will leave out details of their lobster dinner and the $150 appetizers[8].

The lore of a great show will eventually transcend the event itself and, armed with the fond memories, the team will have little trouble moving forward with the show the following year and the year after that and the year after that. Each year with bigger budget than the year before.

Bury Those Painful Feelings Deep Down Inside

Studies[9] have shown that depression is common during and right after Christmas, suicides are on the rise, family disagreements blossom when emotions run high. Who isn't at least a little let-down on January 2nd? Do the Holidays ever live up to the expectations we set for them in November?

We bury these negative feelings deep down inside so that we can free ourselves to look forward to next Christmas. *Next* Christmas will be the best Christmas *ever*!

Just as we bury the negative Christmas feeling under piles of sugarplums, we bury the negative trade show feeling under tales of success. We politely ignore the fact that we didn't really meet anyone new, we avoid being pinned-down on an actual number of new leads we generated and we shake off that nagging feeling that although time and money were spent, we really don't have much to show for it.

Now Back to Our Regularly Scheduled Program

So here I was, reviewing a $350,000 show budget from the year before. Our sales team was struggling. The Internet bubble was in full-burst, customers were going out of business left and right. The day trading market which was the company's Cash Cow was quickly becoming obsolete.

[8] Yes, I've seen people order $150 appetizers at trade show dinners.
[9] I'm not exactly sure which studies, but I sure have heard a lot about them.

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To make matters worse, we had recently introduced a new brand strategy that required the development of a new trade show booth.

With all this in mind I developed my strategy and drafted a budget for approval. I went to the CEO and presented my recommendation which included buying a new booth.

I presented my estimated budget: $50,000.

Heresy

When word got out that I had cut the show budget by 85% and promised extraordinary results there was an outrage. How could anybody in their right mind cut a budget so drastically, including the cost of a new booth, and expect to deliver any reasonable results? But, I didn't want reasonable results- I wanted *outstanding* results. My plan was to blow the doors off. My plan was to *kick some ass and take some names*.

I received all sorts of opposition, especially from high-ranking members of the sales team. At times the opposition was downright confrontational. One woman told me that because I was new to the industry there was simply *no way* I could understand how the sales cycle worked and that my plan for the trade show would never work.

When she reviewed the design for the new booth she actually *cried*. She cried to me, she cried to my team, she cried to her boss, she cried to my boss, she cried in front of anybody that would sit still long enough for her to generate some tears.

Among her concerns was that I had not incorporated any tables and chairs in the booth. My fear, which should also be *your* fear, is that people will use the tables and chairs to sit on their butts and drink coffee. My position, which should also be *your* position, is that there are plenty of tables and chairs in an exposition hall and if you want to sit on your butt and drink coffee you can easily find a place that is outside the booth.

She would have cried even more if she had known that I hadn't even put her on the list to attend the trade show in the first place.

Lucky for me, however, the company had taken such a financial hit over the past year that the CFO and the CEO were eager to approve such a low budget. Additionally, my boss, the SVP of Sales and Marketing, trusted me and also approved the budget and the plan.

In the end, I acquiesced to the table and inviting the crier to attend the show and staff the booth. And, while the rest of us were out there kicking ass, she sat on hers at the table reading her email and drinking coffee—just as I had suspected.

We came back from that show with over 700 qualifiable leads. We rank-ordered in terms of potential value and distributed them to the sales team and we did it all under budget.

I had become: *Trade Show Samurai*.

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In fact, most of the team that attended the show that year had become Trade Show Samurais.

Everyone that is, except for the crybaby.

Battle Scars

It was during that financial data trade show that I demonstrated my abilities and skills as a Trade Show Samurai. It would be a few more years and a couple of companies later before I would achieve *Trade Show Nirvana*. When I did, it was amazing.

I fought hard for my strategy and prevailed, but I thank my lucky stars every day that it actually worked. If it hadn't I probably would have been out of a job. It's tough to bounce back from a failure like that.

A good Trade Show Samurai will forge ahead in the face of adversity knowing that everything he or she does at a show will help improve productivity. However, now that I'm an older and wiser Trade Show Samurai I've learned when to back down.

As a Trade Show Samurai you must be prepared to fight and lose. As deeply ingrained trade shows are into a company's marketing strategy you are bound to run into a few unexpected landmines.

There are times where I have fought for a Samurai-style trade show strategy only to be defeated by others in the organization. I've had the benefit of serving at a senior-level throughout my career and I've nearly always had the ear of the CEO. You may not be in a position. That is one of the reasons I have written this book- to help you make your case to the rest of the company who may fear trade show change and resist attempts to alter the course of history.

If you lose battles buck-up. You will live to fight again and again for there is no end to the number of trade shows in the world and you will have your chance. You may not reach Nirvana, but even the road to Nirvana has glimpses of glory.

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I am Your Sensei

Over the years I have honed my skills at not only being a Trade Show Samurai, but also teaching others to master the art themselves. Even the most timid Samurai-in-training can achieve remarkable results with a little basic training.

Kicking Ass and Taking Names

If you learn nothing else from this book learn this: if you are staffing an exhibit at a trade show your job is simple, kick ass and take names. The more asses you kick, the more names you will get. The more names you get the more leads you will have for your sales team. The more leads you get for your sales team the more sales they will generate. The more sales your company generates the more money you will make.

Meet the Vice President of Sales

I recently visited a booth at the *Everything Organic Expo* in Chicago, Illinois. I approached a woman who was staffing a booth that sold some extremely tasty organic snacks (I had a few samples of the banana flavor). I asked if she had a few minutes to talk to me about her products for an article. She gave me a nervous smile and said, “I don’t know anything. There is a guy here who is in charge. He is in a meeting right now.”

“Um, okay,” I said, “when should I come back?”

“Oh, I’m not sure,” she replied, having no sense that what she is saying is completely ludicrous for someone in her position.

“What’s the guy’s name?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” she answered.

I left. Here was a beautiful ten by thirty foot trade show exhibit. It was stocked with delicious snacks, brochures and product samples. It cost thousands of dollars to buy the equipment, develop the materials, ship in the supplies, coordinate the travel and pay someone to staff the booth. In spite of all this they put in a completely ignorant person. She had no clue what she was doing, she didn’t even know the name of her co-worker.

But the story didn’t end there. I returned several times to speak with “the guy”.

The first time I stopped by he ignored me because he was talking on his cell phone. The second time I found him sitting in a chair, where he remained seated even after I introduced myself.

I asked him about the company and the products. He provided scant little information and basically told me to help myself to one of the brochures. Granted, I wasn’t wearing a “Buyer” badge, but I was wearing a Press Pass.

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Did I mention that he was the company's *vice president of sales*?

What is most shocking about this scenario is not that it happened; but that *it happens all the time*! It is crazy. I see this same scene play out over and over and over.

Getting Your Message Across

Getting someone to provide quality information about themselves or even buy a product at a trade show must happen in a very short window of time, well under five minutes.

If you've ever been in sales you understand, or at least you should understand "AIDA." *AIDA stands for Attention Interest Decision Action*. This is the backbone of any good sales strategy and it is the backbone of the Trade Show Samurai plan of attack. Here are the basic elements:

1. Attention- how to you get someone to stop in their tracks and give you their undivided attention?
2. Interest- how can you make sure you are delivering a clear, concise message that is of interest to them?
3. Decision- how can you make them decide that you are worth voting for, buying from, or speaking with?
4. Action- how can you get them to take action on their decision as soon as possible- preferably right now?

Learning the techniques for AIDA in this book will put you well on your way to Trade Show Nirvana.

I love trade shows. Over the past few years I've seen a lot of show shrink as businesses tighten their belts. I hate to see them pull back from such a wonderful and fun way to capture great leads.

I want you to become a Trade Show Samurai. I want you and your company to love trade shows for the right reason—that they are good ways to make oodles of money.

I will be your Sensei.

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Part One: The Skills

This is a book about how you can help your company turn trade shows from a mind-boggling waste of money into one of the single most productive marketing tactics they have ever known.

This book is *not* about organizing trade show exhibits. There are lots of books about that and there are lots of people around who are quite good at that. Getting a fancy trade show booth together, ordering some logo-shirts, coordinating travel, handling logistics and tipping union employees to go to the top of the delivery list are all fairly well-documented activities.

What is *not* very well-documented is what you are actually supposed to *do* at the trade show.

Ask yourself this: how much time have I spent *training* for how you should act in the booth *before* the actual day of the event? The answer is probably very little, if any at all.

If a company does any sort of training at all it's usually held in the morning on the first day of the show. They tell all the booth staff (usually the sales team) to meet an hour before the exhibit hall opens so they can go over a few "key messages" and go over some new products or how the spin-to-win game is going to work. Most people come late and miss part of it.

It's no wonder that trade shows are so ineffective for most companies.

At a trade show, magic happens on the show floor when diligent booth staffers properly engage prospects. They will ask questions that will determine whether there is a good fit between the prospects needs and what the business has to offer. Lastly, they will carefully record the needs of the prospect before sending the prospect on his or her merry way. Unfortunately, this doesn't really seem to happen very often.

More often, hours of organizing and thousands of dollars are for naught as the booth staff mill around their exhibits waiting to be showered with attention from eager buyers. They wait and wait. They drink coffee, chit-chat with one another and pass out tchochkies. Productivity is abysmal.

There is a better way. It is now time to learn the skills that will transform you and your fellow booth-staffers into a lead-generating machine, the likes of which have rarely been witnessed on the face of the earth.

The first step is to rethink what you know about trade shows.

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The Trade Show Samurai Perspective

In order to master the skills of a Trade Show Samurai you have to ask some very fundamental questions. For instance:

Why do people attend trade shows?

Most people will give an answer like "to see what's new, look for new vendors, get new ideas" and things along those lines. They are mostly right. After all, these are all great things. With this in mind exhibitors all show up hoping to capture some of the attendees' interest with a well-intentioned armory of tchotkies and $10 brochures. Or perhaps they want to lure them in with a game, a cappuccino bar, or girl with big tits. Again, all great things, lots of fun, and maybe, just maybe, the attendee will stick around long enough to hear your sales pitch.

And, while it may be true that an attendee is there to listen and learn and soak up all that is new and exciting in the industry; there is another, more fundamental, question:

Why does my company exhibit at trade shows?

Most people will give an answer like "to see what's new, look for new clients, get new ideas," and things along those lines. Take note that these are similar goals as the attendee. They are *learning* goals. Ultimately, like attendees, exhibitors want to learn.

However, nearly all trade show exhibits on the planet are designed to *teach*, not to learn.

This brings be to the essential *Trade Show Samurai Perspective*. You must adopt this point-of-view if you are to be successful:

The most important job of the Trade Show Samurai is to learn, not to teach.

Let me say it another way:

What you learn about the attendees is far *more important than what they learn about you.*

Looking at the show from this perspective, I hope, will be a real eye opener for you and your coworkers. It is a perspective that turns the game upside down.

At the end of the day, it is your job to learn just enough information about each and every attendee at the show so that you can pass them off as a qualifiable[10] lead to your sales department. At any given show there could be thousands of attendees. If you are at the right show a *huge* percent of them are very solid prospects. In fact, there are no other business situations where you have so many like-minded people in so little space.

There is only thing standing between you and all the leads you can handle: time.

[10] More later on what a qualifiable lead actually is.

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Know Thine Enemy

By concentrating on learning about attendees instead of teaching attendees you are actually doing them a favor in addition to yourself. Trade shows are a veritable sensory overload. It is nearly impossible to take it all in. At some of the larger shows most attendees are doing well if they can just walk every isle. Most of them are attending seminars as well so time is very limited. The more time they spend chewing the fat with you or your fellow booth staffers the less time they have to get around the show. You, as the expert in your business, can, with the right questions, determine if the attendee is a good fit. If so, there will be plenty of time to talk later with the sales department; if not, you can send them on their way. Either way, you are saving them, and you, precious time on the show floor.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make at a trade show is spending too much time with one attendee. Several years ago I visited the National Association of College Admission Counseling. Was helping to start a company in the industry and I found another company that was very interesting. I spent almost *two hours* in their booth. I spoke to their President, CEO, CTO and lead investor *in detail* about their company, how their software worked, who their customers were, and even their sales and marketing strategy. It was great. I got all kinds of great information, too bad that I was much more likely to be their competitor[11] than their customer. The question is, however, why on earth would they spend that much time with a potential competitor instead of talking to potential customers who were walking by us as we talked? I wasn't hiding anything. They knew I was a potential competitor. I guess they just liked talking to me.

There is something about a trade show that causes people to lose all logic and common sense. You should never spend that much time with anyone, let alone a potential competitor.

In order to capture super-samurai volumes of good leads you have to take advantage of every second at a trade show. There is no such thing as "long hours" on the trade show floor. I don't care how sore your feet are, the time is always too short. From the moment you set foot through the door the clock is ticking. For the Trade Show Samurais, this is a formidable enemy. Unless you are well trained it will crush you.

Trade show attendees will stream by your booth, sometimes steadily and sometime erratically, throughout the show. Every minute, every second you spend talking to one attendee is time away from others. You must engage and disengage with surgical precision.

Sometimes I hear people complain about "low traffic". Traffic is a time problem; it is not a numbers problem. There are still probably more attendees that you can handle, but low traffic wastes time. You will have to learn how to mitigate the damage caused by slow traffic. You will do this by being "always on." You will engage and disengage on the show floor, at breakfast, at the party, on the shuttle bus and even on the airplane. I once got my best lead at a show while I was waiting to get on my airplane after the show was over.

[11] My company didn't compete directly with them.

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The Year Round Trade Show

Some industries have what is essentially a year-round trade shows. The Merchandise Mart in Chicago, for instance, has lots of companies that wholesale retail products. Merchants visit the Merchandise Mart throughout the year to buy inventory, mostly house wares, I think. Shop owners in the Merchandise Mart have all sorts of time to engage their prospects.

Think about your industry. If the trade show was all year you would have a virtually endless supply of leads for your sales team. But most shows are only a few days. You have to kick some serious ass if you are going to maximize your productivity.

When you are kicking ass, you aren't kicking the attendees' asses, you are kicking *time's* ass. It is you against the clock, my Samurai friend.

The Trade Show Samurai Mindset

When you leave your house to travel to the trade show your race begins. *It's on*. Your job is to become a sponge that soaks up professional information from complete strangers. Once you have what you need you need to stop and move onto the next person. You will not be afforded the luxury of long conversations. If your objective is to generate leads then don't try to sell- however tempting. Your efforts will waste time.

You do not show product demos, you do not talk about the weather, you do not host silly putting games, you do not drink coffee, you do not take long breaks, and you do not talk to your co-workers. You stand, poised and ready to strike with your lead-gathering tools close at hand.

Keep this mindset in everything you do. Trade shows are a pressure-cooker of activity.

The Way of the Trade Show Samurai

I know what you are thinking: the mere *suggestion* that you should not be selling ever attendee that walks into your booth or showing product demos to every passer-by seems absolutely insane.

Throughout this book I will introduce concepts that may sound petty or illogical at first. This is because you may be looking at the concept from the perspective of a *typical* trade show exhibitor or a *typical* trade show attendee. The Trade Show Samurai is neither.

A Trade Show Samurai does not follow the beaten path to trade show mediocrity; they follow the unbeaten path to trade show extraordinaire.

For example, consider a small bowl of mini candy bars sitting on the counter of a trade show booth. I personally love mini candy bars and, as a trade show attendee, I even keep an eye out for them. When I see them I quietly make my way over to them and help myself being careful to avoid eye contact so I won't have to speak to the exhibitors. It's not that whatever their offering isn't of value to me, it's just that my goal is to get, and consume, a mini *Three Musketeer* bar and not to enter a long conversation. Based on my observations at trade shows I see that there are a lot of people who slip into booths just to

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grab a mini candy bar. My conclusion is that a bowl of mini candy bars gets high marks from the typical attendee.

Most exhibitors I like the small bowl of mini candy bars too. They can consume them freely throughout the day with little or no guilt because they figure their burning off the calories anyway. And, they see that mini candy bars are also an effective lure for attendees. Sometimes they can intercept an attendee as they are taking one. Sometimes the two of them can consume them together while discussing their favorite flavors. Based on my observations at trade shows, I see that there are a lot of exhibitors who enjoy having a bowl of mini candy bars. My conclusion is that a bowl of mini candy bars gets high marks from the *typical* exhibitor.

The typical, well-beaten path to trade show mediocrity is lined with small bowls of mini candy bars.

But this is not the way of the Trade Show Samurai. The Trade Show Samurai sees a small bowl of mini candy bars as an impediment to getting the job done. She sees it as disrespectful to herself and to attendees. First, it is a distraction. Second, it wastes time. Third, it creates a mess which must be cleaned up which is both a distraction and a time waster. Fourth, it is wholly unnecessary to the productivity of the trade show environment.

While a small bowl of mini candy bars may seem entirely appropriate and even beneficial to typical trade show attendees and exhibitors alike. It is a detrimental addition to the Samurai-style strategy and would never be allowed by a Trade Show Samurai[12].

As you consider your own Samurai-style don't use conventional wisdom, think like a Trade Show Samurai.

Samurai-Style Strategy Works

Several years ago I and a band of Trade Show Samurai experience *Trade Show Nirvana*. We had eight people staffing the booth and eight lead collection kiosks. In our case, we actually enrolled people in the free version of the software at the same time we collected lead information. We enrolled *thousands* of users. The only thing holding us back was the number of staff members we had. The next year the company set up *two* booths at the same show. We kicked ass and took names.

There were other booths around us that generate hardly any leads. They looked upon us with amazement. How did we get away with being so aggressive? How were we attracting so much traffic? We had no brochures, no product demos, no tables, no snacks, no chairs, and nary a bowl of mini candy bars to found.

The answer is that we were Trade Show Samurais and our Dojo was on fire!

[12] *The Battle of the Small Bowl of Mini Candy Bars* is often fought by Trade Show Samurais. Sadly, they sometimes lose this battle but survive to fight the greater fight.

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Honor Sales

Without sales, business is nothing. Sales are the point of all business activities. The Trade Show Samurai must honor sales and with it, the Sales department.

I believe that Sales is part of the overall Marketing function and the job of a marketing department is to not only generate sales leads, but also to push them as far down the sales process as possible before a human has to actually get involved. When marketing does their job, sales should be easy.

There are two possible objectives for a trade show. The first is to generate actual sales. The second is to generate qualifiable leads that can then be turned into actual sales by a professional sales person. You must decide, in advance, the objective of the show you are attending.

A Magazine with a Pulse

Magazines have articles and ads. So do trade shows. The exhibits are the ads and the seminars and sessions are the articles. In fact, they are so similar to magazines that magazine companies are often trade show organizers[13] as well.

You should expect to accomplish the same thing with a trade show as you might expect to accomplish with a magazine ad. The difference is that you can actually reach out and grab your "reader" by the throat if you want to.

So, if your company is the kind of company that makes products and services that can actually be sold through a magazine ad you should expect the objective of your trade show effort to me actual sales.

On the other hand, if your company makes products or services that require the assistance of a professional salesperson to make the sale, the objective of your trade show effort should be to generate qualifiable leads.

Not all trade shows actually allow you to make sales from your booth. The shows that do allow this have a large number of companies that sell products or services that can be sold more or less on impulse. For instance, the Midwinter Meeting for the dental industry has lots of companies that make toothbrushes or latex gloves or small toys for kids. These are the kinds of companies that could actually sell their products through a magazine ad. A dentist would see the ad and simply pick up the phone and place an order. Accordingly, there are lots of dentists who buy lots of toothbrushes, toys and gloves on the spot at the Midwinter Meeting.

Financial data services, on the other hand, are not impulse purchases and cannot easily be sold through a magazine ad. Like a good magazine ad, a good trade show strategy should motivate the reader/attendee to request more information from a sales person.

[13] Industry associations seem to be the primary organizers of trade shows, but they are often just glorified publishing companies.

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As a Trade Show Samurai, you must understand whether you are trying to drive leads or drive the on-site sale of products. It is your sworn duty to honor sales and let your actions be guided by the ultimate pursuit of sales

In most business-to-business trade shows lead generation is the primary objective, but the Trade Show Samurai can use his or her skills for either purpose. However, this book will assume that your Samuraic[14] duty is to generate leads that will then be distributed to the Sales department.

Qualifiable Leads

In order to properly honor the Sales department you must be respectful of their time. A salesperson should dedicate the majority of their time to high-potential prospects. This means it is your job to deliver a lead that can be cultivated into a sale as quickly as possible. For this you will need to deliver *qualifiable* leads.

Most of the time we use the term "qualifiable lead" to loosely imply that the person is in a position to buy your product or service. They need it or want it or have the money to pay for it or have to have it for some reason. In the Trade Show Samurai world "qualifiable" merely means that we are able to assess the potential importance of a lead- good or bad.

This is important because your ability to rank-order leads in order of relative importance is going to be appreciated by your sales team. It is much better to hand over a stack of leads with the best leads on top than to simply hand over a random stack of names and addresses.

A qualifiable lead includes contact information as well as a set of data that will help determine if the contact is a good prospect. Pretend you are a new manufacturer of gardening supplies, which of the following leads would you most like to have?

1. Joe Smith, 847-555-4543
2. Sally Jones, 847-555-8739
3. John Doe, 847-555-6847
4. Jane Doe, Palm, Inc., 847-555-5463

Were you able to pick one? Maybe you like working with women better than men so you picked someone with a woman-sounding name. Maybe you figure the one with the company name looks like a better deal. Or maybe you can't really tell. You can always call them all. This is fine if you have four leads, but what if you have 400?

None of these leads are qualifiable. Qualifiable leads have additional information that will help you prioritize them. Here are the same leads, only this time they are qualifiable:

1. Joe Smith, 847-555-4543, janitor at the conference center.

[14] I know this isn't a real word, I just thought it sounded funny. It's my book and I'll make up words for fun if I want to.

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2. Sally Jones, senior buyer for a national garden supply retailer. Looking for new product ideas, $5,000,000 annual budget. 847-555-8739
3. John Doe, lead groundskeeper for Cascade Country Club, 108 holes, ten full-time employees, unhappy with current supplier, 847-555-6847
4. Jane Doe, Palm, Inc, owner of a landscaping company in your town, two employees, 847-555-8739

These are qualifiable leads. Now which one do you want to call first?

You can clearly see that a qualifiable lead is more valuable than one that is not qualifiable. Most of the time if a trade show exhibitor gets any leads at all they come in the form of a stack of business cards. A business card is not a qualifiable lead. Let me repeat that, a business card is *not* a qualifiable lead.

I don't care how many business cards you collect- they are worthless. To pass off a business card to a member of the Sales department is tacky and disrespectful. People do it all the time, and while it may feel like you are doing them a favor, you are actually creating a lot of busywork that could lead nowhere.

The same goes for show mailing lists, directories and (gasp) contest entries. If all I have is a person's name, title, company name, address, phone number and email address I have nothing. I need to add qualifying information.

A qualifiable lead, on the other hand, will allow the salesperson to rank-order his or her list of trade show leads by sales potential. Then, starting with the top of the list, they can start their daily calls. If you have done your job right your Sales team will have the most success with names at the top of the list and the least success with the names at the bottom. This doesn't mean that it isn't impossible to find the gem in the stack of business cards, but finding needles in a haystack is not the best use of a salesperson's time.

The problem with trade show leads is rarely quality, it is quantity. That's why it's important to be a Trade Show Samurai, only a Trade Show Samurai can maximize the quantity of leads from a trade show. With a booth full of Trade Show Samurais there is no other marketing tactic that can produce the quality and quantity of leads for the same price. And, while it's true I haven't conducted a scientifically valid study to prove this I would love to have the chance. I'll take the Pespi-challenge with another method any time. Trade Show Samurais are the most effective trade show lead-getters hands-down.

Not all trade show leads are great sales leads, but a good salesperson will unearth some gems at the bottom of the list. While it is their job to decide how to prioritize their own time, you do need to give them enough information to make good decisions. The faster they can act on a lead, the more revenue you will generate. Remember, as a Trade Show Samurai you are to honor sales and honor the Sales department. You will generate lots of leads at a trade show, make sure they are qualifiable. Do not disrespect the Sales person's time.

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The Art of Engagement

One of the most important and difficult skills a Trade Show Samurai can learn is how to properly engage a trade show attendee. It is the *Attention* part of AIDA. Properly engaging an attendee is to secure their attention. Keeping their attention will depend on your ability to generate interest. Getting their attention will depend on your ability to engage.

I visit trade shows all the time. Sometimes just for fun. I request a press pass (I write for some publications and well as my own) and wander the halls to see if I can catch somebody doing it right. It rarely happens. People simply don't know how to engage. No skill is more important. Everything at the show, all the time, money and travel is a total waste if you and your staff can't engage attendees.

People, even talented salespeople have a natural fear of others. Introducing yourself, cold turkey to a complete stranger is not a skill in which people get much practice. Couple this with the fear of being rejected and you have a recipe for underperformance.

The key to mastering the art of engagement is to: one, have a plan and two, practice like crazy.

The plan is simple. You must position yourself properly in the booth, make the right kind of eye contact, and have an opener that works for you.

The Trade Show Samurai Stance

Trade show rules often prohibit exhibitors from soliciting attendees outside the booth. I've learned this the hard way. A good Trade Show Samurai will make the rules, whatever they may be, work in their favor. Don't be afraid to bend a few rules. Get the lead, but don't get kicked out.

The proper stance is to face the flow of traffic with one foot on the booth carpet and one foot in the isle. You should never, ever have anything in between you and the attendee. You will need a wide open-space in which to maneuver. Attendees, who are just as unaccustomed to meeting strangers as you, will naturally try to avoid you. If they start moving away from you, you should be able to casually reposition yourself to intercept.

Keep your hands out of your pockets. Many Trade Show Samurais carry a clipboard or other information-gathering tools in their left hand. A clipboard with paper and pen are important tools even if you have a lead kiosk—more later on this.

Your right hand should be ready for shaking an attendee's hand. If you have sweaty palms you will need find a way to dry them off as much as possible. Try discretely rubbing them against your pant leg. Avoid the clammy handshake.

Choose your mark—find someone in the crowd that you want to speak with. If it's a hot girl go for it, if it's a friendly-looking grandpa-type, go for it. I don't care who it is, but pick them out fast and don't let too many others pass you by. Your job is to speak to every last person at the show so you will eventually talk to the less appealing folks but you will be ready after a few hours of picking the low-hanging fruit.

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Most trade show badges are color-coded to indicate the buying role the person has. Blue might be a buyer, green might be a member of the press, red might be a consultant. Once you get your rhythm going you can eyeball the badges to pick the best prospects but in the beginning choose people who look like the kind of people you can relate to.

Once you have chosen your mark, engage using the ten/five rule.

The Ten/Five Rule

Several years ago a friend of mine, Chris Ruffin, was working as the head of quality at the Long Beach Marriott in California. He taught me a very good rule called the ten/five rule that works very well. It is designed to help hotel staff members be respectful of guests, but it works great for engaging trade show attendees as well.

The rule is that you acknowledge someone when they are *ten* feet away from you and speak when they are *five* feet away from you. If you acknowledge them too soon you have an awkward silence before they are close enough to speak to. If you acknowledge too late you look like you are trying to avoid them but can't. Likewise, if you speak too soon you will be shouting, speak too late and you will startle the other person.

Ten/Five strikes the perfect balance.

When you see the attendee approaching the booth, or at least walking in the general direction of your booth, make *gentle* eye contact, smile and give them a little nod. This little gesture breaks the ice and prepares the person to listen to your next comment.

It is important to smile. I cannot stress this enough. Smile, smile, smile, smile, smile, smile, smile. Always smile. Smiles are the primary weapon the Trade Show Samurai has. Smiles are a weapon to fight time. Things will happen much faster if your smile. I promise.

Now, keep your gentle eye-contact for the next five feet and then speak. It will only take a second for the person to walk five feet into speaking range. Hold the eye contact for your first phrase and then shift your eyes away. Don't stare. Look at their badge and learn their name but, beware, don't assume the name on the badge is their name, they may have borrowed it from someone. Also, avoid calling them by name until you they have introduced themselves. It's creepy.

What to Say

The first thing you say to the attendee will have more impact on your success than anything else. Say the wrong thing and the attendee is gone faster than you can say "buh-bye." Say the right thing and you will be able to slip neatly into the interest-generating phase of AIDA. Say the wrong thing and watch your prospect walk on by as a hot wash of embarrassment enshrouds your body.

What you, the Trade Show Samurai, will say is 90% pre-meditated. You are speaking from a script that you wrote in advance and then rehearsed, rewrote, and re-rehearsed.

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Your script will allow you to engage, gather information, and then disengage before the prospect knows what hit them. This is not a time to get to know anyone. You will not be shooting the breeze with the prospect. You will be capturing the information your sales force will need when they follow-up. Your conversation with them is known as the *Battle of Bonsai*.

The Battle of Bonsai

Remember, your enemy is time. You must get to the point of the conversation quickly if you are to succeed. The Battle of the Bosai uses a direct, premeditated line of questioning that will allow you to "bucket" your prospect into the right category in the first few seconds. It's called "Bonsai" because I'm trying to keep with the quasi-Japanese theme and I needed a word that implied that your questions use a branching technique like a little tree (get it?) The correct number of questions to ask is the number that is high enough to provide the information you need to move into your interest-generating pitch and low enough not to turn them off. Asking a long series of probing questions can be off-putting.

The Battle of Bonsai is a battle against time. To battle time Bonsai-style ask an introductory question and then base the next question on the answer to the first and so on until you have the information you need. This branching technique will get you where you want to be in just a few simple questions.

Most of the time trade show attendees will fall into a few main categories. Sometimes the categories are "buyers" and "sellers". For instance, if you attend the *All Candy Expo* you will find that most, not all, of the exhibitors are candy manufacturers. Attendees, therefore, are people who buy from candy manufacturers (like a candy shop owner) and those who sell ingredients to candy manufacturers (like sugar farmers). Sometimes the categories are below you in the sales channel. At a motor home trade show you might find motor home dealers and motor home consumers. At a dental show you might find dentists or hygienists. For whatever reason, there are always two or three dominate types of people. You can and will use this to your advantage.

You will also find competitors, members of the press, and trade show junkies (like myself) who have no real value to you. You will need to prepare a message for each type and commit it to memory. In some cases your message will be designed to capture the interest of the attendee, in other cases it will be designed to disengage the attendee so you can move onto the next. I'll cover that process in more detail later. For now you are going to battle Bonsai-style.

You will be armed with a lead card and/or some other type of lead-collection tool. All the answers you hear will allow you to either check a box on the card or jot down a quick note.

The first question I like to ask is whether or not they have already spoken to anyone at my booth yet. Samurai-style trade show strategies will capture a very large percentage of the overall number of attendees. It is not uncommon to speak with people that have already been reached. This even happens at different shows. I was once with a company that implemented a Nirvana-like strategy at national and regional shows. We eventually captured nearly every major player in the industry so we would often be speaking with people that we had already talked to. When this happens you will have to disengage as soon as possible so you won't waste time. If we haven't already reached them I like to ask something

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that will let me know what kind of relationship my company has with them. For instance, let's say I run a web site that provides services to college students and admissions departments called CollegePeas.com. Here is how the conversation might go:

Have you registered with CollegePeas.com yet?

This is a good opening question, but it carries certain risks. It's good because it will tell you if the prospect is worth spending more time with and it is the kind of question that will force the person to lie if they are trying to avoid you. If they answer "Yes" and they are lying they may be afraid you might look them up and call their bluff. This is a somewhat risky question because any question with a yes or no answer is a "closed-ended" question meaning that once they answer the conversation is closed unless you can immediately reengage. You have about two seconds to get them interested. If you blow it (and you will from time to time) you may not get another chance with that attendee. But don't sweat it, there are plenty more where that came from!

Closed-ended questions help a Trade Show Samurai get to the point quickly. Salespeople are often trained to ask probing, open-ended questions so they can learn more about a prospect and better understand their interests. Trade Show Samurais need to move quicker, they don't have time for too many open-ended questions.

If you ask a closed-ended question you must immediately reengage.

My next question is the next branch of the Bonsai tree. I asked it *regardless* of their answer to the first question although I record either answer.

Are you with a high school or a college?

In this example I take advantage of the two or three-category concept. This question gets them talking about themselves beyond a yes or no answer. If they are one or the other they will tell you. If they are something else they will tell you as well. Sometimes you can tell from the color of their badge what category they fall into and you won't have to ask, you can just say something like, "it looks like you are an admissions counselor- right?" Always confirm, never assume.

Getting critical information like this will help me understand which pitch to deliver. I will have memorized a few different pitches. If I gave the same pitch to everyone I would lose a lot of interest.

My next question will give me information with regard to how much information I need to provide during my pitch.

Have you heard of CollegePeas.com?

This is another closed question which is fine. I don't want an open question because I want to solidify interest in the product. Too many open questions are bad. I'm checking boxes on my lead card. I want to avoid taking too many notes.

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This kind of questioning is often hard for a salesperson. They ask open questions and want to delve deeper and build a rapport. This is not necessary at this point in the game. There will be time for that later when you pass the lead onto sales and they follow-up.

Drawing Them In

Once they answer this third question I have neatly secured their interest. They are now standing near me and my data-collection kiosk because I have drawn them into the booth. At first, I held engagement stance with one foot in and one foot out long enough for them to get within a few feet. As they took a step towards me I *stepped back* into the booth. They step forward, I step back, they step forward, I step back. The key is to give them room to get off the isle and in your booth. This is important because it's awkward to talk to someone standing in the isle. Lead-capture kiosks are near the edge of the booth and evenly distributed so I'm close to one and I can start transferring their information into the computer.

I'm ready to deliver my pitch to secure their interest.

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The Art of Intrigue

Once you have properly engaged the attendee and captured their attention, you are now in the home stretch. Your chances of obtaining a qualifiable lead are very high. But first, they must be intrigued. Practicing the Art of Intrigue will allow you to draw in the attendee so that they understand the value your company has to offer. You are opening their eyes to possibilities they never thought possible.

The Pitch

You will be intriguing as long as you follow a structured routine and give a good, pre-rehearsed pitch. The two or three questions during the *Battle of Bonsai* will have supplied you with the information to pick the right pitch. For instance, if I find out the prospect is a counselor I can use my counselor pitch. If I find out they are from a college I can use my college pitch. If I find out they are a member of the press I can use my press pitch[15].

A pitch is a 20-30 second description of your business that is designed to provide just enough information to generate enough interest in your prospect that they want to learn more.

For instance, let's use the previous example of my company College Peas. I engaged the attendee and found out that they are a guidance counselor. Here is my pitch:

> *CollegePeas.com is a new service that helps students learn about unique college opportunities that they may never have known otherwise. The service is simple: students complete a profile on our site and our consultants match them with real college opportunities for which they are eligible based on their academic achievement, extracurricular activities and internets. If the student is interested in learning more we will share their contact information and profile details with the college. If they are not interested we will keep their profile private. We do not rent or sell lists of student names.*
>
> *If you register as a guidance counselor you will be able to monitor the activity of your students who use College Peas, see what colleges are interested in them and provide more specific guidance.*
>
> *The service is free to students, free to high schools & guidance counselors.*
>
> *I can get you started right now by registering you and setting up a free account. When you get back to your office your counselor kit will be waiting for you.*
>
> *May I have your first and last name please…?*

That's a good pitch. It is short and to the point. It touches on some important points that are important to counselors such as student-controlled privacy, it's free and the counselor has the ability to monitor. It also promises a free counselor kit. This carefully designed pitch will capture 70%-80% of counselors without further questions.

[15] See the Art of Disengagement

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If they do ask further questions you will have pre-rehearsed answers to provide. For instance if the counselor asks, "how do you make money?" I will answer:

> *We are an advertiser-supported site. Like many sites we charge certain pre-screened advertisers to put their messages in front of the student.*
>
> **pause**
>
> *I can register you right now, it only takes a minute and you will receive some more information for you and your students in the mail including a "Behind-the-Scenes" Admissions DVD that helps students understand what happens to their application once it is submitted.*

Boom- question answered as briefly as possible and the counselor is redirected back to the registration process with a little more detail about what they will receive.

You and your team will need to anticipate all possible questions and prepare answers in advance.

Let's say the attendee indicated that they were a college instead. Here is how a pitch for the same company, College Peas, would sound for them:

> *College Peas helps students learn about unique college opportunities that they may never have known about otherwise. We work with colleges like you to identify unique educational opportunities on your campus and the types of students you are trying to attract. We will find the students you want and tell them about your college. If they want to learn more we will share their contact and profile information with you.*
>
> *I can get you started right now. It only takes a few minutes.*

This pitch is even better. It is shorter and even more succinct. Again, it focuses on points relevant to the attendee like the fact that College Peas will work with them to identify students.

Let's see how a typical question might be addressed such as *"Interesting, but I need to talk to our dean of admissions before I can sign up for anything."* A question like this indicates that you are not talking to a decision maker. This is your chance to obtain the decision-maker's name so you can give it to sales. You say this:

> *No problem. Let me take their name and a few notes and I'll follow-up with them directly with some more information.*

You just improved the quality of the lead by including the name of the person who is in charge.

Here is another example. This time we are talking about that financial data feed company that I used to work for. We'll call them *SuperFeed Technologies.* The attendee has been engaged and we find out that they are the technical person in charge of the trading desk applications. Here is the pitch:

> *SuperFeed Technologies provides a real-time data feed of all major securities markets. We use a proprietary compression technology that enables a 10:1 compression with no loss of data. No*

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> *other company can do this. This means that even during peak trading volumes your traders will still receive 100% of the data. All other companies drop lower-volume security data at peak times which leaves your traders flying blind.*
>
> *We offer a number of service levels based on your firms needs. How many traders does your company support?*

This is another good pitch. It is fast, to the point and it moves right into a line of questioning that will provide valuable qualifying information.

Pitch Discipline

Being a Trade Show Samurai requires discipline. Your company may have four or more completely different pitches depending on the show's audience. Your entire team must memorize all of them word-for-word including the answers to the questions.

I cannot stress this enough. Everyone who will be in the booth must memorize by heart every single word. I don't care how long it takes, you have to memorize it.

You will also practice and rehearse your pitch for many hours. This will help you hone it to the point where you are comfortable saying it and it will make sense.

The hard part is getting the attendee's attention, from there it will be smooth-sailing as long as you have a good pitch. The lead is yours to lose. Don't take any chances.

Just to reiterate: *memorize* your pitch.

One reason for memorizing your pitch is to ensure that everyone is delivering the same message. If the message isn't working you can all get together at the end of the first day and discuss potential problems. If there are consistent questions you didn't expect you may have to incorporate the information into the pitch. Then you can all skip dinner, go to your room and memorize the new pitch.

Don't Get Into It

If your pitch is right you can avoid "getting into it" with prospects. Getting into the details of your business is *murder* for the Trade Show Samurai. In-depth discussions with attendees are major time wasters. The more information you provide the less likely you will be able to capture a qualifiable lead. Leave the details to the sales department. It is not your job to discuss the company. You are practicing the Art of Intrigue, you want to arouse curiosity, not satiate it.

Conversations at trade shows can easily go off on tangents. The Trade Show Samurai is doing battle with time and understands that he or she is in serious jeopardy of losing the battle if they lose focus.

You may find someone who is really excited about your company and really wants to know more. If that is the case you have found a very good lead. Say something like this:

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> *I can tell you have a lot of good questions and that you are eager to move forward. Joe Blank is our top sales contact for your region. He is somewhere here at the show. If you give me your cell phone number I'll ask him to call you when he gets back to the booth. If you can't connect here I'll put your information in front of him first thing Monday morning. How do you spell your last name?*

Done. Move on to the next attendee.

Why Salespeople Usually Aren't Trade Show Samurais

I often find that the Trade Show Samuari-style is off putting to professional sales people who prefer to spend more time with show prospects. They like to have meetings, connect with their peers and do non-Samurai-like activities. These things are all fine, but they do not wage a good war on time. It is for this reason that I am usually reluctant for a sales person to become a member of the trade show booth staff. I would rather they met somewhere outside the booth.

When I'm running the show I only allow trained Trade Show Samurais to work the booth. If a salesperson is willing to learn the way of the Trade Show Samurai I am willing to include them. Unfortunately, this is not common. Even a salesperson with good intentions rarely has the time to invest in the training and rehearsal. I always recommend they stay behind and be prepared to start following-up on leads. It's good to have a few of them on hand to meet with large clients or to accept referrals of really eager prospects.

This isn't a knock against salespeople. It is simply recognition of a difference in style that can cause problems for a Samurai-style show strategy.

The Purpose of the Pitch

I said earlier that what you learn about attendees is far more important than what they learn about you. If that is true, you might ask, then why do I make a big deal about the pitch? The answer is that you must convince the attendee that your company offers sufficient value as to be worth sharing some professional (as opposed to personal) information. During your pitch the attendee is making up their mind whether to keep talking to you or to walk away. The good news is that if you pitch your pitch as you rehearsed your chances of getting all the information you need is pretty much guaranteed.

Rarely have I had an attendee say "no" after I delivered a good pitch. This does happen, but it's probably more like one out of five hundred attempts. You are far more likely to lose an attendee's during the first few seconds of engagement. They will ignore you, avoid you, insult you or lie to you. Engaging an attendee is the hardest part.

Decision

AIDA. You have their attention; you have generated their interest now they will decide to "register" with you. I like using the word register because it sounds official, almost like an honor. It's a good word. I always say, "let me register you and we can send you our information kit." Kit is a good word to. It's

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almost as if you are offering to send them a cool toy or something. Use these words to close the deal. If you find that “register” doesn’t work, pick another word or phrase like “let me hook you up with an information kit,” or something like that.

Like I said, after you get their attention they are yours. You rarely lose someone during the pitch. People generally have the social wherewithal to allow you to finish what you are saying. Where you will lose them is when they are making up their mind. Some will be on the fence, they may be suspect because your pitch was too smooth (which is okay). They will ask questions.

A funny thing happens during the question and answer part of the conversation. It’s best if they don’t ask questions at all. If they do ask questions your chances of getting more information, or registering them, diminishes. Chances get worse with every question to a point, then they start to improve. So, a few questions is bad, a lot of questions is good. However, if you are answering a lot of questions, even if you are doing a good job, you are losing your battle against time. You are getting into it with the attendee and you need to cut bait.

If an attendee can’t make up their mind whether to register with your company you need to quickly disengage. We will cover this in more detail later. For now, keep in mind that memorizing the pitch and any associated Q&A will help secure the decision to move forward by the attendee. Discipline is everything. Stick to the script and you will succeed.

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The Art of Interrogation

As I mentioned before, a qualifiable lead is one that has enough information so that it can be rank-ordered in terms of potential value to the firm. So, in addition to basic contact information, you must ask a series of questions that will allow you to assign a relative value to the individual.

It is not uncommon for a trade show exhibitor to come home from a show with a pocket full of business cards and think of them as leads. They are not. Business cards are worthless because they aren't qualifiable. While it's true that you may be able to sift through them later and look for chicken-scratch on the backs of them for the purposes of the Trade Show Samurai they are total junk.

A business card is merely contact information. It is virtually impossible to assign a value to a business card. I guess if you were intimately familiar with every known company in the industry you could thumb through them and make some educated guesses. But this is very time consuming and the Trade Show Samurai's arch enemy is time.

Business cards do have a role at a trade show because they can save time during the collection of contact information. But, unless they are accompanied by a completed lead card I recommend you throw them all away. Later, I will show you the business card's other role in the *Art of Disengagement*.

What to Ask

When you interrogate, you must ask questions that will allow you to assign a relative value to the lead in terms of future revenue potential. In other words, you want to be able to later qualify the lead as super hot, ice cold, or something in between.

When you first set out to engage the attendee you used the Battle of the Bonsai method and asked a series of short questions. This is actually the beginning of the interrogation process and you have already begun to collect information that will allow you to assign a value.

In the College Peas example the first question asked was, "are you with a high school or a college?" The answer to this question helps determine the potential value of the lead. In this example the company, College Peas, might want to sell advertising services to colleges, but not to high schools. Therefore, anyone who says they are with a college is a more valuable lead. It would be wise to let the sales staff know about this important piece of information.

Trade Show Samurais typically collect hundreds, if not thousands[16] of leads at a trade show. In the College Peas example you will most certainly have more than one person who says they are from a college. Therefore, you must ask additional questions that will help you better understand the potential value.

There are a number of qualities about a college that will help you determine the its relative potential. For instance the size of the college could be a factor as well as its status as a public, private or

[16] Yes, it is possible to college thousands of qualifiable leads at one show.

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proprietary[17] college could also be a factor. The title of the attendee could be important; an admissions counselor has less decision-making power than the dean of admissions, for instance.

Let's say that College Peas is an online marketing service. It would be important to know if the college is currently using online marketing.

In some cases you can ask about existing solutions. Do they work with one of your competitors, for instance?

Some answers will increase their relative value and others will decrease their relative value. Don't make any judgments for now.

The Dream Lead

The enemy, time, is always advancing. The Trade Show Samurai must move quickly. You will need to concentrate on four to eight essential questions.

It is important to work closely with sales to get this right. Speak to them about the company's top customers and work with them to understand the reoccurring characteristics or behavioral patterns the customers share.

In the College Peas example, the ideal customer may be a private college with a student body of between 5,000 and 10,000 students located in a rural setting with a liberal arts focus and a secular heritage. If this is the case then the "Dream Lead" would be from a private, not-for-profit college with a student body of between 5,000 and 10,000 students located in a rural setting with a liberal arts focus and a secular heritage. Capiche?

In order to capture the Dream Lead you will need to ask the following questions:

1. Are you from a high school or a college?
2. Are you public or private?
3. (if private) Are you a non-profit college?
4. How many students attend your college?
5. Where are you located?
6. What is your college's primary educational focus?
7. Are you a religious or secular college?

This is *plenty* of questions to ask and plenty to cover a wide range of possible relative values. The key here is to get them in the big buckets handled and worry less about the details.

[17] A proprietary college is one that operates on a for-profit basis, like DeVry, for instance.

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Keep an Open Mind

Everything goes here. I've worked for companies where men were better prospects that women and in companies where women were better prospects than men. Is it sexist to rank a woman higher than a man when it comes to potential value? Maybe, but who cares? You are a Trade Show Samurai, you honor sales and sales alone. Give them what they need to be successful.

Check the Box

Notice that all of the questions in the above example are "check the box" questions in that they are relatively short answer or yes/no questions. Some of the questions are phrased as "or" questions with two answers even though there may be others. For instance, question seven asks if they are a religious or secular college. The college could be a military college. If so, the attendee will tell you even though you didn't mention it. This subtle point is important and will be covered in more detail in the chapter about data collection. The reason the Trade Show Samurai asks questions in this format is because it is fast. Listing out all possible answers is slow.

If you have ever done a telephone survey you will know what I mean. You get questions like this:

> *This question deals with the size of your student body. Answer "A" if your student body is "very small" with fewer than 1,000 students. Answer "B" if your student body is "small" with between 1,001 and 5,000 students. Answer "C" if your student body is "medium" with between 5,001 and 10,000 students. Answer "D" if your student body is "large" with between 10,000 and 20,000 students. Answer "E" if your student body is "very large" with over 20,000 students.*

That is the long way of asking "How many students attend your college?" On your lead card you can check the corresponding box.

All questions should have a list of possible answers that the Trade Show Samurai can simply check-off. Open-ended questions take more time and generate a lot of notes which are difficult to manage. Avoid them wherever possible. Use notes, but only use them when absolutely necessary.

Hank, Will and Carl

During each conversation with each attendee you will get a "feel" for whether they are a serious prospect or not. Even a potential Dream Lead can send signals that they won't be a good customer and even a potentially bad lead could show signs of great interest.

You will need to capture this feeling with your friends Hank, Will and Carl. Hank, Will and Carl are codenames for Hot, Warm and Cold. Use these names, or names like it, when you record your lead data. If someone is looking over your shoulder they may be offended if you mark them Hot, or wonder why you marked them Cold, or disagree with your indication that they are only Warm. This kind of discussion is a huge time waster. If they ask about Hank, Will and Carl you can just say they are guys in sales that might handle your lead.

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Time Bandits

Hank, Will and Carl is a tool that can help you, the Trade Show Samurai, battle time. The conversations that Hank, Will and Carl help you avoid are Time Bandits that wait to steal time from you. They are devastating to your productivity.

There are many Time Bandits. They are little conversation or tasks that keep you from being productive. They are a misplaced pen, or a missing lead card. They are a tangent conversation or a chatty, but worthless, attendee. You must fight them.

Here is why Time Bandits are so destructive. Let's say you and your fellow Trade Show Samurais spend about 1 minute responding to worthless questions every time you talk to someone. Trade Show Samurais are speaking with 1,000 attendees over a three-day period you will waste 1,000 minutes or over *16 hours* of time. In this same time period you could have spoken to 200 other attendees increasing your productivity by 20%.

Never underestimate the damage of Time Bandits. Look out for them. They are small, seemingly insignificant and easy to over look.

Total Time Bandits

In many cases the Time Bandit will be an attendee that has no potential value to your sales team. While most of the people visiting your booth will be potential customers, there are many that will *never* be a potential customer. These people include competitors, other exhibitors, and members of the press. You will need a plan to disengage these people quickly and quietly.

These people are Time Bandits not because they aren't sometimes important, but because they don't make good sales leads. Members of the press, for instance, could be very valuable contacts indeed, but if you are a Trade Show Samurai in the heat of battle you will have little time to speak with them. You will have to politely disengage by either passing them off to the designated *Press Ninja* or schedule a time when they can meet with the Press Ninja later. More on Ninjas later.

When Good Prospects Turn Bad

Sometimes a good prospect will turn into a Time Bandit after they have given you the lead details. They like you now and want to chat. You intrigued them and they want to chat. The like your shirt and they want to chat. They, for whatever reason, want to chat, chat, chat, chat, chat! Noooooooo! You must disengage!

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The Art of Disengagement

Just as you needed a strategy for engaging attendees, you also need a strategy to *dis*engage an attendee. The Art of Disengagement is an important one. Poorly done, you can offend an attendee and jeopardize the later sale.

There are two circumstances under which you will want to disengage the attendee. The first is after you have collected the qualifiable lead information and the second is when you recognize them as a Time Bandits.

In the first scenario the attendee will be fulfilled having gone through all the necessary steps. You have engaged them, interested them and motivated them to divulge some professional information that will lead to a prosperous future. They are happy that they can move on knowing that you will follow up with them later. It's one less thing they have to worry about. Disengaging an attendee after interrogation is respectful of their time and yours. Standing around chit-chatting about the weather or the party the night before is wasteful and disrespectful.

In the second scenario you will be cutting off someone who may have many questions. This is more difficult. Cut them off too abruptly and you will get a bad reputation. Talk with them too long and you will not only waste time, but also risk divulging information you shouldn't.

The Trade Show Samurai has a special weapon; it is a tool that neatly marks the end of a conversation. Wield it wisely. It's called "crap."

The Tao of Crap

Anything that an exhibitor brings to a trade show with the intent of passing out to attendees, with the exception of product samples, is crap.

This includes brochures, business cards, posters, caps, t-shirts, pens with crazy hairdos, flashing buttons, squeeze balls, DVDs, CD ROMs, press kits, candy bars, post-it notes and any other sort of thcochkie under the sun.

Most companies bring these things with the expectation that they will be used to attract or engage attendees. That is why it is so easy to walk out of a trade show with a bag full of toys to take to your kids without speaking with anyone. I've seen trade show staff simply handing things to people as they walk by. I got a sweet set of Skype headphones that way.

Crap is not an engagement tool, it is a disengagement tool.

I call it crap because it is worthless. Nobody in the history of the world sat at their desk and thought, "you know, I've used up almost all of these Oracle Post-It Notes. I should call them up and order a few licenses." It never happens. Not for Oracle, not for Google and not for you.

Most of the time crap winds up in the trash can. Walk by any trash receptacle at a trade show and you'll see it's *filled* with crap. Sometimes it is cute enough to get home to your kids where they will play with it

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for about three hours before your wife throws it in the trash. Like the stuffed monkey I dragged back from China, it lasted about a day, I think.

I love collecting crap at trade shows. I put it all in one of those crap-sacks that some companies pass out. I take it back to my hotel room and toss about half of it into the trash. Then I put the remaining crap in my suitcase being careful to toss out anything else that puts my bag over 50 lbs so I won't have to actually pay to get the crap home. When I get home I give some of the crap to my kids and take the rest of the crap to my office where it sits on the floor under my desk for about six months before I toss the rest of it in the trash. I save the crap-sack and give it to my wife who tells me she will use it for groceries (but she actually just throws it in the trash).

This realization is heartbreaking for the company who passes out $10 brochures thinking that every prospect that gets one takes it back to their company and pours over it with their senior staff.

The Trade Show Samurai knows better. In fact, the Trade Show Samurai couldn't care less if the crap she passes out winds up in the trash. That's because the moment she gives the crap to the attendee it has fulfilled its ultimate and complete purpose.

To disengage, the Trade Show Samurai hands the attendee a piece of crap and says:

> *"It was really nice meeting you. I'll make sure one of our salespeople follows up with you right after the show. Take this piece of crap[18], it has our phone number and web addresses on it; if you don't hear from anyone feel free to give us a call."*

This is a nice way to disengage because when you hand someone a piece of crap at a trade show it marks the end of the conversation and everybody can move on. It's like magic. However, if you give the piece of crap to them at the *beginning* of the conversation it creates an awkward tension, almost embarrassment.

The Non-Samurai Way

In the non-Samurai-style booths conversations are often strained and awkward. This is because so many people think that the crap is meant to be given at the *beginning* of the conversation. This may seem like a subtlety, but the impact is significant.

Think about it. Whatever your company does, you exist to create some kind of value for your clients above and beyond what they pay you. I may sell them a financial data feed for a few thousand dollars a month. They can use this data to power their trading desks that allow their traders to make millions. With millions of dollars worth of value at stake why would you need a pen with a crazy hairdo to attract a prospect? The mere notion of is insulting to you both. A *serious* conversation about a multi-million dollar advertising program does not start with a squeeze ball. It starts with two intelligent businesspeople having a meaningful conversation. That's what the Trade Show Samurai does.

[18] You can substitute the word "crap" with whatever, wonderful, unique and exciting piece of crap *your* company bought.

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When the crap is given at the *end* of the conversation it serves as a small token of respect and gratitude to thank the person for the few minutes of time they spent with you. It does not assume that they would value it over your company's value proposition.

The same concept applies to putting games, spin-to-win games, booth babes, or any other kind of cheap parlor trick. These things are pathetic attempts for a company to placate their fear of introducing themselves to strangers.

The other problem with passing out crap or playing silly games at the beginning of the conversation is that the attendee may have really wanted the piece of crap or silly game. In this case they will painfully hear your pitch because they want to move on and collect more crap. Don't get me wrong, I love crap as much as the next guy, it is fun to collect crap at trade shows. It's like adult Trick-or-Treating. But, the Trade Show Samurai honors sales and battles time. Passing out crap to *attract* attendees degrades both.

I know what you may be thinking. "The mugs we passed out last year were great!" They may be great, but they are still crap. 99% of them were tossed out or left in hotel rooms. It's all crap. Repeat after me, "it is all crap". Crap can and will serve its useful purpose at the end of a conversation. Don't put any more value on it that is due.

Good Crap

I used to think crap was a *total* waste of money until I realized what a great disengagement tool it is. Now I think it is great. Here are a few pointers about buying crap for disengagement:

1. **Buy the cheapest crap you can find** that won't reflect poorly on your company. A business card is probably the best crap. Handing someone a business card is a great way to respectfully end a conversation. Don't give them *your* card; give them the card for your head of sales. After all, you don't want them to call *you*; you want them to call sales (if they keep the card at all)

2. **Make the crap personal.** When you pass them your sales manager's business card take a pen and write your name on it, then circle the sales managers cell phone and say something like, "feel free to call Tom on his cell phone and tell them you spoke to me, Mike, at the conference." This makes it personal. At one show we had a kiosk application that would allow us to set up an account and assign a password on the spot. We would write their password on a little card and hand it to them. It was a great little piece of crap. When they threw it away it wouldn't matter because we would send them an email telling them how to retrieve their password anyway.

3. **Make the crap relevant.** I once worked for a company that had a name that rhymed with "cap" and a cap was our logo. We passed out real caps that looked like our logo. It was good crap. We bought 20,000 of them for less than two dollars each and used them at dozens of shows. It was cheap crap, but it was high enough quality that it didn't reflect poorly on our company.

4. **Make the crap trash-resistant**. All crap eventually winds up in the trash, but sometimes you can give it a little staying power. For instance, if you create a souvenir of the event people will often hang onto it for a while. For example, there are people who travel all over the country visiting

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motor home shows. If you are exhibiting at a motor home show in Hershey, Pennsylvania you could make a patch or pin that is essentially a Hersey souvenir that includes your company logo.

Pitch or Ditch?

During attendee engagement you will learn a few details about the attendee that will help you decide which of your memorized pitches you will deliver. Not everyone will receive a pitch. In some cases you realize that the person you are talking to is a human time bandit and you will have to abort the conversation and disengage the conversation quickly.

In these situations you will have to make a split-second choice with regard to the Time Bandit's potential value to the firm. Many will have no or very low value to the firm. Competitors, other exhibitors who are "bored" so they are wandering the halls, students, expo hall employees looking for free stuff, etc. These Time Bandits have feelings too so as much as you might like to release your Samurai fury, you will have to restrain yourself and use some tact.

This will require all of your cunning. Many of these people will be very interested in picking your brain. Competitors, for instance, would love to know what you are up to. Students want to learn from you and emulate your success. They are inquisitive to say the least. You will have to be firm, but polite as in this example scenario:

The Scene:	You are a Trade Show Samurai staffing the booth for Vicarious Communications, Inc. A company that offers marketing services to the veterinary industry. You have assumed the Trade Show Samurai Stance and you have engaged an attendee using the ten/five rule. You have no idea they are a time bandit because you can't make out their badge.
Samurai	Hello, have you registered with Vicarious Communications yet?
Time Bandit	No, I haven't.
Samurai	Are you a veterinary office or a product manufacturer?
Time Bandit	Neither, actually, I'm a marketing consultant. I heard about you from one of my clients.
Samurai	*Thinks: Drat! A Time Bandit. She is a consultant, I'm not sure what that means, it could be bad or good. Must investigate. The Trade Show Samurai holds his position at the front of the booth. This leaves the Time Bandit in the isle where conversation is difficult and uncomfortable.* I hope you heard good things! Which client was it?
Time Bandit	It was one of my pharmaceutical clients. How does Vicarious get its clients?

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Samurai	*Thinks: He won't answer my question and instead asked a strategic question. He is trying to pick my Samurai-brain. Abort! This guy is worthless!* We use a number of sales programs like trade shows, for instance. We've had a busy show. We have a lot of information on our site. Here is my card with the web address. Take a look when you get back to the office. Do you have a card I can have?
Time Bandit	Thanks, I have a card here somewhere.
Samurai	While Time Bandit is searching for his card the Trade Show Samurai moves to engage another attendee under the assumption that the conversation has ended.

The above example shows a quick and polite disengagement. The Trade Show Samurai uses a couple of very important techniques. First, he held his ground in Trade Show Samurai Stance. In a normal circumstance the Trade Show Samurai would step back into the booth drawing the attendee with him until they are both on the booth carpet, preferably near a data college kiosk. However, faced with a Time Bandit, the Trade Show Samurai leaves the attendee in the isle. It is tough to carry on a meaningful exchange if you are standing in the isle.

If the Time Bandit tries to walk around you to enter you booth *stand still.* Make no attempt to follow nor should you discourage the Time Bandit from entering your booth. Instead, let them make the move. This will mean they are no longer face-to-face with you and you will be free to immediately engage another attendee before the Time Bandit even knows what's going on.

The second technique the Trade Show Samurai uses is *the passing of the crap*. In this case the Trade Show Samurai gives the Time Bandit a business card- a nice, inexpensive piece of crap. This formally marks the end of the conversation.

The last technique the Trade Show Samurai uses is asking for the Time Bandit's business card. For some reason trade show attendees are pretty bad about have business cards handy. Many of them keep them in their wallets or purses. If they happen to have one in their pockets it is usually mixed in with a bunch of other business cards. In most cases it will be a struggle for the Time Bandit to produce one. This will provide just enough time for the Trade Show Samurai to move over a little bit and engage another attendee at which point the Time Bandits efforts have been thwarted and they will slip away.

If the Time Bandit approaches another Trade Show Samurai in you booth they will receive the same treatment.

High-Value Time Bandits

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Some Time Bandits will actually have high value to your company. You may come across individuals with high potential as investors, partners, or even future employees. Members of the press, for instance, can be valuable allies. Time Bandits like these are important and should receive the attention they deserve, however, Trade Show Samurais honor sales and these people will not lead directly to a sale.

Sure, a good article can generate leads that may turn into sales, but rarely will a salesperson make a sale to a member of the press. The same goes for investors, partners or employees.

Most Trade Show Samurais will have to stick to the script and will not be trained to deal with these non-sale prospects. In these cases you will have to disengage by redirecting the Time Bandit to a Ninja.

Ninjas

A *Ninja* is a person from your company that is specially trained to deal with non-sales prospects or Valuable Time Bandits. Sometimes you will have a person that is a Trade Show Samurai *and* a Ninja. Sometimes they are just a Ninja and won't be a Trade Show Samurai. A Ninja may not even be at the show.

There are different types of Ninjas. They are trained to handle special cases.

- **Press Ninjas** are trained to speak with the press. It is good to have at least one Press Ninja at the show because there are usually a lot of journalists there. When faced with a Time Bandit who is a member of the press deliver your Press Pitch that will sound something like this:

  > *Thank you for stopping by, we have some really interesting stories here are NiceBox.org. For instance, we just received a government grant to help fund some of our education programs. We also signed up ten new fortunue-500 sponsors over the past sixty days. Our programs are being run in over 2,000 public and private schools across the US and Canada. Mike Moyer is our primary press contact. I would be happy to introduce you right now.*

  If the Press Ninja is busy you can make an appointment for a later time. You should have a notebook with the Press Ninja's schedule in a safe place that can be accessed by the Trade Show Samurais should the need arise.

- **Sales Ninjas** are members of your sales staff who will be prepared to spend more time with an attendee than a Trade Show Samurai. I like to invite a few of the top salespeople to be on hand at the show. Not at the booth, necessarily, but at the show. They can set appointments with major clients ahead of time and, if an attendee keeps asking questions after you have attempted to disengage you may need to refer them to a Sales Ninja by saying something like:

  > *It sounds like you have a lot of good questions. Let me grab Sally who can provide additional detail. (look around). Hmm, Sally isn't here but I'll grab her schedule. Looks like she will be back in the booth at 2:00, shall I pencil you in for a quick meeting?*

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- **Investor Ninjas** are individuals who are in a position to talk about investment. It is okay if you don't have any investment Ninja's at the show. You can simply collect the individual's contact information on a lead card and stick it in the Investor Ninja's folder. The same process would apply to a **Human Resource Ninja.**

- **Marketing Ninjas**, **Operations Ninjas** and Other Ninjas are people who are in a position to handle questions about company specifics. If a potential marketing partner approaches you at the booth you may want to put them in touch with a Marketing Ninja. You will have these Ninjas designated and trained before the show and they will be prepared be handle any inquiries.

The primary reason for Ninja's is to allow Trade Show Samurais to disengage and get back to their work of gathering sales leads without losing out on a potentially good contact for your firm.

Nice Crap

If you work of a crap-loving company you could consider "tiers" of crap. This is useful because it will make someone feel more appreciated when you disengage them. For the average attendee you might disengage them with a business card. For a "good" customer you could have something special. This will help you disengage customers in a very meaningful and respectful way. For instance, I once saw a company who gave a bottle of nice wine to any customer who stopped by the booth.

If you do this be disciplined, if you start passing out nice crap to just anybody it will have the opposite effect. Even if you come across the most exciting prospect in the world, *do not* give them anything reserved for customers. If the president of the United States stops by don't give him (or her) the customer gift[19]. The nice crap gets its value from who you *don't* give it to.

Becoming a master at the Art of Disengagement is one of the most valuable skills a Trade Show Samurai can have. Conversations can spin off on all sorts of time-wasting tangents. Time Bandits will leech valuable information from you and chew through valuable time.

[19] What has he done for you lately???

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Lock and Reload

Trade Show Samurais move quickly. The entire conversation with an attendee should take *less than three* minutes. This is not a lot of time, but it is the right amount of time. Trade Show Samurais do not rush. They take all the time they need and none of the time they don't

The reason the conversations go so quickly is that they are highly scripted, memorized and rehearsed. The Trade Show Samurai carefully controls the conversation from beginning to end.

A conversation with a Trade Show Samurai is meaningful, fulfilling and respectful. The attendee gets just the information they need to make a decision to learn more. The attendee, who is also short on time, can get back to browsing the halls. The conversation is fulfilling in that because the Trade Show Samurai asked questions about relevant, non-threatening professional information the attendee feels as if they had a chance to speak. Additionally, the pitch delivered was highly relevant to their personal interests.

Aggressive

One of the most common criticisms of the Trade Show Samurai technique is that it is too aggressive. This critique is often generated by less motivated individuals who don't understand how the process works. All they see is a trade show booth with a *frenzy of activity*.

There is some merit to this criticism, however, because Trade Show Samurais are in a constant battle for time. It is easy to forget to that you are dealing with human beings who deserve to be treated with the utmost respect. These people are the people who will be paying your salary. They are your future customers.

When you are in the heat of battle against time you must maintain your poise and respect for those around you. I, myself, have been lost in my pursuit of leads. It is not uncommon to find yourself being short with people and developing distaste for those who are getting in between you and your goal.

To overcome this important risk, take a moment to *Lock and Reload*.

Lock

At the end of each conversation take about 30 seconds to "lock" the conversation. Locking the conversation means that you will double-check the data on the lead card and in the kiosk. It means jotting down any important notes the sales team will need. And it means mentally reviewing the conversation in your head to make sure it went the way you had planned. This quick little review will not only ensure you have carefully captured the information you want, but also it gives you time to reflect on how you behaved. Were you gentle and kind or were you forceful and rude? If you were the latter, don't worry about it. On the off chance that you did offend someone you have another chance to make it right with the next attendee.

Reload

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After locking the conversation take another 30 seconds to reload. Reloading means to make sure the data is saved and the kiosk screen is reset and ready for the next person. It means tucking the completed lead card to the back of your clipboard or in another safe place. It means making sure you have a clean lead card and another piece of crap to dish out to the next person. You will also have a moment of calm for yourself.

During this moment of calm, take a deep breath, make sure you are wearing your best smile and get mentally prepared to go back out there.

When you Lock and Reload you will be toward s the interior of the booth. This should buy you the time to get prepared before you assume the trade show stance. When you are ready, step back up to the edge of the booth and do it all over again.

Breaks

If you feel yourself getting short with the attendees or missing your lines or taking too much time, you need to take a step back and relax. Let the other Samurais know that you are going to take a break and the leave the booth. Go off to the side, get a drink of water, have a snack. Take just enough time to clear your head and then get back to work. Hour-long coffee and lunch breaks are not for the Trade Show Samurai. They leave the booth, eat lunch and return without wasting a lot of time. Just because you are taking a break, it doesn't mean that time stops.

Huddle

At the end of each day do a huddle with the rest of the Trade Show Samurais. The first order of business will be to collect all the lead cards and give them to the team leader or whoever else is designated to take care of them. This is one of the most important things you will do all day. Protect the leads with your life.

Let me reiterate- *protect your leads*. Download them from the kiosks, email the data back to the office, keep the lead cards in a safe place. The value of the lead cards is equal to the entire value of all the booth equipment.

Again- *protect the leads*.

The next order of business will be to discuss the day and any changes you made to the pitch on the fly. Even though all the Trade Show Samurais memorized the pitch, they will naturally adapt it during the day to make it more comfortable to say and to achieve better results.

Teach each other what you learned throughout the day. This time with the team will be incredibly valuable. Congratulate each other. You had a long day, but it's not over.

Parties and Events

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Inevitably, there are parties and events at trade shows. The Trade Show Samurais don't get together for a good time. They pair off and hit the important events with the goal of laying the groundwork for the next day.

Have a drink, but only one or two. It's okay to have a good time, but nothing can kill a good trade show than a hangover. There will be a time to party, but this isn't it, ironically.

As you and your wingman (or wingwoman) work the room, meet the people that look interesting, be enthusiastic about the show and invite them to the booth. If it feels awkward to do business at a social event I have some advice: *get over it.*

Parties at trade shows are *not* social events, they are *business* events. You are on a business trip doing business work. Trade Show Samurais understand this and stay on the ball. People who confuse business parties with real parties wind up face down in the gutter looking like a total ass. This is not you.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy yourself, business parties are a great way to reenergize, meet people and pick up girls (as long as you invite them to your booth and *not* to your room.)

Enjoy the evening, my fellow Trade Show Samurai, tomorrow is another big day!

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A Zillion Percent Increase

If you learn the ways of the Trade Show Samurai and master the Arts of Engagement, Intrigue, Interrogation and Disengagement you will achieve results that approach a zillion percent or more.

This is because your practice of the Trade Show Samurai Arts will enable to process attendees in not only a processional and respectful manner, but also as fast as humanly possible.

Nine times out of ten the limitations of a trade show aren't the venue or the booth or the traffic or the economy[20]. The limitation is the failure of trade show booth staff to successfully turn trade show attendees into qualifiable leads. When my band of Trade Show Samurais is operating near trade show Nirvana the only limitation is ourselves. If we added *twice* the number of Trade Show Samurais we would have *twice* the number of leads.

Everything you do to organize a trade show merely sets the stage. You are the actors on the stage, how you act determines the success of the show.

Practice, Practice, Practice

When I do a trade show the other Trade Show Samurais and I train for many hours during the weeks and months before the show. Training involves a number of active sessions for the Trade Show Samurai.

During early sessions we review pitches. We go over and edit the pitches for each category of attendee as well as a press pitch, investor pitch and potential employee pitch. We critique them and then commit them to memory.

We also brainstorm about possible questions and outline answers for all of them. We write up the answers and, again, we commit them to memory.

Memorizing this material is critical. It all needs to be second nature. We don't want to have to think, we want to act. Adaptations will happen naturally as you actually start talking to attendees, but memorizing is the place to start. Consistency is key.

After we have memorized the pitches we rehearse them aloud in front of each other. We want to make sure the pitch sounds natural and makes sense. We rewrite parts of it if necessary. Everyone practices the pitches and the Q&A until it is perfect.

Next we outline the right questions for engagement. We all work from the same script and it isn't final until we all agree. We are clones of one another. While each of us will develop our own style, we will do it from a common ground. This is not a time for improvisation.

We work closely with the sales department to develop a lead card—*the* essential Trade Show Samurai tool. It helps guide our engagement questions and it helps us understand how the conversation should flow. More about the lead card is coming in a later chapter.

[20] I once did a show were my booth was placed on the balcony overlooking the show floor. It was *horrible*.

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All the Trade Show Samurais practice in front of one another. During role play we try to create every possible situation that might occur at the show. We will continue to tweak and edit the materials. Everyone will re-memorize the changes. We rehearse and rehearse and rehearse until we get it right.

We go over disengagement and practice during role play with varying levels of intensity. For instance, we might do a role-play where we pretend we are an aggressive competitor or hot prospect. This type of practice will help us on the show floor.

Rehearsal

We don't stop there. If possible, we will actually set up our booth and rehearse in a natural setting. We will discuss the location of the booth and the potential traffic patterns. Is the booth near the bathrooms? Will that hurt or help? Where is the coffee shop? Should we try and engage people who are on their way to the bathroom or on the way back? How can we position ourselves to maximize exposure? How will we change position at different times of the day? For instance, in the morning we might want to engage people on the way to the bathroom, after lunch we may want to engage them on their way back.

We will also discuss the arrangement of the booth and how to maximize use of the data collection kiosks—more on this later.

Dress Rehearsal

When we are ready, we will invite others from the organization to play the role of the attendees and we will do a dress rehearsal. We prepare "situations" for the guests. For example we give them slips of paper that say:

> You are a high school guidance counselor from a large urban public school; you need to go to the bathroom.
>
> You are an admission counselor from a small, liberal arts college in rural Tennessee, you are excited about everything
>
> You are a potential investor looking for a deal.
>
> You are a reporter from the Wall Street Journal, you've heard some bad things about the company's management team
>
> You are a principle from a mid-size suburban public high school; you are in a great mood
>
> You are an option trader who works from home, the market is killing you

This type of rehearsal really sharpens the Trade Show Samurai's skills. The mock-attendees provide valuable feedback that can be used to further hone the message of provide some direction to a Trade Show Samurai that may be leaving the wrong impression. We incorporate feedback into the pitches and the Q&A and we memorize all over again and do more rehearsal.

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One of the primary benefits of exhaustive rehearsal is that it will help build the Trade Show Samurai's confidence. On the show floor confidence is everything. You need it to successfully engage, you need it to successfully navigate the conversation and you need it to successfully disengage. If the Trade Show Samurai is prepared for every situation then the show will go smoothly.

The dress rehearsal should be as authentic as possible. Wear your uniforms, this will ensure that if you had to obtain your own pieces of the uniform it will coordinate with the others. Use the real booth. I setting up the real booth is impractical, get some duct tape and tape out an outline of the booth on the ground. Test out your kiosk software by setting up some makeshift kiosks if you have to. Make sure everything is working properly. You don't want any surprises on the day of the show.

Screwing Up

In spited of all your preparation, you will still make mistakes. It is not uncommon for a budding Trade Show Samurai to start getting really nervous about making mistakes, forgetting their lines and experiencing general stage fright. This is very common. Here is my advice: *it's* going *to happen, you* will *screw up, don't let it bother you.*

In fact, expect to screw up pretty much every time during the first hour or so of the show. You will engage the lowest number of attendees during this period and you will deliver a lousy pitch to most of them. Who cares? It doesn't matter. What matters is that you keep your head in the game and concentrate on improvement. Think *progress*, not perfection.

Getting over the fear of what might go wrong is very important. Fear is a huge time waster. I once trained a group of women to be Trade Show Samurais. They were veterans of the show and had done it "the old way" for years. They were petrified that taking notes on a lead card would offend people. They came up with every imaginable excuse. I arrived about 30 minutes after the show started to find them sitting on chairs, sipping coffee, and chatting with one another. They looked up at me and informed me that "people really don't like the clipboards." The clip boards and lead cards were tucked out of site. Their fear was a self-fulfilling prophecy. They imagined the worst and looked for things to validate their concern. I took the lead cards back out, assumed the stance, and started working the isle. By the end of the first day we had collected well over 150 leads.

If you can muster the courage you will eventually overcome your fear and will be performing at a fairly consistent pace. It won't take long. On day two of the show you will rock. In fact, you will rock until the end of the show unless you give up early. A real Trade Show Samurai won't stop engaging and pitching until he or she is on their own doorstep.

Being a Trade Show Samurai is very much like being a stage actor. There are scripts, sets, costumes and an audience. The difference is that the show is interactive and performed on a one-on-one basis or for small groups at a time.

As an actor leave your other self behind and immerse yourself into the core arts of the Trade Show Samurai:

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The Art of Engagement

- Assume the Trade Show Samurai Stance
- Get the attendee's attention using gentle eye contact and the ten/five rule
- Ask a short series of qualifying questions to determine which pitch they will receive

The Art of Intrigue

- Step back in to the booth drawing the attendee with you until you are both standing on the booth carpet, out of the isle
- Deliver your memorized and rehearsed pitch
- Be prepared to answer questions with pre-rehearsed answers
- Move quickly into additional qualifying questions and don't get sucked into the details

The Art of Interrogation

- Ask a series of questions with answers that will allow you to assign a relative value to the lead
- Capture the data
- Control the conversation, but be respectful. Beware of Time Bandits, do not let the attendee take over the conversation

The Art of Disengagement

- When you have all the qualifying data you need the conversation is over
- Mark the end with a piece of crap
- Redirect valuable Time Bandits to Ninjas
- Disengage other Time Bandits and move quickly to another attendee
- Lock and reload

Becoming a Trade Show Samurai and keeping true to your training will have a positive impact on your trade show effort. Implementing a Samurai-style strategy will be difficult. You will face fierce opposition from others in the company. Build support among senior staff, use this book.

You will prevail and you will come closer to trade show Nirvana every time.

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Part Two: Weaponry

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Armor

What to wear at a trade show is bound to be a sticking point. People *hate* to be told what to wear. Over the years I've come to one basic conclusion: *Trade Show Samurais should look more like each other than they look like the attendees or other exhibitors.*

Good trade show booth apparel is much more common than good trade show booth behavior, but it's still quite rare. As a rule, people like to blend in with the crowd. Therefore, many people wear "trade show camouflage" which comes in two basic forms:

1. Suit
2. Golf shirts and khakis

Walk the floor of any major trade show and you will see people blending in using these two basic looks. Sometimes the booth staff wears matching golf shirts with company logos. This is a step in the right direction. Senior managers and sales people often wear suits. This is common. They don't want to wear the same thing as their underlings. I guess they don't like being on the same team or something. This is fine, wear the suit if you want; just don't spend any time in the booth. Trade Show Samurais stick together and look like a team.

The choice of trade show camouflage is understandable. Just like people have a natural fear against meeting strangers; people have an instinct to blend in with the herd. Most of us don't like to stand out. It feels weird. After all, if we stand out too much we would be a prime target for a mountain lion or a leopard who would like nothing better that to drop us like an elderly gazelle. You never know when their might be a leopard wandering the show floor.

Uniforms are a great way to look like a team. During one Trade Show Nirvana experience we were all wearing white workman's shirts with a huge embroidered logo on the back and matching caps. The shirts cost well over $100 each but it was well worth it. People noticed us in and out of the booth. This is perfect.

The problem with uniforms is that some people hate them and will pitch a fit if you try and make them wear them. They are notoriously unflattering so women try to avoid them. Or, they design them and the men want to avoid them. It's a tightrope. If you can walk it you are in good shape.

Among the striking uniforms I've seen included a booth where they all wore white lab coats, another where they wore coordinating coveralls and another where they all had matching shirts and bright red pants. The pants were great because nobody else wore red pants. It helped them look like a team and stand out from the crowd.

If your team hems and haws about the uniform keep in mind that you don't have to wear a uniform.

I grew up in a family that *loved* live theater. I don't go much as an adult, but my family is still wacko for it. My middle sister writes musicals, my older sister was a professional actress for many years and my mother travels to New York to see Broadway shows all the time.

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I remember seeing *Cats* on Broadway when I was a little kid. The actors were dressed as cats, but not just like cats. It was still clear they were actors. Not many real cats wear leotards. But the make-up and the hair and the actors acting was pretty convincing. At one part in the play the "cats" came out into the audience. One of them stared right at me like a cat might. If felt like I was being asked to come up on stage or something.

The set was a giant junkyard. It was much more realistic that the costumes, but for the fact the box of Cheerios was about six feet tall. Nevertheless, there were times during the show that I got wrapped up in it enough that the cats did look like little cats in a junkyard. The set made them look small. The costumes and the sets were perfectly coordinated. I laughed, I cried… you know the rest.

All the cat's costumes were distinctive, yet they all had a tight cohesion. They all had the same style and look, even though each cat was an individual.

It is possible to do this with your trade show apparel as well. For instance, everyone could dress in clothing that was circ 1970. You could wear whatever you want from that era, but would still look like a team. Sometime you can coordinate ties and scarves or some other accent that will keep things cohesive.

The key, again, is to look like each other, but *not* look like everyone else.

The ideal Trade Show Samurai Armor will make them one with the booth and awkwardly out of place anywhere else. When the Trade Show Samurai is in the booth, the clothes he or she wears should reflect the boldness and character of the booth. When they are out of the booth people should think, "who is that weirdo? They must be promoting something."

Wearing clothing like this doesn't have to be as elaborate as a Cats costume. It can be tasteful, but it has to stand out. The Trade Show Samurai needs a suit of armor that will help them achieve their goals. The right clothing will really help grease the wheels with attendees. When you engage, they will see you as one with the booth. I'm not trying to be corny. It's true; you need a uniform that will reflect the style and energy of your booth.

As with booth design, your choice of apparel should be bold and mirror you company's brand style The best armor will position you and your fellow Trade Show Samurais as clear members of the team while you are in the booth, but make you stand out when you're not in the booth. Don't worry, it's the good kind of standing out. It's the kind that says, "hey, that guy is standing out! I remember him from the exhibit hall, he was so busy all day. I've got to find out what he is all about!"

Armor Appointments

Whatever you choose to wear, make sure it has pockets or a belt or some kind of small bag. You will need to have a few pieces of equipment close at hand including a stapler, pens, and crap. If your crap is small enough to fit in your pocket you will be super mobile. You will always need extra pens because

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attendees have a tendency to keep them. Also, having a quick-draw stapler on hand will allow you to staple business cards to your lead forms and save yourself a little writing[21].

Lead Card & Data Collection

I've mentioned the lead card several times before already. You probably have at least a vague understanding of what a lead card is, however, most people have painfully underestimated its importance.

The Samurai Sword

To a Trade Show Samurai the lead card is his or her sword. It is the perfect weapon. Creating it takes time, patience and skill just as perfecting its use takes time, patience and skill.

A good lead card is the single most important tool in the trade show world. No other tool is more critical to success.

A lead card is where you capture all the qualification data as well as the contact information. It exists in physical form, that is, it is printed on paper or cardstock. When your lead card is perfected it will mirror your conversation and allow you to simply check boxes to capture important data points.

The lead card is one of the first things you and your fellow Trade Show Samurais should put together. It will be a central working document until the very end and will likely go through a number of major changes.

Anatomy of a Lead Card

There are three main sections to a lead card. Contact information, qualifying information and notes. Each section plays an important role in the value of the qualifiable lead.

<u>Contact Information</u>

The first section is the contact information section. It contains space for typical contact information such as name, address, email address and phone number. In some cases it's useful to record gender or other details. Below is an example for a mock company called Iron Ox. Iron Ox makes chassis for motor homes. In addition to contact information I've also included gender and spouse's name. The vast majority of motor home owners are older married couples. It would not be uncommon for a sales effort to include communication targeted at the man or the woman or both.

[21] Remember, even if you staple a business card to the lead form you should still copy down the name and phone number in case the card falls off!

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About You	
Title: O Mr. O Mrs. O Ms. O Dr.	O M O F
First Name:	Last Name:
Spouse:	
E-mail:	Phone Number: ( ) -
Address:	
City:	State: Zip:

You rarely have to complete the entire contact information section as people, especially in a professional setting, usually provide a business card that you can staple to the lead sheet. For this reason it is important to have at least one stapler at each data entry kiosk. Notice the above example does not contain a field for a fax number. Motor home owners generally do not have fax machines so collecting this information is unnecessary because it will waste time.

Even if you *do* staple a business card you have to plan for the possibility that it will fall off. Be sure to at least write the person's name and phone number. That way if it does fall off you can match it back to the lead card later. Also, if you lose it completely you can still contact the person via phone.

Business cards generally don't have spouse information and gender so in the Iron Ox example it is important to complete those fields as well.

Qualifying Information

The next section is qualifying information. This section contains the answer fields to the questions you will ask during interrogation. Every question you ask will have a corresponding answer field. If you are asking questions that don't uncover qualifying information you are *wasting time*.

About Your RV
Status: O New Owner (0-3 mo) O Own (3 mo. +) O Shopping (0-6 mo) O Looking (6 mo +)
Type: O Class A Diesel O Class A Gas O Class C O 5th Wheel O Trailer
Chassis: O IronOx O Freightliner O Spartan O Ford O Workhorse O Other
Year: Date Purchased: O New O Used
Manufacturer:
Model:
Average Miles Per Year: O 5K-10K O 10K-20K O 20K-40K O 40K-80K O 80K+
Average Nights Per Year: O 0-20 O 20-50 O 50-100 O 100-200 O 200+ O Full-time

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All the questions will help rank-order the lead by relative value. Note that this particular lead card will capture information relevant to owners and to non-owners. If the lead card indicates the attendee is an owner the details of the other questions are assumed to pertain to the current owned chassis. If the lead card indicates a non-owner it is assumed that the rest of the information is with regard to purchase intent.

The information on the lead card will not only allow you to rank-order them for the sales group, but it will give the sales person everything they need to start a meaningful conversation with the individual.

What would the sales person have to do if all you gave her was a business card? This is a typical scenario. The sales person receives a fishbowl filled with business cards from people hoping they were going to win an iPod or something. They would have no idea where to start. They would essentially be cold-calling a list of people who may or may not be interested in buying a motor home. Granted, at least they would be interested in the motor home topic, but other than that they have nothing.

Let's say that Iron Ox sells chassis for Class A Diesel motor homes. These are the big, bus-like motor homes with the engines in the back. Who would you, as a salesperson, rather call?

> Prospect A: the owner of a used trailer who has owned it for 15 years and uses it two nights per year.
>
> Prospect B: a couple shopping for a new Class A Diesel motor home with a special interest in Iron Ox. They are considering two models from two different manufacturers. Both manufacturers offer Iron Ox chassis, but only one of the models comes standard with Iron Ox. They expect to put about 20,000 miles per year because they are on the road about six months a year.
>
> Prospect C: Larry Jones (555) 673-3203

Prospect C came out of a fishbowl. If you received prospect C from your marketing department you can consider yourself lucky you got anything at all. Prospects A and B came from Trade Show Samurais. Clearly you will spend the most time with prospect B. If, after you close the sale, you have time, you can call prospect C to see if you can upgrade his trailer to a $350,000 Class A diesel motor home.

Notes

The last section is for notes. Notes are relatively useless when it comes to rank-ordering prospects. Additionally, they are difficult to capture and process electronically. If at all possible avoid taking notes.

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Notes

The note section, however, serves two purposes. First, it uses up space at the bottom of the card so the card doesn't appear to be wasting paper and makes your lead card look nice. This seems petty and for the most part, it is. However, you will occasionally run up against a subversive-type who will accuse you of being environmentally reckless for using so much paper.

The more important reason for the notes section is to pass information off to *Ninjas*. Ninjas usually won't receive a rank-ordered list of leads; they will receive a stack of lead cards with some good notes about the person who wants to speak with them. It is usually *not* worth it to create a separate lead system to handle press contacts, for instance. At any given show you may capture thousands of prospects but only a small handful of press contacts. The Press Ninja can work directly from the cards.

When you do take notes be as thorough as you can. Complete the contact information as completely as possible and write neatly. When you are in the heat of battle you may not be thinking of handwriting. If you do everything right you will still be wasting your time if your sales team can't read your handwriting!

The entire Lead Card should fit neatly on a 8.5" x 11" piece of paper. Two-sided or multi-page lead cards are not acceptable. They are difficult to use and a waste of time.

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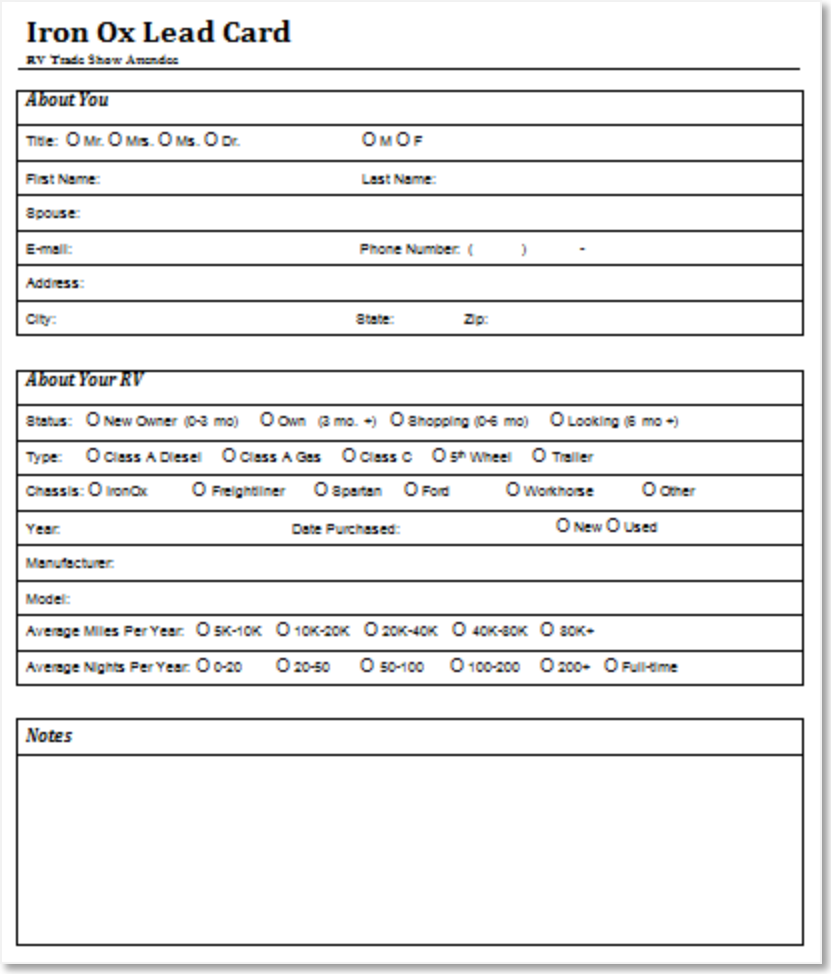

Iron Ox Lead Card

RV Trade Show Attendee

About You	
Title: O Mr. O Mrs. O Ms. O Dr.	O M O F
First Name:	Last Name:
Spouse:	
E-mail:	Phone Number: ( ) -
Address:	
City:	State: Zip:

About Your RV					
Status: O New Owner (0-3 mo)	O Own (3 mo. +)	O Shopping (0-6 mo)	O Looking (6 mo +)		
Type: O Class A Diesel	O Class A Gas	O Class C	O 5th Wheel	O Trailer	
Chassis: O IronOx	O Freightliner	O Spartan	O Ford	O Workhorse	O Other
Year:	Date Purchased:	O New O Used			
Manufacturer:					
Model:					
Average Miles Per Year: O 5K-10K	O 10K-20K	O 20K-40K	O 40K-80K	O 80K+	
Average Nights Per Year: O 0-20	O 20-50	O 50-100	O 100-200	O 200+	O Full-time

Notes

In some cases you will be able to use the same card for multiple attendee types. This card is fine for motor home owners, prospects as well as valuable Time Bandits that need to be redirected to Ninjas.

However, sometimes you will have to develop a different lead card altogether. For instance, let's pretend that Iron Ox also sells chassis for commercial trucks. The information would look quite different. The lead would be a business and not a couple of retirees. Also, it wouldn't have anything to do with motor homes, although you may see some of the same competitors on the list.

Here is an example of the contact information section on a commercial Iron Ox lead:

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About You	
Title: O Mr. O Mrs. O Ms. O Dr.	O M O F
First Name:	Last Name:
Company Name:	
Vocation: O Bakery O Laundry O Utility O Delivery O Other _____	
E-mail:	Phone Number: ( ) -
Address:	
City:	State: Zip:

Note that "spouse" is no longer required and that a vocational field has been added. This helps round-round out the business' basic demographics.

The qualification information is also quite different:

About Your Current Truck(s)		
Status: O New Owner (0-3 mo) O Own (3 mo. +) O Shopping (0-6 mo) O Looking (6 mo +)		
Type: O Step-Van O Cutaway O Van O Minivan O Other _____		
Chassis: O Iron Ox O Ford O Chevy O Workhorse O Other _____		
Year:	Date Purchased:	O New O Used
Manufacturer:		
Model:		
Average Stops per Day: O 5-10 O 10-20 O 20-40 O 40-80 O 80+		
Number of trucks in Fleet: O 0-20 O 20-50 O 50-100 O 100-200 O 200+		

The information collected is important in terms of being able to rank-order the leads. For instance, fleet size would be an important factor in determining value. Fleet size alone, however, may not be the most important factor.

It is important to note that you will not be using two different cards at the same show. Your lead card should capture all possible attendee types at the show. In the above examples the first one was for a consumer show and the second one was for a dealer show.

Checking the Boxes

Notice that nearly all the responses require simple check of the box. The more often you can create check-box qualification fields the easier your life will be. In some cases there are far too many options to include them all on the lead card. Year, for instance, is a fairly straightforward answer that doesn't require a complete list of all possible years. Manufacturer is another. There may be 10-15 different body

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manufacturers. In these cases you can have a more comprehensive list in the electronic version of the lead card.

I'll post some sample lead cards and templates you can use on the TradeShowSamurai.com Web site.

The Electronic Lead Card

In most cases your lead card and a trusty clipboard will be all you need. Paper is quick and easy to manage for a few hundred leads. A pair of Trade Show Samurais in a 10' x 10' booth should easily be able to capture that many leads at an average show.

However, a band of Trade Show Samurais in a large booth are likely to generate an unwieldy number of leads. A good Samurai-style strategy will generate hundreds or even thousands of leads. Far too many to be practical to manage with paper cards.

In these cases you may want to create an electronic version of your lead card that can be loaded onto a data collection kiosk at the show. The electronic version will allow you to enter data directly into a spreadsheet or database. A good program will generate a lead file that you can import directly into the company's sales management system.

I've done some good shows with lots of activity only to hit a major wall when we had the task of entering all the lead cards at the end of the day. Data entry can be tedious work, especially at the end of a long day on the show floor. It was tough work. It would have been worse to have saved the leads until the end of the show and asked an administrative assistant to enter them. This could have taken weeks and the leads could have gone stale.

The best show I've ever done was one where we had nice data entry screen that looked a lot like our site. Our CTO set it up so that it would automatically assign a username and password. It was browser-based, but it was not hooked to the Internet (never do internet applications at a trade show- ever). The program generated a database file that could be uploaded into our system as live accounts. The leads were then loaded into Salesforce.com where they were made available to our sales staff the next morning. A system like this is golden and you should strive for it as long as you have a cooperative IT department.

I'll post a sample electronic lead card program on the TradeShowSamurai.com Web site.

The IT Guys

If you have a cooperative IT department let them know about your plans at least six months in advance so they can schedule time for your project so it will be done 2-3 weeks before the show to allow for last-minute tweaks and testing. You will want them to program a data-entry program that will allow for speedy data entry. You will also need their help loading the data into the sales system. If you don't have a sales system get one. There are lots of good, inexpensive customer relationship management (CRM) programs out there. I recommend *Salesforce.com* if you have some cash, if you are strapped for cash try *Highrise.com*.

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India

If you don't have a cooperative IT department try outsourcing the project to India. They should be able to program a basic program for a few thousand dollars. I'll post a project description and some possible vendors on the TradeShowSamurai.com Web site to help you get started.

You will want them to create a stand-alone program that can be loaded onto a laptop at the show. It will have a "kiosk" mode that will cover up the screen with the data entry screens and hide the desktop. You will use an unlock code like CTL-ALT-W to close the program. The program should create an Excel or Comma Separate Values (csv) file and save it to the desktop or a folder you can find later.

At the end of each day you can use a thumb drive to collect the data files. You can then run them through your scoring model and email them to your sales department in the evening. I generally discourage doing an online form because all sorts of problems can arise with Internet connections at the show. It's best to play it safe and have the software loaded onto your kiosk computer.

India is also good at doing data entry. You could fax your lead cards to India in the evening and the next morning they should be able to return to you an excel file. You will want to ask for "double-entry" to make sure the data is accurate. Double-entry means that two people enter the data and the files are compared. If they match the file is completed, if they don't they have to double check the card.

I'll post some additional ideas for development and data entry to the TradeShowSamurai.com Web site.

The Lead Card and Training

You will constantly be using your lead card. You will use the paper version during early training exercises. By the time you get to full-scale rehearsal you should have at least a test version of the kiosk software. This software must work. You will have problems during the show if it does not work.

Even if you have a good electronic lead card you will want to have paper versions close at hand. Keep them on a clipboard so you can start recording qualification data early on in the conversation. You can transfer the data to the kiosk and transition to the electronic version. Sometimes the electronic version will be good enough that you don't need a paper version, but keep copies on hand anyway incase the system breaks.

Badge Zappers

Many shows offer badge-zappers that allow you to quickly scan a barcode on the attendee's badge and collect a "lead". These systems are a blessing and a curse. To most companies they are a curse because they are expensive and they collect pretty much the same information you get from renting the attendee list. If this is all you want then you can skip the show and just rent the attendee list. Some will argue that the zapped list is more valuable because it shows people who stopped by the booth. Unfortunately "stopping by the booth" is not a qualifier. It is meaningless.

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The badge-zapper can be a blessing if you use it correctly. Namely, you must be able to use it to collect the information on the lead card. I've seen, but not used, badge-zappers that will allow you to have a list of custom fields that all have their own barcode. You simply zap the badge and then zap the bar codes that correspond with their answers. The badge zapper machine will associate all those responses with the last badge to be zapped. When you zap the next badge it will associate the next barcode responses with the next badge and so on.

This system is a dream come true, but it does have risks. First, if you don't know how to use it properly you could create a horrible lead file that is worthless. Second, it can be awkward and a bit off-putting for the attendee to stand their why you zap-zap away. It can be very impersonal. Third, the badge-zapper may not handle everything on your lead card and you may be forced to modify your card. This defeats the purpose.

If you use a badge-zapper be sure to do your research well in advance. Try to get your hands on one before the show so you can practice. Make sure you have the right barcodes programmed and make sure you have enough badge-zappers that you don't have to wait while others use it in the booth. Waiting is a huge time-waster and you will lose leads. You will wind up using the paper version and the badge-zapper investment will be wasted.

I highly recommend the use of badge-zappers as long as they do everything you need them to and you have the opportunity to practice.

Samurai Hands Only

On the day of the show, your kiosk application should look as slick and professional as possible. Attendees will be tempted to use them and enter their own data. Do not let this happen. I guarantee after all your practice you will be much faster than them. If they make a move for your machine just tell them that it's not a demo, it's a tool to help manage information and that you will enter the information based on what they tell you. Practice deflecting their advances. The kiosk tools are not for them!

Beyond the Booth

A good lead card should be the basis of a company's entire lead-generation effort. All lead-generating marketing tactics should be based on the lead-card information. This includes telemarketing leads, internet leads, magazine leads, direct mail leads- everything. The same scoring model should be applied to them all and optimized over time.

This is smart business. It not only creates the best possible lead-filtering available, but also provides a standardize basis for the ongoing comparison of lead sources.

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The Art of Scoring

WARNING: Take a break, get a glass of water and then keep reading. This is the most boring, but among the most important parts of the book. If you're not up for it, skip to page XX.

I've been talking a lot about rank-ordering leads for the sales staff. There is an art to getting this right and with practice you will get the hang of it.

The method I'm going to describe is one that I have used successfully over time. It is by no means the only way and it might not even be the best way. It works for me and it may work for you. At the end of the day I don't care how you score your leads as long as it's logical and actionable. Your sales team is the ultimate test. If it works for them it works. If it doesn't work for them it doesn't work.

I've been in a number of companies where I have not only been in charge of the trade show strategy; but also, I have done sales. So, in effect, I've eaten the dog food that I created. It tastes great. From my sales experience I can honestly say that there is no better list than a properly scored trade show list.

By now you know that the qualification questions the Trade Show Samurai asks are designed to help assign a score to a lead. Scores are based on the answers to the questions. Different questions are weighted more heavily than others and different answers to those questions are weighted more heavily.

The objective of scoring is to ensure that the best possible leads rise to the top and the worst leads sink to the bottom. The sales team, who helped guide the creation of the questions, should be eager to call the best leads first. It's not important that they ever get to the bottom of the list. Some leads may have such a low rank that leads from other sources demand more attention. For instance, if your company generates leads from online marketing the online marketing leads may be more valuable than some of the trade show leads.

In a perfect world you would use the same scoring model to score all of your leads. That way you can not only compare the relative value of your lead sources, but also you can rank leads among each other. To sales, a good lead is a good lead no matter where it comes from. The Trade Show Samurai honors sales so good sales leads- no matter where they come from, is the Trade Show Samurai's top priority.

Understanding Qualification Value

Let's consider the earlier example of the commercial truck chassis lead card. There are two sections on the card that capture information that could be relevant to the value of the lead, the contact information section and the qualification question section.

How can the contact information be used to better understand the value of this lead? The answer will primarily depend on your understanding of the sales process which will primarily depend on how well you listened to your sales team.

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About You	
Title: O Mr. O Mrs. O Ms. O Dr.	O M O F
First Name:	Last Name:
Company Name:	
Vocation: O Bakery O Laundry O Utility O Delivery O Other _____	
E-mail:	Phone Number: ( ) -
Address:	
City:	State: Zip:

When I put this card together I listened to my sales team and learned a few things that will help me leverage the information on this card. For instance, I know that the four vocations listed are the most important vocations and that any other vocation has significantly less potential. They are all more or less equal in their potential. I could have used the question: are you a bakery, cleaners, utility or delivery service? With a yes/no answer. However, I can use the individual vocations to distribute the leads to the right sales people. Other vocations, such a bus companies or shipping companies, have much less potential. It's not zero, but it'd also not as high as the listed vocations.

I also know that the state is important. The Iron Ox chassis are first shipped to a body company where they are then used to make a laundry truck. The location of these body companies will impact the overall cost of the finished truck. Therefore, certain states have a slightly higher close rate than others simply because Iron Ox is more competitive in those states. Also, if Iron Ox uses a lot of General Motors parts, sales will tend to be higher in areas where there are a lot of General Motors employees, Michigan, for instance, might be a good state to sell Iron Ox chassis.

Lastly, let's say the head of sales of Iron Ox is a woman which is very uncommon in the truck manufacturing world which is male-dominated. Additionally, two of the best sales people are also women. The sales team as a whole has had a lot of success with female buyers giving us a slight edge over the competition when we meet a female buyer. Therefore, leads that are women are more valuable to us than leads that are male. There are considerably more male buyers so we want to make sure any woman buyers move towards the top of the list. It's not a huge factor, but all things being equal we would like to call the woman vs. the man.

This is quite a bit of information to glean from the contact information alone when it comes to rank-ordering the leads. The next set of questions I need to consider are the qualification questions. All the questions in this section are valuable.

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About Your Current Truck(s)
Status: O New Owner (0-3 mo) O Own (3 mo. +) O Shopping (0-6 mo) O Looking (6 mo +)
Type: O Step-Van O Cutaway O Van O Minivan O Other _____
Chassis: O Iron Ox O Ford O Chevy O Workhorse O Other _____
Year: Date Purchased: O New O Used
Manufacturer:
Model:
Average Stops per Day: O 5-10 O 10-20 O 20-40 O 40-80 O 80+
Number of trucks in Fleet: O 0-20 O 20-50 O 50-100 O 100-200 O 200+

Some of the questions in this section can have a huge impact on the value of the lead. Type, for instance, is significant. Iron Ox makes chassis for step-vans and cutaways but, not for vans, minivans or anything else. Therefore, a prospect that wants to buy a van is considerably less value that a prospect that wants to buy a step-van. Of course, it is *possible* for a good sales person to change a buyer's mind, however, it is more difficult. Proper scoring can help the sales person concentrate on the low-hanging fruit.

Assigning Values to Qualification Questions

Assigning an actual value requires you to think through all of the possible qualification questions and consider each of them in relation to the other. For the Iron Ox example here are the attributes that we need to consider:

- Gender
- Vocation
- State
- Status
- Type
- Chassis (brand)
- Year
- Date Purchased
- New/Used
- Manufacturer
- Average Stops per Day
- Number of Trucks in Fleet

Each answer with either *increase* the potential value of the lead or *decrease* the potential value of the lead. For instance, if the attendee is currently shopping for a new truck they are more valuable than someone who is merely looking. Conversely a recent new owner has already been sold so their value as a lead is very low. When assigning points you may actually have to *subtract* points for new owners to make sure they drop to the bottom of the list.

Relative Importance

The first step in assigning value is to rank-order the questions in terms of relative importance to one another. For instance, I mentioned that gender is important, but it's not as important as whether or not

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the attendee is actually in the market for a new truck. Clearly, if the person isn't looking to buy a truck the gender makes no difference. In this case intent to buy is much more important that gender. However, all things being equal, gender is important enough to put one lead ahead of another.

Note that the status question is important enough to bump someone high on the list if they are in the market and low on the list if they are not. If they just bought a truck, the chances of selling them a new one may be small. However, if the attendee manages a fleet, for instance, they may be buying more trucks even if they have recently bought. This isn't clear from the card alone. On the lead card the questions are arranged to mirror the flow of the conversation, not necessarily in terms of importance. This is why it is critical that Trade Show Samurais train properly. The answers to the questions need to be consistent. All Trade Show Samurais need to understand how to complete the card. In this example the Status might apply to the annual buying for the fleet. In other words, recent owner means the fleet order has been placed for the year. A rule could be included in the sales management system to put a contact reminder in six months to capture next year's sales.

You can see how each question and each answer deserves some thoughtful discussion. Be prepared for some debate. At the end of the day perfection isn't the goal. If you have something that is logical and useful you have done your job. Over time if you work with sales and track the results your model will be tweaked and refined until it does what you need it to.

Keep in mind that any amount of thoughtful scoring is better than no scoring at all. Sales will need some direction on where to begin.

Here is how I might rank-order the information on the Iron Ox lead card:

1. Status	5. Average Stops per Day	9. New/Used
2. Type	6. Chassis (brand)	10. Year
3. Vocation	7. Manufacturer	11. Date Purchased
4. Number of Trucks in Fleet	8. State	12. Gender

I put status as the most important because it tells us if the attendee is actively looking for new trucks. Next, the type of truck is important. Iron Ox makes chassis for step vans[22] so other types of trucks aren't a very good fit. In some cases a good sales person can convince someone to buy a step van over another style of truck, but it will depend on other variables. Average Stops per Day, for instance, will be important. The more stops, the better. Step vans are idea for many stops, mini vans are terrible.

Vocation is number three. Unless the attendee is working within one of the listed vocations the chances of making a sale go way down- not impossible, but much lower.

[22] A step van is one of those trucks like UPS uses

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Some rankings are like splitting hairs. Is year more important than new/used? It may not matter but work with sales to get to a place you are comfortable and review it in a few months. They will be able to give you a better feel for the right order.

Gender is last. This is the kind of question that tips the scales when leads are mostly equal. The tiebreaker, by the way, is time. When two leads receive exactly the same score, call the one that was added to the list first. Ultimately, it will be up to sales to review the lead and make the final call.

Relative Value

Now that you have rank-ordered the questions, the next step is to weight them. You know the relative importance. Gender is less important than Status, but how much less important? Does one question trump the other question or are you splitting hairs? Relative Value will help you understand.

Start with a thousand points. You could start with ten points or a million points or six hundred and forty three points or any other number you want, but I find a thousand points does the job quite nicely. Now, allocate the points among all the questions in a way that you think best describes the relative value of the question.

The more important the question the more points it will get. Here is how I might allocate a thousand points across the Iron Ox lead card questions:

Rank	Question	Value
1	Status	200
2	Type	160
3	Vocation	140
4	Number of Trucks in Fleet	125
5	Average Stops per Day	100
6	Chassis (brand)	75
7	Manufacturer	75
8	State	50
9	New/Used	30
10	Year	25
11	Date Purchased	15
12	Gender	5
	Total Points	1000

Now it's pretty clear that status is *way* more important than gender. According to this chart it is 40 times more important. Be prepared to argue these numbers with the other Trade Show Samurais in your team and the sales department. Argument and debate at this point is a good thing. The more points-of-view you understand the better your allocation will be.

By rank-ordering the questions first you can use the above and below questions to help determine the point allocation. In some cases you may find yourself reordering the questions. For instance, I gave items

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six and seven the same value. It's difficult to tell. If I had decided that Manufacturer deserved more points than Chassis I could have easily moved them around in rank-order. This isn't rocket science. Do what feels right.

Assigning Points

Now for the fun part—assigning points to different answers. To do this, you will divide up the allocated points for each question among the answer choices. In some cases you will add points in some cases you will subtract points. It all depends on the answer.

Like everything else in this process, it's all a judgment call. Do what you think makes sense. Work with sales, discuss your choices with the other Trade Show Samurai. Divide up the allocated points for each question among the various answers. As a rule of thumb they should add up to the original allocation.

Here is how I might do it for the Iron Ox example:

Status- 200 Points

Answer	**Points**
New Owner (0-3 mo)	-125
Own (3 mo +)	-75
Shopping (0-6 mo)	75
Looking (6 mo+)	125

Type- 160 Points

Answer	**Points**
Step Van	80
Cutaway	50
Van	20
Minivan	10
Other	0

Vocation- 140 Points

Answer	**Points**
Bakery, Laundry, Utility, Delivery	140
Other	0

Number of Trucks in Fleet- 125 Points

Answer	**Points**
0-20	0
20-50	10

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50-100	25
100-200	50
200+	40

Iron Ox is a smaller supplier and it does best with mid-size fleets. Notice that large fleets of 200+ trucks gets fewer points than the mid-size fleet of 100-200 trucks. All things being equal, Iron Ox sales is more confident in their ability to close a mid-size fleet even though larger fleets have higher revenue potential. This doesn't mean large fleets are bad, they still beat a small fleet, it just means that the mid-size fleet represents low-hanging fruit. This is a common scenario, the really big fish tend to have longer and more complicated sales cycles as well as tougher competition. A lot of companies make a nice living serving the mid market. Yours may be one of them.

Average Stops per Day – 100 Points

Answer	**Points**
5-10	-10
10-20	10
20-40	20
40-80	30
80+	50

As I mentioned before, Iron Ox makes chassis for step vans which are ideal for applications that require frequent stops. 80 stops per day is an extremely high number of stops but some companies, like the post office, for instance, do this every day. They simply cannot do their job without a step-van style truck. Iron Ox is a real contender for these customers.

Applications that require fewer stops have a higher chance of going with an alternative configuration. In this example I actually *deduct* points for companies that require 5-10 stops. This might be an appliance repair company that would be better served with a minivan which is cheaper and more efficient.

Chassis (Brand) – 75 Points

Answer	**Points**
Iron Ox	70
Ford	-5
Chevy	30
Workhorse	-20
Other	0

Anyone who is specifically in the market for an Iron Ox chassis gets a lot of points to bump it up in priority. Also, Chevrolet is no longer in the market so anyone who indicates interest in Chevy can easily be enticed to look closer at Iron Ox. Those searching for "Other" may not know much about the market so they receive a neutral score for this question. Workhorse is among the highest quality chassis on the market and Iron Ox rarely beats them, people interested in Workhorse chassis are hard to convert. The

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same holds true for Ford, but to a lesser extent. Workhorse is a far superior product than a Ford and everybody knows it.

Manufacturer- 75 Points

Answer	Points
Union City Body Company	50
Utilimaster	25

Manufacturer refers to the company builds the truck body itself, Iron Ox only makes the chassis part. It is closely related to chassis and has been allocated the same number of points. However, while there are potentially dozens of different manufacturers, only two of are any significance, Union City Body Company (UCBC) and Utilimaster[23]. Other manufacturers could be companies that make custom bodies like the Oscar Myer Weinermobile. Only the two listed above get points because they are closely integrated with the Iron Ox chassis and generally serve one of the important vocations. UCBC is a better match so it receives more points.

State- 50

Answer	Points
Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio	30
Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, West Virginia	20

Both major body manufacturers are located in Indiana. Iron Ox, therefore, can be more competitive on price if they don't have to ship a completed truck to a far away distance. Additionally, some customers like to visit factories before they purchase. Neighboring states make it easier to offer competitive pricing and accommodate factory visit. This isn't a huge consideration, but enough so that it is worthy of extra points. Adjacent states get more points than other close states. Most states get no points.

Year- 25 Points

Answer	Points
0-2 years	-10
3-5 years	0
5-10 years	15
10+ years	20

Most step vans are extremely durable and have a long useful life, even if use daily. Their sizes don't vary much so capacity is rarely an issue. Step vans are replaced when they wear out. Newer trucks are harder to replace. Older trucks get a higher priority even though it's not uncommon to see an older model on the road. UPS, for instance, has had the same basic design for decades.

[23] These two companies are now one, but the example is made up anyway so I'm going with it...

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Statistical Models

If your company has good data about your customers it may be tempting to hire a fancy-pants statistician to build a statistical model. I don't wear fancy-pants, but I'm smart enough to know that a good statistical model will probably beat the pants off my method; however, the operative word is "good". In my experience it has been difficult to put together a sales dataset that is both large enough and complete enough to conduct a meaningful analysis. This is especially true in a business-to-business setting which encompasses the majority of companies that exhibit at trade shows.

Several years ago I designed a scoring model using the above method to develop a predictive model for college admissions. It scored student-supplied data against a college file *without* using any statistical data. We couldn't use statistical models because the data simply wasn't available. The program worked for virtually any college in the United States and in order to create a statistically valid model we would have had to obtain real admit/deny data from every college. While it may be possible, it certainly wasn't practical.

To test the program we worked with a few colleges who were willing to give us their admit/deny data. Our scored program worked remarkably well. When our program indicated a low chance of admission for a group of students the data showed that only a few students from that group were accepted. When our program indicated a high chance of admission for a group of students the data showed that the majority of students in the group were accepted.

Scored models work well. The trick is to work with Sales, think about the issues and do your best. They can be tweaked over time as new information becomes available. Again, perfection isn't the goal. Productivity is the goal.

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The Dojo

The place where the Trade Show Samurai practices his art is their Dojo, commonly known as the trade show booth or exhibit. It is the portable structure that will be set-up by the time you arrive at the show. I know very little about this process. I've never had to coordinate an actual trade show booth installation in my life. I've either hired someone to do this for me, or I've worked for a company that has somebody who has been "doing the show" for years.

There are a lot of books out there about coordinating a booth or choosing the right conference. If you haven't already figured it out, this is not one of those books. I have two big assumptions. The first is that you have already chosen a show and the second is that you have already figured out how to get your booth there.

For the most part, if you already have a trade show booth, you can probably continue to use it. These days most of the companies I see at shows have a pretty spectacular installation. In most cases a few minor tweaks will allow you to Samuraize your booth so that it is suitable for a Samurai-style strategy.

Samuraizing the Booth

A good trade show booth has everything it needs and nothing it doesn't. Booths do not generate interest and they do not generate traffic. You will generate interest in your company and you will draw the show traffic into your booth. In the trade show world traffic begets traffic. The more you and your fellow Trade Show Samurais engage attendees the more of them will flock towards your booth. I don't care what it looks like. Given the choice between a cheap booth with a good Trade Show Samurai and a beautiful booth with a typical trade show exhibitor, I'd take the Trade Show Samurai any day of the week. A good Samurai with a little 10' x 10' pop-up booth in the back corner can outperform a typical booth ten times the size.

That being said, it's nice to have a big beautiful booth. But always remember, the purpose of the booth is to make you, the Trade Show Samurai, look good and to let people know that your company has its act together.

The booth is essentially a stage set. It will help set the tone, mood and energy level of the experience for the attendee. If your company has a solid brand vision, it should shine through in your booth. If it does not have a solid brand vision, get one.

As a Trade Show Samurai I like to practice the *Art of Frugality* (more later). Therefore I opt for a basic booth with bold graphics as a backdrop to me and my team. Try and confine graphic images to those that won't change from year to year. Product images or web site screen shots, for instance, make bad booth graphics because they will need to be redone for the next show. Stick with company colors and logos.

Avoid words like "quality," "service," and "trust," these are meaningless. Most words on a trade show booth, besides the company name and possibly the tag line, are distractions at best. If your booth

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already has this kind of thing, don't worry about it. You can fix it later. For now, concentrate on the skills of a Trade Show Samurai.

No matter what your booth looks like, make sure you have enough data collection kiosks and that you can arrange the booth equipment to maximize the booth's coastline.

Maximizing Coastline

The booth's coastline is the unobstructed outer edge of the booth perimeter where the booth's carpet meets the exhibit hall's carpet. It is this line that you will straddle when you assume Trade Show Samurai Stance (one foot on your booth's carpet and one foot on the isle).

You will want to have about 1.5 Trade Show Samurais for every ten feet of unobstructed coastline. To prevent human vivisection, simply round up to the nearest Samurai. So, if you have a 10' x 20' booth and only the front 20 feet is unobstructed, you will need three Trade Show Samurais to properly staff it.

An *obstructed* coastline is one that can't easily be accessed because it is blocked by another exhibit or part of your own booth. I see a lot of booths that have exterior walls; this design is devastating to a Trade Show Samurai-style strategy.

It is important to keep coastline in mind when choosing the right location for your booth. The more sides of your booth you have exposed, the more coastline you will have. A 10' x 20' booth will accommodate only three Trade Show Samurais if it is in-line with other booths. A corner position will open up another ten feet of coastline accommodating five Trade Show Samurais. A peninsula position will open up yet another twenty feet and accommodate eight Trade Show Samurais. And, the coveted island position will open up another ten feet and accommodate nine Trade Show Samurais. You will be three times as productive in an island position than an in-line position.

Nine people in a 10' x 20' booth are a lot of people. You will need to minimize the amount of stuff you have in your booth. The first thing to go should be tables and chairs.

Yes, I said it, lose the tables and chairs. For some reason there are few statements that illicit such heated debate at this one. People love their tables and chairs. And for good reason, it is nice to sit at a table with your laptop open. You can quietly check your email and sip coffee while attendees wander by.

By now you fully understand that this is not the way of the Trade Show Samurai. As a Trade Show Samurai you are always active, always alert and always on your feet. Therefore, tables and chairs are the *worst* pieces of furniture you can have in a trade show booth. There are exceptions to every rule, but Trade Show Samurais never sit on their butts at a trade show. It is virtually impossible to kick ass and take names if you are sitting on your ass.

Maximizing coastline also requires that you minimize the products in your booth. Many companies bring *every* product in their entire line. It is painful to think that every product does not need to go to every show, but unless the product is serving a function in the Trade Show Samurai-style strategy, they should

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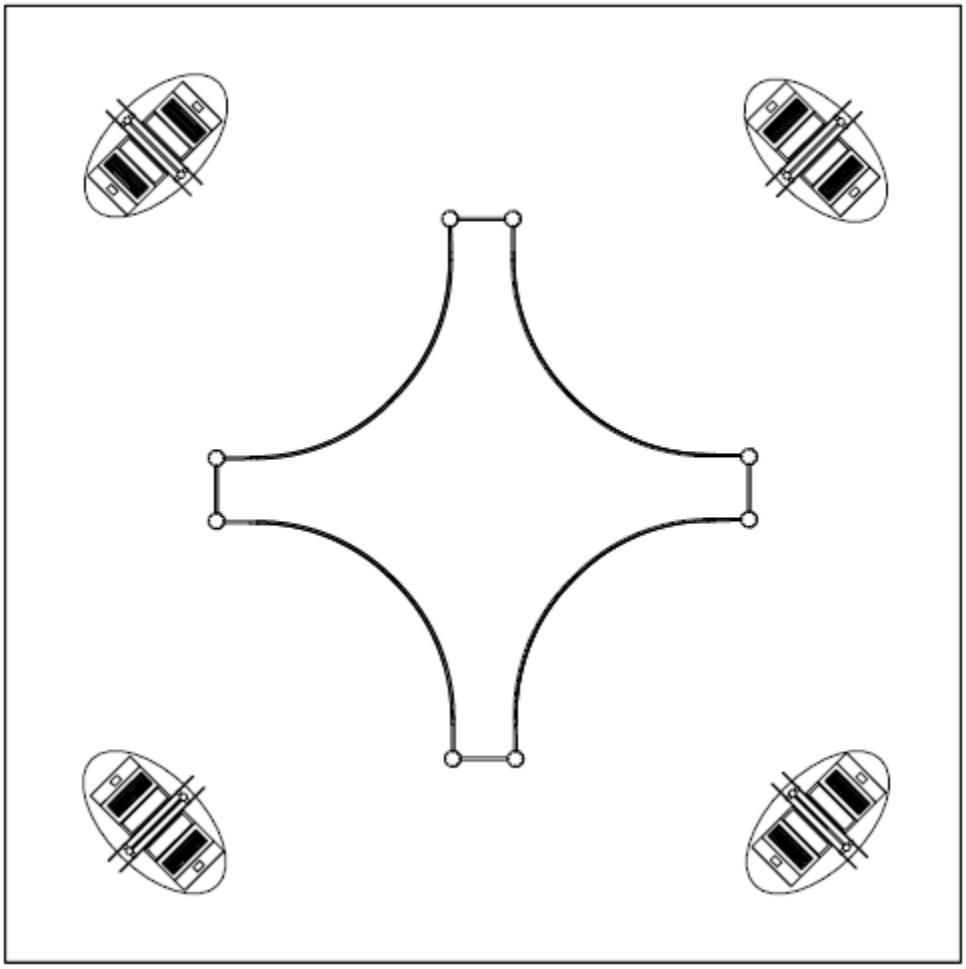
not be there. This is especially true if you have a narrow island booth like the one I mentioned before.



This 20' x 20' Island with plenty of open coastline has eight data-entry kiosks and a center feature that allows for the neat storage of crap.

Truth be told, a 10' x 20' island booth is exceedingly rare. But 20' x 20' booths are common and will allow space in the middle for the right products because Trade Show Samurai will usually be working the coastline.

Demo Demons

Space isn't the only factor when dealing with products. I also discourage products because they are a major distraction and even a brief conversation about products can kill precious time. For many companies, the trade show is an important milestone in the year. It is the time where they launch new products and services. For this reason it is overwhelmingly tempting to bring your products will you or to [gasp] set up a live demo.

Far too often, however, demo products are in prototype or "beta" form. "Beta" is a codeword for "doesn't work". I can't tell you how many times I've seen a new product on the show floor only to hear

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things like: “this will be green for the production version,” or, “the production version won’t have this smell.”

I once knew a company that spent about $50,000 on a prototype for a silly toolbox that attached to the wall. The product was literally *in pieces* before the show even opened! The people who managed that company were pretty dimwitted to begin with, but this move was really short-sighted.

Live software demos are the same. The most common comment is “wow, the Internet sure is slow.” Internet connections at conference centers are notorious for behaving badly. Do not rely on them for anything!

There are demons that take over your demos, they hate you and they will bring you down.

The right way to used products in your booth is to first, make them part of your pitch and two, make them talk.

Talking Products

A talking product is one that is designed to help you explain it better to attendees. You can do this by using exploded or cutaway versions of the product and using cards and labels, sometimes called “Silent Salespeople” to highlight specific features that you want to concentrate on. For instance, let’s say you are a gun case manufacturer with a new waterproof gun case. Cut the case in half and use labels to call-out the inner workings of the case like the seal, the latch and the compartments. This makes the product talk in that is it now part of the conversation instead of just being a prop.

Iron Ox chassis, for instance, may be tempted to bring some chassis with them. This is very expensive. They should take care to call out the features that are most important. Using cutaway parts and labels will help the Trade Show Samurai walk the attendee through the sales pitch and keep on track. The conversation will stay structured and you can avoid “getting into it” with the attendee. The power of the pitch is that is specific and concise. Talking products help keep the conversation that way.

You can also use talking groups of products. For instance, I once did some work for a company that manufactured fishing tackle boxes. I implemented a point-of-sale program that increased sales by over 100%. I also reorganized their product line and updated the overall look to be more consistent. Now the products could be displayed as different groups and card and labels could be used to highlight the value of the group of products as opposed to individual features. This called attention to the retail business strategy behind the product line and how the retailers (attendees) could appeal to different groups.

Busy Bodies

I said before that booth traffic begets booth traffic. It is not uncommon for even the best Trade Show Samurai-run booth to start getting backed-up with attendees who are milling around trying to see what all the activity is about. And, while it is certainly possible to handle attendees in small groups (especially if they are together anyway), many attendees won’t have the patience to wait to speak with you. And, finding no easy access to crap, they will depart.

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Talking products can help keep them around. Your booth turns into a little museum of interesting facts that can hold an attendees attention for a good five to ten minutes which is plenty of time to get to them. Keep the bodies busy in your booth, even when they aren't speaking to you, it will serve you well.

Videos

The same concept applies to software or intangible products. Instead of having live demos of your products which are time consuming and doomed to failure, you should have a looping three to four minute video showing the important aspects of your product in general terms.

For an even better effect, get a few users and customers on film talking about how awesome you are. Get as many video testimonials as possible and do a continuous loop. Sprinkle in testimonials from different types of users. These short videos will keep your backlog in the booth long enough for you to get to them.

A video can be set up using an external monitor on the data collection kiosk. You can be typing away on one side of the kiosk and attendees can be watching a video on the other side. This saves on equipment costs and keeps the attendees close by.

To see some sample kiosk videos check out TradeShowSamurai.com.

Kiosks

By now you've heard me mention the data collection kiosks many times. These kiosks are an essential part of the Trade Show Samurai-style strategy because they convert the lead data into electronic format so that it can be score and distributed to the sales teams in record time.

Kiosks are tables with just enough room for a laptop and a video monitor if you have one. They will also accommodate a badge-zapper. The electronic lead card is set up on the laptop so you can enter the data as you speak with an attendee. It's nice to have custom kiosks that match your booth, but most conferences will rent tall tables that will serve the same function. You won't need the chairs.

If at all possible, use dedicated laptops for this purpose. Try not to use your personal computer. Never mind the fact that they can be easy targets for theft. It is important to have all the kiosks in good working order. Ask you IT department to test each machine before it leaves and let the Trade Show Samurais carry the kiosk computers with them on the airplane.

As a rule of thumb, you will need a kiosk for every Trade Show Samurai in your booth. If space is an issue, try for at least one kiosk for every ten feet of coastline in your booth. This will mean that Trade Show Samurais will slightly outnumber the kiosks, but they should be able to take turns.

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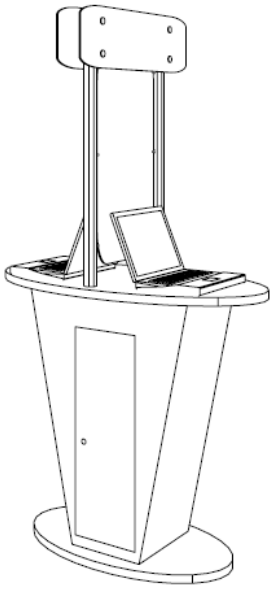

This data-entry kiosk has two laptops with electronic lead cards on both. One the door offers easy access to crap. One of the laptops could be swapped out for a video monitor.

Badge-zappers can be expensive to rent, but in the grand scheme of things they are worth it. In rare cases you can have one or two central kiosks. This would be a circular counter with one or two people behind it. The Trade Show Samurais would take attendees over to the kiosk to have their badge scanned or data entered. This system works best when there is a need to distributed controlled crap like expensive product samples or price lists. The attendee would receive this information after coughing up some professional information.

Crap Caddies

You will need to bring a basket or box to keep your crap. Crap should never be easily accessible by attendees. If it is they will help themselves and keep walking.

I used to work for a company that passed out caps. We kept them in tall baskets next to the kiosks so we could grab them easily. It was awkward for an attendee to help themselves because it was so close to the kiosk.

The ABC's of Booth Etiquette

When it comes to the booth, just remember ABC—Always Be Cleaning. The correct time to clean the booth is whenever you get a second. If there is a short lull in booth activity, clean. Clean, clean, clean. Trade Show Samurai's know better than to eat or drink at the booth. Eating and drinking is sloppy and disrespectful to attendees.

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I was recently at the Everything Organic Expo in Chicago where I say a couple of booth staffers sitting at the table and chairs eating take-out from *McDonalds*. What could be more inappropriate at an organic foods conference? Clearly these people didn't care about their image.

When a Trade Show Samurai gets hungry or thirsty they good take a quick break for a quick bite—outside of the booth.

Be crazy-clean about the booth. Discard any and all food containers that attendees may have left behind. Bring some Windex wipes and wipe down the video screens and kiosks whenever they get slightly dusty. Remove completed lead cards from the clipboards and put them in a safe, very safe, place. Make sure the staplers have staples. Make sure all the Samurais have lead cards. Make sure everyone looks nice. Fill the Crap Caddies.

You can never be too anal about your booth. All Trade Show Samurais should work together to make sure it looks fresh.

Modular Packaging

While many companies have the "one big show" per year, there may be a smattering of smaller, regional shows that draw a more local audience. The Trade Show Samurai doesn't need much to perform at these shows. A simple, 10' x 10' booth is usually pretty inexpensive and a small pop-up booth, clean and simple, can serve as a nice backdrop. Pop-up booths usually come in a storage container that doubles as a kiosk.

Most modern trade show booths are fairly easy to assemble, even large booths. And, while you can hire people to assemble them for you, it can be expensive. I like to assemble my own booth whenever possible. Pop-up designs are nice because they are light and portable and easy to assemble.

If you order a new booth, make sure you ask the trade show company to create something you can build yourself, if possible. Also, be sure to request modular packaging. This means they pack individual components of the booth in separate cases. You can have each kiosk packed in its own case. This is important, even if you spend slightly more money.

With the right design, a large trade show booth can be split up to create two or more smaller booths. If they are packaged by individual component you can run two or more smaller shows with the same equipment as one larger show.

For instance, if each kiosk is packed in its own case you can simply ship the number of kiosks you need. Often, trade show booth companies pack different pieces of different booth components in the same cases to save space. For example, they may pack all the countertops in one box and all the legs in another. You want one set of legs, one countertop and associated hardware in once case.

This comes in handy when you attend the regional shows.

Dojo Nirvana

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It is much easier to reach trade show Nirvana with the right Dojo. Your booth creates the context within which you will deliver your powerful message. It is your temple. Make it work for you.

The right booth will have plenty of open space and just enough kiosks so that all the bodies are busy. It will be clean all the time and create an inviting environment that reflects the personality of your business.

The rest is up to the Trade Show Samurai.

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The Art of Frugality- ROI

It all adds up. Trade Shows run the risk of being a marketing money pit unlike any other. Costs range from those big lump-sums like the booth, the space and the travel to those little nickel & dime costs like union drayage and supplies. While there are some companies that have a pretty good handle on these costs it is easy to lose track of them. It can be a mess.

Combine the cost of the booth and exhibiting expense with hosting parties, paying for hospitably suites and entertaining would-be clients. The monster grows and grows. I once worked for a company that spent over $300,000 on a hotel room tab (it was before I got there!)

Because lead-generation is so low in most trade show exhibits measuring Return On Investment (ROI) is often a meaningless practice. Consider the ROI formula:

(Total Sales – Total Cost of the Show) ÷ Total Cost of the Show= Return on Investment

This nice thing about this formula, and the reason it is so popular, is that it is the true measure of a trade show's value yet it's nearly impossible to calculate. For these two reasons it is perfect. Everyone will agree that it's the right measurement, but nobody will know how to actually get the right numbers together so they can calculate it. So, it gets put off until the whole idea becomes moot. This usually takes a year or so and by that time you are busy planning for the next show.

Total Sales is impossible to measure because there are no real leads generated from the show. Salespeople sometimes attribute them to the show, but more often than not they will chalk them u to good networking on their part. Salespeople rarely admit that marketing really helped them out.

Total Cost of the Show is easier to measure but it is often spread over a number of different accounting codes such as exhibit, direct mail, advertising, travel, blah, blah, blah. The marketing department must ask the accounting department to jump through hoops to get a reliable number. Keeping cost tracking in mind for future shows, however, accounting departments can probably assign a project code for allocating show costs across departments.

Because the ROI on a trade show is so nebulous, however, it's the perfect time to go a little nuts with the spending. The team goes ahead and orders the lobster and buys the extra drink and takes a cab, rather than the shuttle. The costs somehow get allocated across and between departments and nobody seems to really be paying attention. The problem is real. I once saw a man order a $150 *appetizer*. Ouch.

Frugality is rarely a consistent component of a trade show mostly because it's so hard to track. However, Trade Show Samurai practice the **Art of Frugality** at each show and they do it by applying a practical measurement called Cost per Lead (CPL).

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Cost Per Lead

CPL is the right way to measure the effectiveness of your trade show effort because it is much easier to manage than ROI. You still have the problem of measuring costs, but you eliminate the tougher problem of measuring related sales.

Here is the formula for measuring CPL:

Total Costs ÷Total Leads = Cost per Lead

This elusive little equation is at the heart of the Trade Show Samurai's existence, but it's rarely calculated or tracked by companies because it would reveal the Dark Truth. It's a number that is too painful to face for most companies. Calculating this number would be a total embarrassment for most trade show organizers. Too few leads and too many dollars make everyone who participates look bad.

However painful it might be, it is an important measure that should not be overlooked. The mere implication that you will be measuring CPL is enough to make people not only rethink what they are spending money on, but also make them more careful about collecting leads.

For traditional style trade show strategies the CPL is obscenely high. Think about it. If I spend $100,000 on the trade show and only come back with two leads the CPL is $50,000 each. Chances are the leads aren't even qualified, but let's pretend they are qualified. Unless you are selling airplanes or tanks $50,000 is probably too much to spend. It's painful to even think about it which is why most people choose not to.

When you think about the show in terms of CPL the painful reality of wasting money sets in because, for the responsible employee, spending $50,000 to get a business card is simply not an option. The only way to concretely justify the cost is to lower the CPL. There are two ways to lower CPL: the first is to increase the number of leads you capture and the second is to lower the cost of the show.

Trade Show Samurai are sensitive to both of these techniques and practice the Art of Frugality. Trade Show Samurai do not waste money.

More Leads

Most of what this book has covered is how to generate more leads at a trade show. By now you should understand that a lead isn't a lead until it is qualifiable and that a fishbowl of business cards do not a lead make. Trade Show Samurai honor sales and we must respect their time by providing insightful material.

Collecting leads is a good thing and it is the most important part of your trade show effort. When it comes to the Art of Frugality, the Trade Show Samurai understands that every new lead they collect will lower the average CPL for the entire show. Therefore, collecting good, qualifiable leads is my number one priority.

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That being said, however, you will reach a point of diminishing returns with lead collection alone. In other words, there is a point at which collecting leads begins to have a minimal impact on CPL.

Think about it. Using the example above, let's say your entire show costs $100,000. After you get your first lead your average CPL is $100,000. When you add your next lead the average CPL is $50,000 an so on. Early on the reduction in Average CPL drops dramatically. However, by the time you get to 100 leads the decreases are smaller. When you reach your 100th lead your average CPL is $1,000. Add one more and your Average CPL drops from $1,000 to $990- a mere $10 drop. The drop in average CPL between your 500th and 501st is about 40 cents.

So there is good news and bad news. The good news is that you have 500 awesome, qualifiable leads that cost about $200 each, the bad news is that it's harder to lower your Average CPL.

Important: this does *not* mean that there is a point at which collecting leads is no longer worthwhile, it simply means that to lower CPL you need to find ways to lower the overall cost of the show.

Divide and Conquer

When considering other ways to reduce the Average CPL you need to consider what pieces of your trade show effort is lead-generating and which are not. For instance, you may be one of those companies who host a customer-appreciation reception. The point of this reception is not to generate leads, but to mingle with customers and thank them for all the money they threw your way over the past year. If this effort is important to your marketing efforts then go for it, but consider it a separate expense. Just because the party is going on at the same time in the same town as your trade show, does not mean it is a lead-generating expense. Divide this out. Similarly, if you have salespeople who travel to the show and sit in client meetings all day you should remove them too. A sales meeting can happen anywhere at any time. Just because it is happening at the show does not make it a lead-generating effort.

Stripping out cost that are not directly related to capturing leads will give you a better understanding of your true CPL. If you isolate other costs you will not over-inflate the CPL.

Please note that this is not just a simple accounting trick to justify the show. In fact, it is quite the opposite. When you divide and conquer you will be building a better understanding of the true value of the show and, if your goal is to collect leads, you will be able to cut any efforts that aren't directly related to that effort.

Years ago I was the vp of marketing for a company that sold financial market data to trading firms. The company was having a hard time finding new sales opportunities post-9-11 because their sweet spot, day traders, had been dropping like flies.

The company had been exhibiting for over 20 years at the Securities Industry Association conference and they had never been able to attribute any leads or actual sales to the show. The year my team, who were trained as Trade Show Samurai, took over we cut the budget by about 80% and came back with 700 leads for the sales team. We did this by cutting anything that wasn't directly tied to generating

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leads. This meant we cut the hospitality suite and the big dinner and all the things that we didn't feel were going to move the needle.

Don't get me wrong, parties and drinks and treats may be an important part of the show for your company. But when it comes down to go or no go, you may be able to justify going on a bare bones budget and have a great show. Too many companies cut trade shows from their budget because they are unable to measure the success or assess the value.

Tchotchkes

There is often an uncontrollable urge to spend money on tchotchkes at the show. As mentioned before, these are great tools during the Art of Disengagement. However, keep in mind that passing out tchotchkes introduces a variable cost to your CPL that will eventually cancel out any savings. I once worked with a guy who insisted that we give everyone a baseball cap. We generated well over 1,000 leads. A $2 cap added $2 to the cost of each lead. If the leads cost a few hundred dollars anyway this cost may be negligible. However, keep in mind that most Tchotchkes wind up in the trash.

Comparing Apples to Apples

When you use CPL as the primary measure for your trade show efforts you can easily compare the cost of a lead from the show to the cost of a lead through other sources like direct mail, for instance[24].

[24] Assuming that you do track costs on other projects.

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- http://www.skyline.com/files/xls/tst_budget.xls

The Wandering Samurai- being an attendee

- Lead cards

The Separation of Church and State

- Separate budgets for banquets, advertising, etc.
    - Isolate battle zones

Samurai Defense- FAQs

- Sales won't let me get rid of the tables and chairs
    - First, it gets in between you and the attendees leaving you little control over the physical space. Second, it prevents you from working the edge of the booth carpet where you would assume the show stance. Third, it often serves as a display surface for crap and Trade Show Samurais never provide self-service access to crap.
    -
- We have a really fat guy in our sales department; he can't stand up all day.
- We have really large products
- It's not about the leads for us.
- All people want to talk about in our booth is tech support.
- The marketing department is just me, how can I staff the booth
- Sales really wants to print up post-it notes and pass them out
- Nobody can make it to our training sessions
- The other exhibitors make fun of us
- My industry is different
    - I've had the good fortune to have worked at a senior-level in a wide variety of organizations. They all have trade shows. For the most part trade shows are all the same. I like to think of them as a magazine with a pulse. The speaker sessions are the articles and the exhibit hall are the ads.
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The Ongoing Quest

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It originates from the samurai moral code and stresses frugality, loyalty, martial arts mastery, and honor untildeath.

Most exhibitors do it wrong. Their lack of success will be apparent and they will fear you. They will make snide comments and, in some cases, they will make fun of you outright. They will criticize the size of the booth, they will criticize your uniform, they will criticize your approach, they will think you are too aggressive, they will think they better understand the industry than you. They will try to bring you down to their level. They will sit on their asses and fail- you will not. You have a mission and a plan to succeed. They are losers, they will stay losers and you will benefit from them being losers.

The purpose of the booth:

> We have a booth to make a memorable impression. It does not do our work for us; it only exists as a backdrop to our work. Without us in the booth the booth is worthless.

The purpose of the uniform:

> We wear a uniform that makes us look like a team with their act together. It is different than other uniforms in that it stands out from the crowd. When you wear the uniform you may feel self-conscious- good. This isn't the army, we don't wear camouflage, we dress to stand out.

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Do's

Do get rid of all tables and chairs- It is not possible to succeed sitting in a chair behind a table. Losers sit on their ass and miss names- winners kick ass and take names. You can't kick ass if you're sitting on your ass.

Do be anal about the booth- Make sure the booth looks great. Remove all trash, keep surfaces clean, keep clutter off the kiosks and around the computers. You must look like you have your act together.

Do arrive early and stay to the bitter end- Losers get bored and wrap up early. The best leads are often captured at the end. Attendees who stick around late are the people who really care and are there to learn. They aren't with the crowd, they are trying to find help- be there for them.

Do set goals- know how much it costs to go to the show, know how many names you need to take in order for the show to be worth it. Get them, don't quit until you do.

Do always be on- you never know when or where you'll meet a prospect at a show. You may get some in the hotel lobby after hours, you may get them in the airport, you may sit next to a prospect on the airplane (don't sit with coworkers for this reason), you may meet them at dinner.

Do know your pitch- have a 30-second pitch for all types of prospects and know it cold. Know the answers to the tough questions. Loser draw blanks, winners know the pitch. You don't have to know everything- you can always kick their ass and take their name so you can get back to them with other information.

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Don'ts

Don't sit on your ass in the booth- you have no chairs so this should be easy

Don't eat or drink in the booth- it looks sloppy and it will get in your way of kicking ass. Step away from the booth to eat. If you must have a drink, hide it out of site.

Don't put anything on the kiosks except for the computers- *never* put food or drinks on the kiosks (see above). Avoid putting stacks of cards or pens or collateral materials on the kiosks. Find a SAFE place to keep clipboards handy but out of the way.

Don't stand behind a table- tables are a crutch

Don't think someone is going to get back to you- they won't. Get back to them.

Don't worry about making mistakes- it's better to try than to fear rejection

Don't worry when someone tells you "No"- but don't always take no for an answer- you'd be surprised how often you can convert.

Don't pat yourself on the back- be frugal at shows, meet your goals and let your manager treat you while you're on the road. If your manager isn't there then keep to the plan and your work will show for itself. Shows are hard work. You deserve rewards when you do a good job

Conferences and tradeshows aren't rocket science, but, they are designed and managed by people who make money putting on tradeshows. These people don't know your business. Also, you will not find any good examples of a properly executed exhibit strategy from other exhibitors. They simply don't exist. They all suck. Sometimes you'll find a good idea here or

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there but most people, even the ones who have “been doing it for years” completely and utterly suck at executing.

Most people show up, sit on their ass and wait for people to stop by. Even the good marketers and the aggressive sales people still rely on stupid tactics that will never produce results.

Your job is a job well done if, and only if:

You leave with enough hot and warm leads to more than cover the cost of the show.

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