



TITLE: Trade Show Best Practices

AUTHOR: Russ Ziegler, Connect

About the Author:

Russ Ziegler is the Founder of Connect Sales, Coaching and Consulting, focused on helping OEMs and dealers strengthen performance through education, operational alignment, and measurable accountability. With more than fifteen years in the dealer distribution space, he has trained hundreds of professionals and supported dealerships across the United States in improving sales, profitability, and whole-dealer health.

Trade shows are often one of the largest single expenses in an OEM's marketing and channel development budget. Booth space, travel, displays, sponsorships, and entertainment add up quickly. Yet too often, organizations attend because their competitors will be there, or because "we always do this show."

That is not enough. If you are not deliberate, you risk spending six figures for very little return.

Define What a Win Looks Like

Before committing to a show, leadership needs to be crystal clear on objectives. Are you there to:

- Build customer demand for new products?
- Recruit and sign new dealers?
- Deepen relationships with existing partners?
- Launch a new solution or technology?

Different objectives require different booth strategies, staffing plans, and follow-up processes. A company trying to recruit dealers will look very different from one trying to generate end-user leads. Success cannot be measured if success was never defined.



The Connect Channel

Do Not Let the Follow-Up Slip Away

Every show ends the same way: your team leaves with a stack of business cards, a list of badge scans, and the exhaustion that comes from three long days of standing, pitching, and networking. Then real life at the office takes over, and the best leads slip away in the fog of “catching up.”

The ROI is not in the booth — it is in the follow-up. That means:

- Assigning clear accountability for lead distribution.
- Categorizing leads immediately (hot, warm, cold).
- Having a pre-planned cadence of outreach ready before the show starts.
- Tracking conversions all the way through the sales funnel.

Without disciplined follow-up, the trade show becomes little more than an expensive branding exercise.

Learn, Rate, and Decide

A deliberate approach also means looking backward with honesty. Did the show deliver the expected outcomes? What was the cost per lead or cost per dealer signed? Did the quality of attendees justify the expense?

Too many organizations roll into the next year’s booth without ever pausing to evaluate. The most effective OEMs hold a post-show review, assign measurable outcomes, and adjust strategy accordingly. Sometimes that means doubling down. Sometimes it means walking away.

The Bottom Line

Trade shows can absolutely be worth the spend — if they are approached deliberately. Define what a win looks like, prepare for the follow-up before you arrive, and evaluate results with clear eyes. OEMs who expect their teams and dealers to treat shows with this level of discipline will see far stronger returns on one of the biggest annual line items in their budget.

Build stronger OEM–Dealer results through clarity, alignment, and measurable performance.
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