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SUCCESS BY DESIGN

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Engagement - Creating Connections with Customers

# Engagement

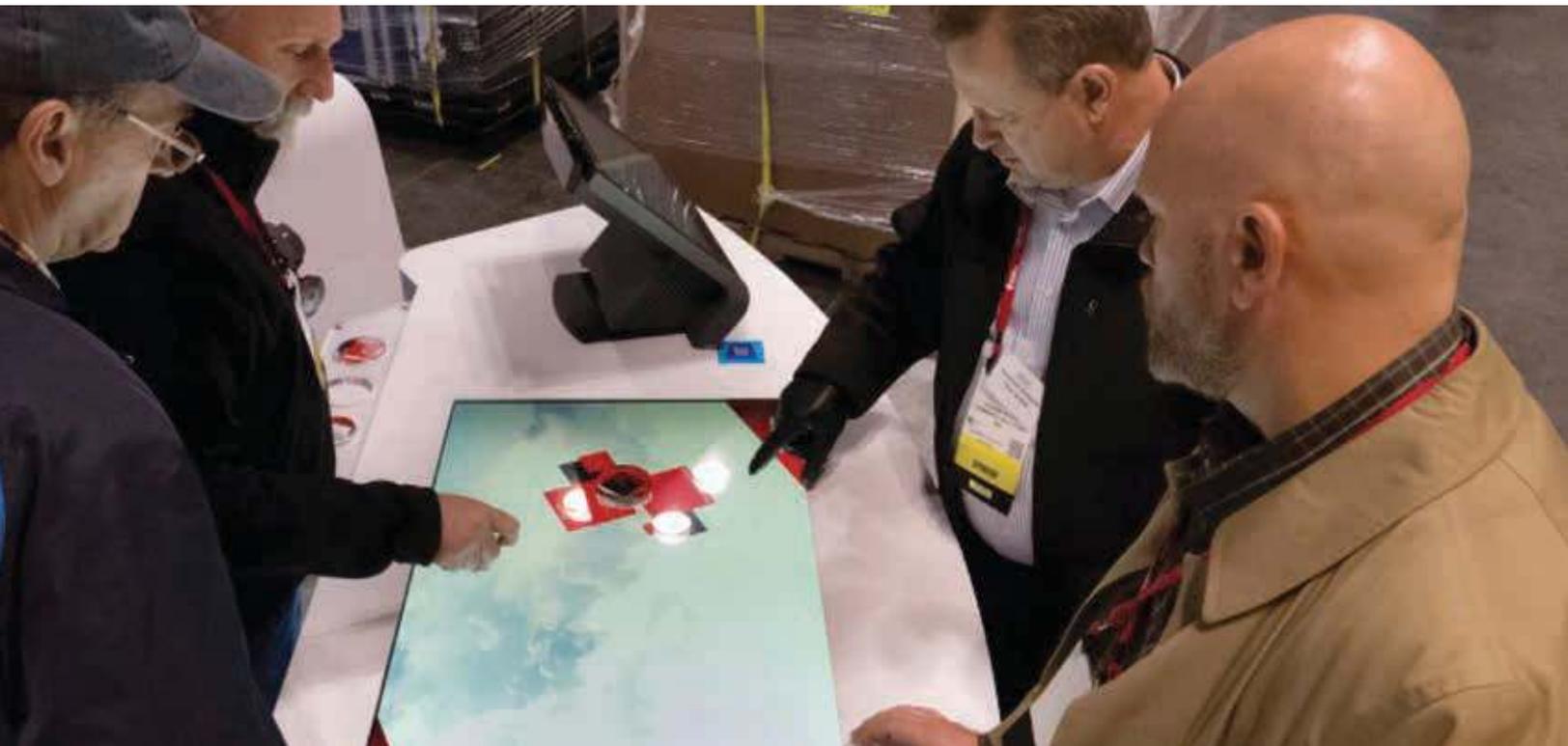
## *Creating Connections with Customers*

*Exhibiting at a trade show or an industry event is an opportunity to meet and engage existing and potential customers. Exhibitus believes that to assure a successful outcome, an exhibit program must be built on a foundation of excellent DESIGN – design that captures the attention and facilitates the engagement of all target audiences.*

*At Exhibitus, we rely on “Smart Design” – an exhibit design approach based on the principles of collaboration, empathy and human behavior found in Design Thinking. This process ensures that our customers effectively interact with their customers and prospects using a program that meets the goals and objectives of their company.*

*At the heart of this process, is engagement. To engage is defined as “to establish a meaningful contact or connection with.” For the exhibit industry, the “with” is an identified target audience, such as existing customers the company would like to retain, or a pool of prospects qualified to do business with the company that could be converted into customers.*

*In this white paper, we will take a closer look at the role of engagement in the exhibit environment and provide examples of the types of engagements that have helped clients successfully attract attendees.*



# Customers are the Key

It is simple. Customers are the key to a sustainable business model. Building a good relationship with customers is the foundation for a business's long-term success. To do so in today's competitive world that is full of options, a company must provide individualized service, maintain customer loyalty and interact constructively with the customer to establish a meaningful relationship.

In other words, businesses must rely on the heart-and-soul of business transactions: human-to-human connections. Every day your company is easing pain points and solving problems for your customers. Even in today's online world, people at one end of cyberspace are offering products or services that provide a positive customer experience for those at the other end.

If you want to keep your current customers in the fold and attract new ones, you must engage them. And what better place to begin the engagement process with customers and prospects than at a trade show, a user conference or a similar marketing event where you can meet them in person. These face-to-face interactions build trust and understanding, creating a real sense of shared mission that is essential to brand loyalty.

# Marketing Has Evolved

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, held in London in 1851, marks the beginning of the modern trade shows, with some 10,000 objects displayed along more than 10 miles by over 15,000 contributors. The idea behind this exhibition was to present to the world manufactured products that demonstrated the great achievements of the industrial revolution.



Working machinery was one of the most popular exhibits. For instance, visitors could observe the entire process of cotton production from spinning to finished cloth.

As impressive as this Exhibition was, in today's world of technology prowess and a complicated competitive landscape, simply viewing a product display or seeing a description of services will not entice even the most enthusiastic attendees. Even the demo-station approach so popular in the early years of computer software now rarely influences a prospect to consider spending time in a booth.

Marketing has become a much more active, experience-based endeavor. Activities that garner success are now dependent on the power of human interactions. Thus, engagements within a trade show booth must tap into a behavior or a piece of the psyche of attendees that result in meaningful connections.

# Engagement Defined

Forrester, a research and advisory firm, defines customer engagement as "creating deep connections with customers that drive purchase decisions, interactions and participation over time." (Sashi, 2012). Customer engagement begins as a social interchange and evolves depending on the quality of the relationship and what both sides gain as a result of the relationship.

There are many components that influence the quality of the relationship such as:

- **Vigor** – the level of energy shown during an interaction.
- **Dedication** – the sense of belonging as a customer; the customer is proud of the firm they associate themselves with.
- **Absorption** – when a customer is completely happy and deeply engrossed in the relationship.
- **Interactions** – the many connections between the brand and the customer.

As you can see, business engagements over the long term are complex. But unless the initial interaction between a company and the prospect is positive and both parties feel a true sense of engagement, the relationship needed for fruitful transactions will most likely not occur. Successful engagement at marketing events is now a critical component on the path to turning prospects into valuable customers.

## How to Connect

What approach is best to make sure attendees want to engage? Fortunately, there are many different ways to create an engagement that will draw a steady stream of customers and prospects to your exhibit. Engagement doesn't have to involve a high-tech solution, although in today's world technology is often the foundation used to grab attention.

Most importantly, content drives technology. The approach that describes your brand and your specific messages for the event should be developed prior to choosing any platform.

In the following discussion, we will provide examples of four different approaches, all demonstrated by sophisticated, leading-edge technology. In subsequent publications on this topic, we will demonstrate these and other approaches using "low-tech" or "no-tech" engagement solutions to pique your visitors' interest.



# Tell Them a Story

One of the most effective ways to connect is through the art of storytelling. Storytelling has sustained human beings throughout our development by providing a way to entertain and educate, thereby creating a shared experience. Researchers have found that stories actually release chemicals in the brain that trigger empathy and help you lose yourself in the narrative. No wonder you scream when someone jumps out from behind a door in a scary movie!

In the business world, storytelling becomes a powerful way to understand the goals and objectives of the market you serve. This shared experience can be the first step in making a “message” stick in the mind of an attendee.

A major shift in the evolution of marketing has been that companies have walked away from “let me tell you about my company and its products” to an approach of learning about the details of what customers and prospects need and what they are trying to accomplish, i.e., their journey through the purchase decision and beyond.

With this information, a company can develop empathy for the prospect’s needs and can tailor the description of the benefits of their products and services to offer solutions based on requirements.

Toshiba Global Commerce Solutions understands that its customers are looking for a seamless customer experience when they head to a retail outlet. The company based the story they told at the National Retail Federation (NRF) in 2017 on the following:

*People are changing the way they shop. They demand personalization and engaging shopping experiences, product information and recommendations at the touch of a button, and a smooth and secure checkout.*



Toshiba labeled this evolution in retail as **Brilliant Commerce** and built their interactive displays to demonstrate this advancement.

The company’s primary objective for the show was to ensure that attendees left the booth understanding how the organization’s hardware and software solutions could provide a positive shopping experience for both its retail customers and the consumers they serve.

The engagement solution needed to not only illustrate the complete story, but also offer the opportunity for a company representative and an attendee to delve into any aspect of the solution set that particularly resonated with the attendee.

They began by mapping the steps of the shopping journey a customer might take according to two scenarios: a retail specialty store experience and a mass merchandiser experience. Each of these stories demonstrated three key pillars needed for success:

- Actionable Insights
- Enriched Shopping
- Frictionless Checkout



The details of these journeys were displayed graphically on two 10'x20' "raw wood" walls using conductive ink technology. In short, conductive ink allows for various surfaces to become live circuits for digital technology. For Toshiba, the ink was screen-printed onto the wood based on graphics depicting the steps of the journey. The conductive ink was then wired to a special board which connected to the walls, triggering both sound and visual reactions with a touch. The animation that happened with the touch projected onto the walls from multiple projectors mounted about the exhibit.

When visitors touched a certain item for purchase, light animations activated to tell the story of how that item would make its way from the store shelf to a consumer's home, relying on the company's retail products and systems along the way.

As the light traveled over the various stages of the display, the company's representatives had the opportunity to provide additional information about the activity, explain the features of the equipment being used and the type of data being captured for marketing decisions in the future. Each step in the process is an opportunity to further explain that phase and answer any questions that the attendee might have.

**“Words are how we think; stories are how we link.”**

- Christina Baldwin, author of *“The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair”*



## Make the Details Come to Life

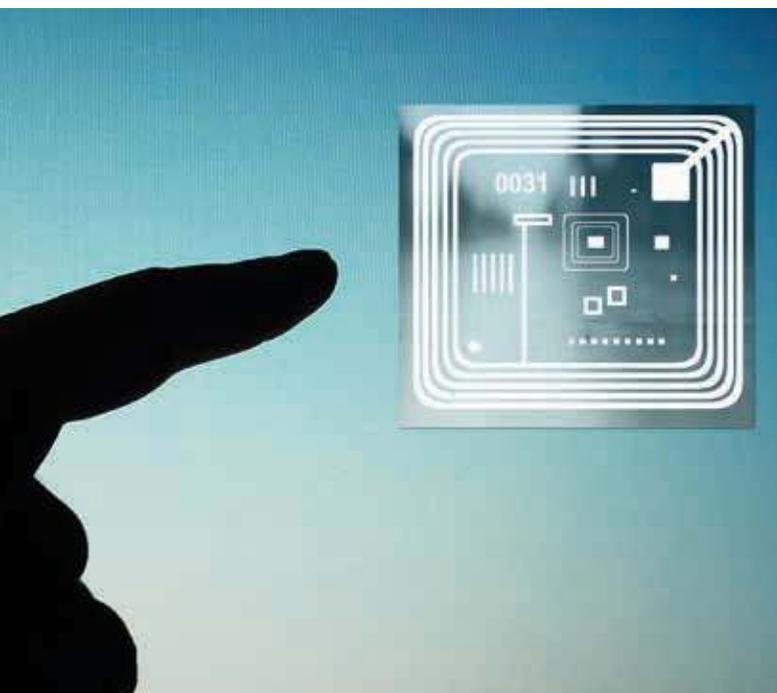
Radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology uses electromagnetic fields to automatically identify and track tags attached to objects. RFID is a simple way to monitor attendees as they move around an event. But exhibitors have found that RFID integrated into a table or counter offers a tactile experience that works well for displaying detailed information about complex products.

Tactile learning means you learn by touching and doing. You understand and remember things through physical movement. Learning through touch and manipulation of objects has been found to be valuable, as it nurtures curiosity about the physical world. Just the small amount of tactile movement involved in an RFID table has shown to increase an attendee's engagement and interest in product details.

MBX Systems is a technology company that manages hardware programs for independent software vendors (ISVs) and service providers that deploy their software on hardware appliances. It is complicated work and often challenging to describe in conversations with potential customers.

At a recent show, the company used a table topped with a graphic display of the various components of one of their complex solutions. On the table are pucks painted with icons that represent components in the solution. As the puck is moved over the area of the graphic with the same icon, the RFID chip in the puck reads information on an RFID tag embedded in the graphic. This information is immediately displayed on a monitor for review and discussion with booth staff.

Medical device and pharmaceutical companies have also found this technology particularly helpful. Moving the puck over a graphic of human organs or areas of the body can quickly inform as to how a device or drug might work to improve patient care.



# Bring Their World to Their Fingertips

Kawneer, an Alcoa company, offers a vast array of Kawneer, Traco and Reynobond(R)/Reynolux product solutions that improve and protect the environments where people work, play and live. Recognizing that no event marketing environment could contain even a reasonable percentage of its products, Kawneer's trade show exhibit was designed to minimize the amount of full-size products to be included, without diminishing the impact of the breadth and depth of their portfolio.



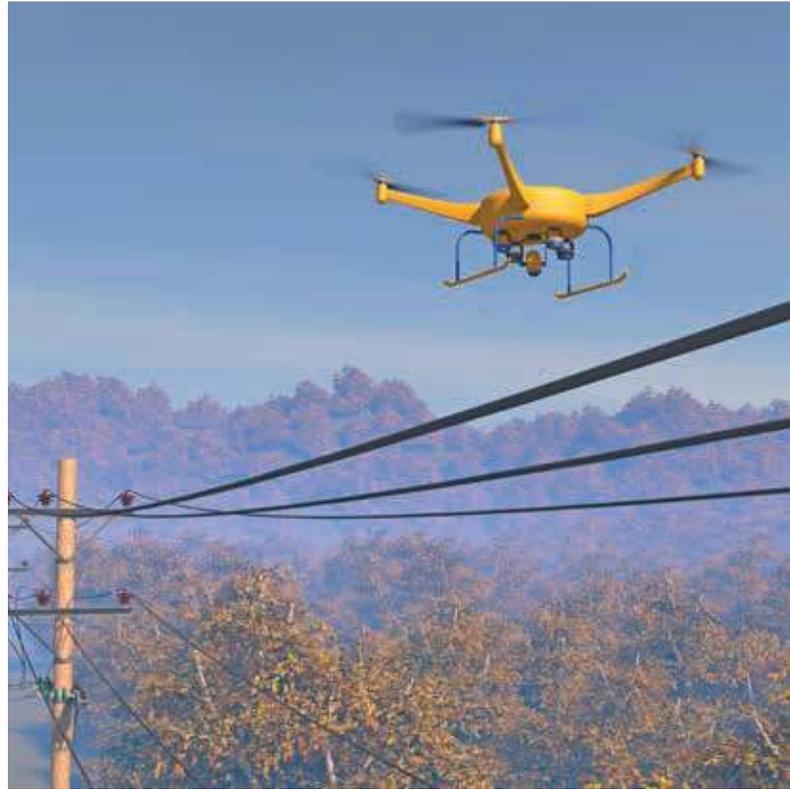
Visitors were welcomed to an interactive gallery of stations featuring product cutaways. A large video wall drew attendees into the booth for engagement opportunities with company representatives.

To fully engage the company's primary customers, architects and designers, the company developed an app on a tablet that allowed the user to design a building using Kawneer products. Detailed information regarding the various products used was gathered and sent via email to the participant's office, providing an additional opportunity for interaction with the company's products.

## Take Them to the Field

Companies, particularly those in the telecom, oil and gas industries, must maintain an expansive and complex physical network of equipment and service lines to provide customers critical services across the U.S. that they depend on every day. This means that equipment and service lines must cross remote terrain that is physically hard to access. Companies are now deploying drone technology to monitor these hard-to-reach assets.

At CTIA Super Mobility, AT&T Mobility offered attendees the opportunity to experience the flight of a drone to a remote location through virtual reality (VR). The attendee sat in a specially designed chair, put on a VR headset, and then flew away with a drone on an inspection mission to the hinterlands!



## As You Plan

No matter which approach your company chooses to entice an audience, it is important to remember two things as you plan your engagement:

- 1) Content comes first. Develop your approach and message, then choose the appropriate technology to convey the content.
- 2) The engagement is merely a draw that leads two people to a meaningful conversation and a next-step action that furthers the sales cycle.

To gain the most from any marketing event, it is important that your program – from the exhibit structure, to the messaging, to the interactive engagement – provides a holistic approach aimed at making that ultimate connection between attendees and your brand, gaining new customers and retaining valued ones for continued success.



**exhibitus**<sup>®</sup>  
success by design

Exhibitus is an award-winning custom exhibit house specializing in 3-dimensional design for trade shows, corporate events, user conferences, permanent installations, museums and corporate interiors. Driven by the philosophy that "DESIGN MATTERS", the company builds jaw-dropping exhibits that capture brand, inspire action and assure business success.

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