

Increasing Trade Show Booth Traffic and Sales

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## MAXIMIZING TRADE SHOW ROI

TRADE SHOW  
DOs & DON'Ts

TRACKING  
PRINT ADS

GOOGLE  
UNDER FIRE

## No doubt about it, trade shows require a significant investment of time and resources.

OVER THE YEARS, I've heard various opinions about whether trade shows deliver a return on this investment.

When clients have asked whether they should do trade shows, my response has always been, "Mmmm, well, I don't know."

Fortunately, one of the clients with whom Rachel and I work with does know. This month, Matt Kays, of Kays Engineering, shares his expertise about what works and what doesn't when it comes to trade shows.

You'll also find tips about using vanity URLs to measure response to tradeshow print ads, as well as some trade show Dos and Don'ts.

Are you attending or exhibiting at IMTS in September? Rachel and I are still discussing whether one or both of us will go. If you're going, let me know and we can make plans to meet up.

— Dianna Huff, Editor

Send us your thoughts on anything you read or your suggestions for future issues. Write to [dianna@huffindustrialmarketing.com](mailto:dianna@huffindustrialmarketing.com).

# Manufacturing Marketing

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#### COVER:

Matt Kays, VP of Business Development and his father Ed Kays, founder and CEO of Kays Engineering, at South-tec 2017.

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## IN BRIEF

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- **Emerging trend:** Manufacturers are combining collaborative robots and CNC machines – from the [Rethink Robotics blog](#).
- **The forerunner of the modern trade show** was the Great Exhibition, held May 1, 1851 in London's Hyde Park. [Read the story at the Apple Rock blog](#).
- **An interesting WashPo op-ed piece** by Megan McArdle – and why she's altered her views about the wisdom and tactics of free trade. [Read more](#)

# Trade Show Marketing Tips for Increasing Booth Traffic and Sales

Matt Kays, VP of Business Development for Kays Engineering, has managed over 20 trade shows in the last five years. The company exhibits at six shows during odd numbered years and two shows during even numbered or IMTS years.

Kays Engineering makes a major investment at IMTS, including bringing in equipment and extra staff to man the booth, which is why they do only one other show those years.

Matt, who does all his own marketing, has grown his company's presence at trade shows – and has figured out what works and what doesn't for his company. We sat down with him recently to get his perspective on trade show marketing.

### TRENDS: BOOTH SIZE, MADE IN THE USA

When asked about any trends he's seeing, especially with regard to attendance, Matt commented that the number of people who attend shows and/or exhibit at them has remained pretty consistent over the last five years.

He finds that in terms of booth size, bigger is better. Bigger doesn't necessarily mean huge; simply moving up from the standard 10' x 10' to a 10' x 20' booth can help attendees notice you more as they walk

down the aisle.

A 10' x 20' booth also gives you room to add a machine and/or a table and chairs where you can sit and have conversations with prospects.

"You want to configure your booth so that people can easily enter it. If you block the entrance, they're stuck in the aisle and are less prone to having a conversation with you," he says.

One trend that doesn't work is booth clutter, especially in terms of messaging and signage. "Attendees," says Matt, "will ask themselves, 'Who are you, what do you do, and why should I care?' You have to make sure your message is clearly stated so people 'get it' in mere seconds. You don't want them overwhelmed."

One message that does work is "Made in the USA," especially if you're competing against international distributors and companies.

### NUMBER ONE BENEFIT: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

For many manufacturers, especially those selling equipment, the time from initial quote to sale can be very long – from months to years – hence establishing a relationship early on plays a huge role in the sales process.

At trade shows, you have the

opportunity for lots of relationship building.

“In the digital age,” says Matt, “face-to-face time at shows is extremely valuable. Trade shows offer a good way to establish a relationship right up front. And, it’s good for prospects to see or demo products live.”

**PRE-SHOW MARKETING: WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN’T**

Over the years, Matt has experimented with various tactics. The one tactic that works well is sending an email to prospects within a region.

If Kays Engineering is exhibiting at Eastec in Massachusetts, for example, Matt will send an email 4 – 6 weeks before the show to all the people with whom they’ve spoken at previous Eastec shows, as well as to the people within the region who requested a quote but haven’t yet taken action.

“The emails have a link to a specific landing page, and we generally see a 15 – 20% open rate,” he says. “We also send postal mailings, but it’s a little harder to track those.”

Matt sends press releases to approximately 20 publications in order to let readers know Kays Engineering is exhibiting at a specific show.

While 15 – 20% of the publications run the release, it’s tough to gauge whether the press releases bring traffic to the booth or the website as Matt isn’t able to use a targeted URL in the release.

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Figure 1: Kays Engineering ad with vanity URL

What is effective, however, is print ads. To track traffic from the ads, Matt uses vanity URLs (see Figure 1), which then redirect to specific pages on the company website. Matt can track the redirected traffic.

“I spent a lot of time a few years ago correlating data between website visits and quotes,” he says. “I know that X amount of traffic translates into X number of quotes. From this data, I know how much a website visit is worth.

“For example, let’s say 25 – 30 visits translates into \$4,000. Using the URL data, I can see how many people visited the website from the print ad and compute that into dollars. If an ad delivers a 70% ROI, this means the value of the website visits it delivered is 70% above the cost of the ad.”

One print vehicle that doesn’t work as well is the tradeshow directory. “I’ve not received one visit from an ad in a directory,” he says. “I think it’s because people

don't hang on to them and don't place much value in them.”

Matt has also been experimenting with Passport, the IMTS marketing app. Users can send secure email to 2016 show attendees and filter down to target people by interests and industry. The app costs \$2,300 for two years of access, and according to Matt, is worth the money.

### MEASURING SHOW ROI

Matt calculates ROI by determining the value of the quotes they do based on the leads they get from each show. He also looks at the number of badges scanned.

“We use a historical quote-to-sale ratio to predict the expected sales from the dollar value of quotes we send from show leads.

We then compare that number to the cost of the tradeshow. Of the 20 shows we've done in the last five years, we've had a positive ROI on all but two of them.” 

*Kays Engineering, based in Marshall, MO, designs and manufactures DeHoff and Eldorado deep hole drilling machines. Visit [www.kays-dehoff.com](http://www.kays-dehoff.com).*

## Trade Show Dos and Don'ts

- **DO** book as early as possible in order to secure a high traffic spot near the main aisle.
- **DO** lots of pre-show marketing and use the free opportunities the trade show offers.
- **DO** have an open and inviting booth so that people come in off the aisle for a conversation; have lots of under-carpet cushioning to ease tired feet, a table and chairs.
- **DO** stay off your phone! When people see you buried in your phone, they walk by without stopping.
- **DON'T** have a cluttered booth or message. You have 3 – 5 seconds to capture someone's attention.
- **DON'T** spend more on hardware (furniture, display) than on software (staffing, pre-show marketing).
- **DON'T** party the night before and then roll in late looking red-eyed and bleary.
- **DON'T** pack up early. The best leads often come at the last 10 minutes of the day or the last two hours of the last day of the show.

## BE PROACTIVE: USE YOUR WEBSITE TO ATTRACT YOUNGER WORKERS

U.S. unemployment is at an all time low, while open job positions – especially in manufacturing – are at an all time high. The result: a very tight labor market coupled with lack of skilled labor.

Download our free booklet: [Creating Manufacturing Websites to Attract Younger Workers](#)

## Question of the Week

### *Can a Print Ad Be Tracked or Measured? No... and Yes*

Tracking the ROI of print ads is something small manufacturers often ask about because a print ad can be a serious outlay of cash when added to the other trade show expenses: A full-page ad can cost over \$7,000; a quarter-page ad can be over \$2,000.

You can't track and measure views of a print ad in the same way you can measure the number of Sessions for a web page.

However, you can measure and track response to print ads that feature an offer (e.g., "Download our free white paper"). You can also track responses to a landing page that carries the offer.

The mistake the vast majority of manufacturers make, however, is to send people from their print ad to their website homepage. (Even large companies with agencies who should know better do this!)

To measure ad response, you can use two tools: Bitly or a vanity URL.

Bitly is a URL shortener that shows you real-time data for clicked links, and while it's most often used for shortening URLs in social media posts, you can also use Bitly URLs in print ads.

The problem with Bitly URLs, however, is that few people will type in the URL – perhaps



Figure 2: Starrett ad with vanity URL

because they're wary of a non-standard URL. (But test it and see – your mileage may vary.)

The other disadvantage is that Bitly URLs aren't easily remembered or shareable.

A vanity URL is a custom-branded URL that's easy to remember and share – you hear them on the radio or podcasts: "Go to *companyname.com slash exciting-offer* for your free thingamajig!"

Usually, vanity URLs go to a specific landing page where you'll find the advertised offer. You can also use vanity URLs in print ads

to send people to landing pages featuring gated or non-gated content.

In Figure 2, for example, Starrett® uses a vanity URL – [starrett.com/flip](http://starrett.com/flip) – to send people to a page where they can watch a video and fill out a form to receive a brochure. Starrett can use Google Analytics to track how many people visited this page, as well as keep track of how many people filled out the form. 📊

## QUICK TIP

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### Ensure Your Events Page is Up-to-Date

One web page that's often neglected is the Events page: maybe you created it at the beginning of the year and then promptly forgot about it.

If your website has an Events page, take a few minutes now to update it:

- Remove any past events or update event dates or locations if you've contracted to exhibit for the next year.
- Add any new events and booth numbers if you have them.
- Put a little note telling people they're welcome to set up meetings with you at the show and let them know how to contact you.

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### ABOUT DIANNA HUFF AND RACHEL CUNLIFFE

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Dianna Huff, [Huff Industrial Marketing](#), and Rachel Cunliffe, [cre8d design](#), provide ongoing marketing and design to manufacturing clients across the U.S.

Our process is seamless and efficient and is designed to **strategically create a website and follow-on marketing that gets you sales.** We're easy to work with – and friendly and charming, too.

