

OPERATIONS 2.0: Hands-on ideas from industry experts

Trade show audits

Find out how audits work and how to use them to your advantage



Benefits of an audit

1. An audit report is a powerful sales tool. It provides existing exhibitors with independent verification that you are delivering their desired audience, and thus desired ROI. Prospective exhibitors see compelling, credible evidence of the customers and prospects they'll miss if they don't participate in your show.
2. Audits are used by exhibitors to gain buy-in from their superiors. The reports prove, with hard data, the wisdom of participating in your show. They also justify additional expenditures in the show, such as expanding booth space or spending more on a sponsorship.
3. Audits can be used to gather critical demographic information, with the added credibility that independent verification brings to the numbers.
4. Exhibitors can use verified demographic data generated by an audit to consider how to best deploy their resources while at the show.
5. An audit can be used as a quality control measure for registration. For instance, significant disparity between the attendance figures generated by your registration staff and the numbers generated by the audit can help you identify inconsistencies in the registration process.
6. Audited show numbers lend credibility to your statistics when negotiating for convention center or hotel space. Venues can be confident that you are likely to generate the numbers you claim. Hotels can see a verified record of the number of out-of-town attendees.

What happens during the audit process?

Pre-show

BPA works with you to ensure that your registration

form's questions adequately cover all of the information that you want to have audited. "Clients use audits for the sales process. We want to help them put their best foot forward," says Peter Black, Senior Vice President, Business Development, BPA. BPA will also have you fill out a questionnaire, to learn more about your registration system and plan for the audit.

On site

BPA staff will observe the show and its registration process, watching for possible problems that could affect the audit's results. (For example, if those manning the exhibit hall door are lax about check-

ing badges, it will be difficult to be sure that the number of badges picked up reflects the number of people on the show floor.) There's an opportunity to correct such problems as they occur.

Post-show

BPA will take a representative test sample from your database of attendees and contact them to verify that they were at the show and that demographic information collected about them is correct. Contact can be made in a variety of ways – phone, e-mail or even mailings. It typically takes four weeks to verify attendance and generate a report for the show organizer.

What if my numbers don't add up? What about proprietary data?

Often, show organizers are nervous about a first-time audit – fearful that despite even the best efforts, the audited numbers won't add up with their own records. However, organizers have the option of foregoing release of their first BPA audit report, so that they have the opportunity to correct problems that could not be corrected during the show. In addition, some organizers consider some of the demographic information collected during the show to be proprietary. BPA need not audit such information.

How much do audits cost?

The cost of an audit depends on the size of a show's attendee base. Most audits cost between \$5,000 and \$8,000, which includes the auditing of four demographic questions with up to 20 answer possibilities. Additional demographic auditing can be added for an extra fee.

What should I look for in an auditor?

Look for an experienced media auditor, advises Black. "There are auditing companies that carry a lot of name recognition in the financial world, but don't understand events," he points out. A media

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specialist can also offer value-adds and services that enhance your marketing success, he notes. For example, one advantage offered by BPA is the ability for media companies with shows, publications, Web sites and other media to report audited data on all of these properties in a single, integrated report. This is a very useful tool for the growing number of companies that are using an integrated selling approach.

For more information, go to www.bpaww.com or contact BPA's Peter Black at (203) 447-2802, pblack@bpaww.com.