

GOING TO THE SHOW?

“Going to the show?” That’s a question you’ll hear a lot in the coming weeks as the golf industry’s three major trade shows – the PGA Merchandise Show, the CMAA World Conference and the Golf Industry Show – roll out their red carpets to golf professionals, course owners, operators, managers and superintendents.



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The shows are a good time to renew acquaintances and kick the tires

of new products. But if that’s all you’re doing, you’re wasting a great opportunity to do some real business.

Every vendor and supplier whose booth lines the trade show aisles is hoping to leave the show after writing enough business to make their (usually substantial) show investment worthwhile. That’s why the shows are a great time to negotiate deals for the products and services you’ll need for the rest of the year.

Bearing in mind that a “good deal” is characterized by mutual benefit, here are four elements of an effective trade show game plan to consider as you prepare for discussions with vendors and suppliers.

- **Be prepared.** Before leaving for the show, make sure you understand current market supply and demand pressures relative to the products and exhibitors you want to visit. Review the range of competitive options in advance of the show. Draft a list of targeted vendors with whom you want to work. Be dedicated to your prioritized list and don’t waste time “walking the floor” aimlessly. Use the exhibit floor maps available on each show’s website to create your personal a daily itinerary based on the companies you want to visit. Make appointments in advance and let exhibitors know what you would like to discuss so the appropriate person will be available when you arrive. Be on time and use your time efficiently by getting straight to business.
- **Communicate clearly and honestly.** Let vendors know what you want and don’t want. Can they meet your needs? Are you right for them? If you have a complaint or criticism, state it in a constructive manner. Everyone wants to do a better job and to have the chance to earn more business.
- **Project your needs beyond the immediate.** The best deals are struck when vendors understand your overall needs and can see themselves helping you meet them. Larger volume is advantageous to all parties; one-at-a-time purchases require significant time for lesser benefit. The more your chosen suppliers understand your big picture plans and needs, the better they can serve you.

- **Understand what's negotiable – and what's not.** Timing of purchases and deliveries is important. Purchases early in the year are most attractive to the vendor since everyone has budgets and sales goals to meet. Most vendors believe that an early-cycle (early in the year) purchase is more valuable to them than waiting for the proverbial “birds in the bush.” The longer the year runs, the easier it is for facilities to push a purchase to the following year.

Price is important; but service capability trumps price. If possible, meet the people who would work with you directly and make them a part of the discussion. Local service is very important in most transactions; do business with the companies that provide dependable service.

Terms matter and time really is money. Most vendors offer their best terms for cash purchases. But companies with captive financing options also can help extend your buying power. Understand that there is an attributed cost to leasing – and do your homework.

Loyalty matters. The best deals go to the most loyal customers. Every large customer seeks to leverage size and loyalty in favor of price and terms. Vendors allow the greatest benefits to loyal customers. But driving a hard-bargain and loyalty are not mutually exclusive. So don't confuse friendship with loyalty. Reliability and mutual respect – not friendship – create the best business relationships.

Thorough preparation, thoughtful dialogue, constructive criticism and loyal relationships are the four-corners of a solid foundation for business relationships. Plan now for a valuable show experience, and it's likely you'll have one.