

Face-to-face with the reality of exhibiting

Ever wondered how exhibitions work in the real world? Dona White explains.



Dona White is the founder and CEO of North Port Events, an Auckland company that organises consumer and trade shows throughout New Zealand including The Food Show, Fine Food New Zealand and the Baby Show. She is also the current President of the Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia's New Zealand Chapter.

I've talked a lot in this column about how to use face-to-face marketing events to promote your products and your brand – but now it's time to hear from a couple of real-life companies who have experienced significant growth through exhibiting in The Food Show.

Village Press: The good oil on leveraging your show involvement

Havelock North-based Village Press began exhibiting at The Food Show 14 years ago as part of a group of companies from the Hawkes Bay and has returned year after year because their involvement continues to pay dividends.

Co-Owner Maureen Startup admits exhibiting at The Food Show is a big investment, but the benefits extend far beyond the three or four days of each show and more than justify the money spent. The trick, she says, is to do as much as possible to leverage your involvement before, during, and after the show.

For instance, Village Press is generous when it comes to giving away complimentary tickets to the show, a move Maureen says is well worth doing, particularly in the case of supermarket buyers who often feel undervalued. "One buyer stood at our stand probably for a good hour. She'd never seen our full range and could taste it all. It gives them a chance to actually see how big the range is and



what there is on offer," says Startup.

"They are busy people and they are there so they can tick a whole lot of things off in one go at one event in just a couple of hours. It's a great opportunity to show them what the customers are going for. It's not staged. You can say: 'You keep on telling me nobody wants that product but just look what's happening with the public'."

The mix of exhibitors, consumers, trade buyers, and celebrity chefs at The Food Show makes the event a dynamic networking environment where instant connections can be made that would be difficult or impossible to set up elsewhere.

"In Christchurch about six or seven years ago Al Brown came up and started tasting our oils. And that's how Al Brown and Co came on-board because we started talking to him and that's been very successful. Same with Peta Mathias and Ray McVinnie and now we're associated with Nadia Lim and Brett McGregor. It's through doing the Food Shows that those relationships have developed."

Sampling is an area that Village Press really pushes because it takes full advantage of the strengths of face-to-face marketing.

"Ours is a premium priced product so how else do you get the public to actually appreciate the difference? We're not going to win on price. . . We get people to put it in their mouth and taste the difference. And you get a chance to talk to them," says Startup.

She recognises that sampling can be a big cost for some companies but has learned to reduce costs herself by, for instance, partnering with Loaf to provide the bread people use to sop up her oils so they can taste them.

Making a success of your presence at the show means always being at your stand – because you never know when an important buyer, potential business partner, or other opportunity might appear at your stand.

"Those basic rules are important like not eating on the stand, not texting continuously, or reading the newspaper. You actually are there to work. It is exhausting but it's only for three days," says Startup.

"I did [The Food Show] Wellington this year and I wasn't off that stand the whole three days. We

were always there early, about two hours before the show even starts, we always get ourselves prepared and then it gives us a chance to network with other companies."

Planning the company's involvement well in advance helps Village Press make the most of opportunities at the show and reduces stress levels.

"We're planning now for next year, things like stand position and stand layout, finalising our objectives and what products we want to promote. You need to get organised.

"With [The Food Show] Christchurch a lot of the buyers come down from Nelson and up from Dunedin. The cost would be huge for us to get around the South Island. So we get our reps out there early and start telling the buyers that we're coming to the show. Our big shops like Moore Wilson always come to the show in Wellington – they never miss and that's invaluable. We get to talk one-on-one to them.

"At the end of the day the Food Shows are a big part of our marketing plan for the year and it's built in already for next year. We always sign on immediately so we know that we're on for next year."



Green Meadows Beef: Capturing a bigger slice of the online market

Premium beef retailer Green Meadows Beef had only been up and running for about six months before exhibiting at The Food Show Auckland 2013.

"We were a brand new business so we saw the Auckland Food Show as a qualified, captive audience of food lovers to get some exposure for us. The sheer number of people coming past your stand was too good an opportunity to pass up," says Director Nick Carey.

Taranaki-based Green Meadows sells beef



to caterers, restaurants, and cafés, through premium retailers like Farro Fresh and Moore Wilsons, and directly to the public via its website greenmeadowsbeef.co.nz. Online sales account for about 40% of turnover so The Food Show presented an excellent opportunity to engage with consumers directly, let them taste and see the products first-hand, and sign them up to the Green Meadows database.

"We believe it's up to us to make the show work for us so we're always looking to see better ways we can connect with the visitors coming through," says Carey.

"We attack it in three stages. We do pre-show marketing and EDMs to our 6,000 subscribers and usually include ticket giveaways on social media. Then as much as we can we try to be active on social media during the show and then after the show as well. And then obviously the follow up after the show with another EDM to the new email subscribers that we've obtained.

"Before the show we tell them what products we're going to have available at what price points. During often it's more of an update on what we've sold out of, you've got to be quick to get certain products because they sell out. And then afterwards, it's just promoting our standard offering that's available online.

"We've seen measurable growth as a result, including sales of products at the show and also subsequent sales primarily through our EDMs to email addresses collected at the show."

Carey agrees that face-to-face marketing and online promotions can be a highly effective marketing combination and reckons more companies could be taking advantage of both mediums. His company has worked hard to build the Green Meadows subscriber base and social media audiences from scratch, something he says doesn't happen overnight.

"People have got to spend some time before the show building those social networks and then leveraging off them. Just because you've got a Facebook page and start posting doesn't necessarily mean that people are going to see it," he says. **[FMCG]**

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