

Selling Exhibit Space With a Money Back Guarantee

What?????

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You have got to kidding right? Who in their right mind would even consider giving an exhibitor their money back after they have participated in the exhibition? Good questions.

An operations manager in a recent blog asked her peers how do they get exhibitors to open and respond to show emails. These email would help exhibitors substantially in her event if they would simply read them. There were many answers but none of them addressed the core issue that most all of us are time starved. We time slice, skim emails, maybe even text and drive (*don't do that*). It is all indicative of the 24 hour plugged-in world we live. We give attention to where the pay-off or return on investment is highest. We do what is incentivized.

How do exhibition managers get noticed in the blast of so many distractions and commitments? What does a money back guarantee have to do with an exhibitor opening an email and having a better show in general?

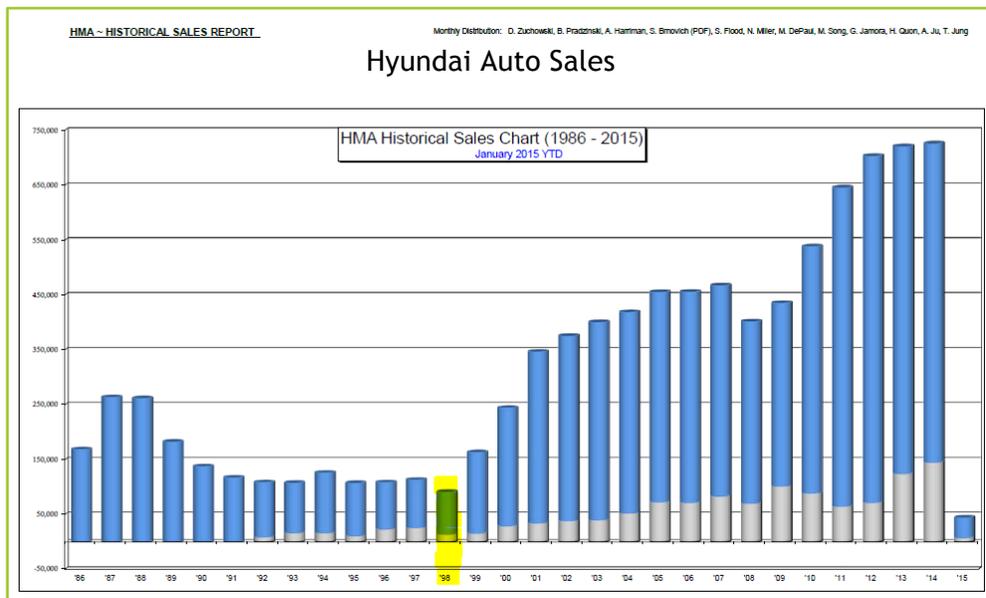
Needs, Wants and Desires

- I need my exhibitors to open my emails. They are important. (Deadlines for submissions, reduced rates, promotional marketing opportunities, changes in policy/dates/information, re-book information, etc.)
- If my exhibitors would all get a lead retrieval, there is a big advantage for them and us.
- We have a great booth training program but it is lightly attended by comparison of the number of exhibitors in the show. Walking down the aisle at the show, there are many that NEED training.
- If exhibitors would simply follow-up on leads. Their ROI would be higher better retention.
- If exhibitors would simply follow-up on leads. Their satisfaction with the event would be better.
- If exhibitors would simply follow-up on leads. They would be more likely to rebook. Less turnover.
- We have inexpensive marketing opportunities that are known to be effective. Participants always benefit but are not taking the steps.
- We are getting more and more late bookings. Exhibitors are waiting until the last minute. It would be great if they would sign up earlier.
- We have competitors and our show is the best. If I had more ammo to convince the undecided that would be desired.
- We know there is significant business being done at our event. It would be great if we had some idea as to the level of commerce being done on our show floor. I want more data.

Warranties

100,000 miles or 10 years. Covers repair or replacement of powertrain components (i.e., selected engine and transmission/transaxle components), originally manufactured or installed by Hyundai that are defective in material or factory workmanship, under normal use and maintenance. Coverage applies to original owner only... Source - Hyundai website.

Sound familiar? A new vehicle limited warranty. Hyundai is a 30 year overnight success. They sold cars based on the warranty no other competitor had. They then were able to increase the quality of the customer experience at the dealer, quality of the car itself and provide value. It took 12 years for Hyundai to offer the 10 year/100,000 mile warranty (1998). Notice a change in sales after year 1998 (yellow highlight). Once the warranty was offered, sales simply changed.



source: hyundainews.com

Though the above example is an over-simplification of a successful business strategy, it makes a significant point. All it takes is for a competitor to raise the bar. Hyundai knew that their cars could provide trouble free operation for 10 years or 100,000 miles. Stand behind the product, see what happens. The ROI is there and then some, Hyundai's June 2015 quarterly profits \$1.5 billion (USD, source: Bloomberg). Hyundai Motors #64 on the Forbes World's Most Valuable Brands List, is in the top 10 largest car builders in the world (source: Forbes) and #2 in overall quality (source: JD Powers). *Nice problems to have.*

Exhibit Space Money Back Guarantee

A limited warranty is just that, limited. Consumers of a limited warranted product must comply with the rules of the warranty to be able to have a successful claim. If the rules are followed the claim will be fulfilled. *The engine died after 80,000 miles and you didn't change the oil... too bad so sad.*

Money Back Guarantees imply quality. The owner of the product is so confident that they will refund your money if it doesn't perform. Offer a Risk Free Money Back Guarantee on your booth space- if the exhibitor does not receive sales from the show that exceed the fee paid for exhibit space, we will refund your exhibit space fee in full. Simple, to-the-point.

Of course it is a limited warranty.

What are the limits to fulfill the warranty? What are the pain points that, as show management, you need to address:

- Late bookings?
- Registration?
- Room block?
- Re-book?
- Exhibitor education?
- General Services provider?
- Lead follow-up?
- Exhibitor retention?
- Communications?
- Sponsorships?
- Marketing opportunities?
- Forms submissions?
- Etc.
- Etc.

You are in control of the item(s) that allow for a successful claim. Your exhibitors must follow the rules of the warranty for a claim. Each item in the warranty must have an easily visible metric so that there are no questions. *Geez, if you would have only changed the oil...*

The warranty must be real and sincere. The guarantee is offered because you KNOW if the items (terms) set forth are followed success will be assured. The goal here is to have no claims. It won't be necessary to for an exhibitor to ask for a refund. You will almost never give money back. If you do it will not be painful as you will have raised the bar of the event, increased your exhibitor satisfaction, rebook and revenue.

The warranty will help to insure that the right exhibitors are in your show. The customer experience will improve for your exhibitor and attendee. The attendee gets an exhibitor who is not on their cell phone with their arms crossed in the back of the booth. An exhibitor that will call them back and follow up with information.

The Proof

As much as I would like to take credit for this novel approach to exhibitor success based on warranties, I can't. I am an outgoing board member of the National Association of Consumer Shows (NACS) I have attended the annual meeting for years. One of the board members was doing a presentation on his events in the bridal show industry as the closing keynote at the annual meeting. His presentation was brilliant. Many in the audience thought he was crazy offering a money back guarantee. *Yes, crazy like a fox.* Let me introduce Marc McIntosh, Owner and CEO of Showcase Events, producers of the Wedding Experience.

They have been doing the guarantee for two years. He says, "I can't point to a specific increase in sales or renewals but our surveys have shown that this was definitely something that made prospective new exhibitors feel comfortable and pushed them over the edge."

They have had probably no more than 10 exhibitors inquire about getting their money back under the guarantee. Only one fulfilled the terms and was issued a refund. During the two years they have had 24 events and more than 1500 exhibitors.

The terms of the guarantee are fairly simple:

- Book prior to 30 days
- Attend exhibitor education (video or in-person)
- Put a special offer in the show guide that expires 60 days after the event
- Follow up the leads, by email, twice within 30 days after the event.
- Follow up with a hard copy mailing.

They are a consumer show which differs from a trade show but it would be the terms that would vary, not the concept. Regardless of show type, vertical or size the Money Back Guarantee can be the tool to help achieve the attention that is needed for an exhibitor to have a successful show.

As far as I know, Marc McIntosh's Showcase Events is the only show organizer offering a money back guarantee. I'm hoping that I will hear from other organizers that offer similar warranties. It also begs the question of a similar but different offer for attendees? *Hmmmmmm.*

I foresee that he has started a trend. It is one of those trendy ideas that effects change. This change is for the better. All parties win which is the best change of all.