



# Setting the Stage

*The work you do prior to exhibiting at a trade show can make all the difference.*

By Tom Comi

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first hour sharpening the ax.” Many companies who exhibit at conventions could learn a lot from our 16th president.

Every business has the right intentions when showcasing their goods at a conference, but there are many mistakes that can be made before you ever step foot on the trade show floor. And those errors can ultimately cost you a lot of lost revenue.

Janet Attard, the founder of the website *Business Know-How* and the author of several business books, maintains that preparation goes a long way toward having a successful trade show. That includes calling current and potential customers weeks in advance to set up meetings.

“Experienced trade show exhibitors don’t wait for the show to start to try to see customers and make new contacts,” she wrote. “To get the most traffic at your booth, send out mailings and announcements before the show inviting your customers and prospects to stop by your booth. Insert announcements in bills you send out, on your web page, and in ads you run near the show date.”

Alison Kiesa, sales director at Syrasoft, said her company very actively promotes its trade show appearances. In addition to reaching out to current and potential clients via phone and email in advance, she said they also advertise the trade show well in advance on their company website.”

“As powerful and far reaching as the Internet is, we like to personally invite our current and potential customers

to come to the trade show to meet and speak with us in person,” she explained. “Our branding is not our only advertising; our people are also our advertising, and we want people to see who we are. We love the opportunity to meet and speak with our current and future clients in a face-to-face situation. We really enjoy putting faces to names, and we think they do, too.”

TJ Kuehn, marketing director for DBCI, said he likes to mix things up to keep customers engaged from show to show. That, of course, means mapping out a strategy well in advance of actually exhibiting.

“We’ve found that ‘experimenting with purpose’ is the best approach,” he said. “It keeps the booth fresh for customers we might see two or three times a year at different trade shows, and allows us to fine-tune our interaction with prospects.”

Another key, he explained, is finding ways to answer routine questions to maximize valuable time with booth visitors. DBCI came up with a suitable solution for those queries.

“One recent show actually got too much foot traffic,” he recalled. “That sounds like a good thing, but you don’t want people standing around waiting for a rep to free up so they can ask a very basic customer service question. So, we experimented with an interactive video display that answered our most common questions. It helped better circulate foot traffic, and it assisted our sales staff during conversations.”

*See Setting the Stage, page 8*



# CASE STUDY-SELF STORAGE



UNIVERSAL STORAGE CONTAINERS®  
The Leader in Portable Container Solutions



Call us for a Demo or Quote

**800-385-0755**

[www.universalstoragecontainers.com](http://www.universalstoragecontainers.com)

## StorageMart - Toronto, Ontario Canada

Better utilize parking space and vacant space on the existing self-storage property.



### Client Need:

StorageMart had a need to generate sustainable higher revenue on previous low revenue generating parking and vacant space areas at their self-storage facility. They considered the cost of new construction, temporary storage buildings, ISO shipping containers, and a few other ways of providing higher revenue on their low revenue areas. All of these alternatives were either too costly, time prohibitive, aesthetically unattractive, or subject to building permits and zoning review.

### Universal Storage Container Solution:

Universal Storage Containers® (USC) provided the solution for StorageMart's need to transform low revenue spaces into sustainable high revenue spaces. StorageMart liked how the USC Z-Box® self-storage containers were easy and fast to assemble, aesthetically attractive and so an initial order was placed. The USC Z-Boxes® were delivered in less than ten weeks, at less cost than new construction or other alternatives, and in two days the entire order of 12 units were assembled and ready to rent.

### Client Testimonial

*"My company has bought well over 250 units of the Z-Box® Portable Storage Units over the past 3 years. We have been able to utilize these units as if they were regular "stick built" storage units. In some markets we have been able to rent these units at a higher premium over units that are located in a building with hallways."*

*Tim Burnam, VP Development and Construction, StorageMart.*

### For More Information:

Rod Bolls  
Vice President  
Universal Storage Containers®  
146 Old Kings Hwy, New Canaan CT 06840

720-263-5687 - Direct/Fax  
800-385-0755 xtn 2 - Office  
404-210-6920 - Mobile  
[rod@universalstoragecontainers.com](mailto:rod@universalstoragecontainers.com)  
[www.universalstoragecontainers.com](http://www.universalstoragecontainers.com)

## Booth Strategy

A big part of being prepared for when the trade show opens is making sure you have the proper literature organized and available to hand out to prospective customers. Display racks can be helpful since you only have a few seconds at most to catch the eyes of those walking by.

However, as Louis Gilmore of Miller Buildings in Pennsylvania points out, it's important to engage with the customers when they are at your booth and then allow them to take the handouts with them.

"The conference can be overwhelming to attendees with dozens of seminars, roundtables, several hundred vendors, bags of handouts," he said. "In the exhibit hall, you have a very limited space and time to present your message, so you need to make it simple and direct. The attendees have limited time, so keep it moving."

Kiesa said one of the biggest lessons Syrasoft has learned in its 24 years of serving the storage industry is that you need to hear what a customer wants rather than always trying to pitch your goods.

"We've learned that we're more successful when we listen to what our current and potential clients are saying at the trade show," she said. "It's not all about telling them about our product. We have to understand and relate to how they

do business every day, because our product is designed to support them in that endeavor."

Having a product to accompany the literature is always helpful, because it creates an interaction between you and the customer. Why explain something that can be demonstrated? But Attard is quick to point out on her website that if your "product doesn't work, or doesn't work properly, you'll lose more customers than you'll ever gain."

Kuehn said DBCI likes to have samples on hand because they "show instead of tell," especially when it's a new product.

"The recent launch of our Curl-Lok door called for us to explain a new locking system for our sheet door panels," he said. It's a revolutionary approach to a product that otherwise hasn't changed much in more than 50 years. In addition to the standard literature, we employed simple hand-held devices that visitors could try on their own. Not only did it convey the function instantly, but visitors could play with the product and test its durability themselves."

## Take Notes, Follow Up

Even the most organized person in the world can't possibly remember everything that takes place in a two-day trade show, so taking diligent notes is crucial for exhibitors and storage operators.

"It's impossible for the attendees to remember everyone they meet," Gilmore said. "Even a compelling product needs a follow-up to make things happen. I make a connection and keep good notes."

While it's important to give out your business cards, Attard also suggests getting cards from the prospects you meet. In addition to putting the responsibility on you to follow up rather than vice versa, it also gives you the chance to add comments about each person's needs on the back of their card. This personalizes the phone call or email, she said, thereby creating more of a connection.

"Have a plan in place for following up on leads as soon as you get home from the show," she wrote. "Don't wait a month or two to get around to sending information to those who stopped by your booth. By then, the hot prospects are likely to have become good customers for one of your competitors."

Kiesa and Kuehn both said their respective companies are diligent about getting in touch with people they meet at shows. Likewise, Gilmore said he likes to categorize leads based on the probability of landing them and follows up accordingly. If they aren't a good fit for Miller Buildings, he has no problem referring them to somebody else.

"I usually email or call everyone that had real interest," he said. "I need to qualify prospects just as they would qualify my product. I know when we aren't the right match for someone geographically, and I make sure I connect that person with the best fit for their location. Networking with my competitors has advantages." ❖



**BOS**  
Container USA

Watch a unit being assembled! → 

BOS Quick Build containers are manufactured from 100% recycled and galvanized steel. They can be shipped flat packed and assembled on site with no tools. Expandable units can be equipped with numerous accessories, such as shelving systems and access ramps to name a few.

+1 (914) 548 0186 | [orders@boscontainer.com](mailto:orders@boscontainer.com)  
[www.BOSContainer.com](http://www.BOSContainer.com)