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How to be an A+ Trade Show Attendee

by Phil Cohen

In the world of a medical transcription service owner (MTSO), life can be hectic. From hiring and staffing transcriptionists to collecting from slow-paying facilities, MTSOs have enough on their plate to worry about while they are in the office, let alone when their work pulls them away from the office. The idea of leaving for a couple of days just to attend a trade show is usually the last thing on an owner's mind.

Chances are you probably feel like you don't have enough time to attend a trade show. Before you start listing all of the reasons why you can't afford to go to a trade show (monetary, geographical, logistical, etc.), I'd like to share with you all the reasons why you can't afford to stay home!

One of the top concerns an MTSO may have about attending a trade show is getting there. Paying for flights, hotels, and conference registrations can add up quickly—that is if you wait until the last minute to book everything. Rule number one: plan ahead. Contact the trade show organizers as soon as you think you might want to attend the show, and ask if discounted flights and hotels are available. The answer will almost always be yes—unless you wait too long. Keep in mind that the prices often skyrocket a few weeks before the show begins, so a good rule of thumb is to book about three months in advance.

Something else to keep in mind is the possibility of not staying in the same hotel as the conference to save a little extra cash. Regardless of whether the preferred hotel is attached to the conference center, staying in it can sometimes be expensive even with a discounted rate. So I would suggest looking into booking a room in a smaller hotel in proximity to the conference location. Staying at an alternative hotel can save you a bundle, while still being a short, convenient walk to the show.

It's also a good idea to pre-register for the conference. Not only will you often save money by taking advantage of the pre-registering discount, it also saves you time once you're at the show. Instead of waiting in long lines outside of the trade show, you can use that time to walk the floor, network with colleagues or attend a scheduled seminar.

If you haven't decided ahead of time which classes you want to attend and which exhibitors you want to visit before you get to the show, it's a good idea to look through the updated show guide provided when you arrive. Take the time to walk the floor once to familiarize yourself with the layout

of the conference rooms as well as taking the time to note where the specific vendors you want to talk to are located. Note the companies' booth locations on your copy of the floor map so that you can find them quickly in-between classes and networking activities.

Once you are ready to start talking to the vendors one-on-one, there are five things that no attendee should be without while you are in the exhibit hall.

1. Lightweight clothes and comfortable walking shoes. Business casual is generally what you will see on the show floor. Just make sure that your clothing and shoes are professional and neat, but also comfortable enough to walk/stand in for long hours.

2. Name badge. It not only allows you to get through the exhibit hall doors, it also allows others to identify you and your company quickly and easily.

3. Business cards. You never know who you might meet at trade shows, so it's good to have business cards handy for when you bump into someone important whom you want to remember. Make sure you bring a big enough stack that you won't run out midway through the show. It's always better to bring too many than not enough.

4. Notebook and pen. Of course, taking notes during the classes will help you tremendously when you get back in the office. Keeping a pen and paper handy while walking the floor is also helpful to jot down notes about each vendor you speak to about your company.

5. Sturdy tote-bag. From giveaways and literature to books and brochures, attendees pick up a lot of items at trade shows. It's really nice to bring some kind of tote bag (even one on wheels!) to hold everything. (NOTE: Oftentimes, there will be at least one exhibitor who is handing out one of these types of bags, so make sure you visit their booth earlier on in the conference.)

Remember that new business relationships can also begin outside of the exhibit hall. Take advantage of the free networking events. You will find that everyone, vendors included, is more laid back in these social settings and not so pushy for

a sale. Take the time to get to know your fellow attendees and vendors off of the sales floor. Just be sure to bring a handful of business cards when you attend these outside activities.

If you follow all of the above advice at the next trade show that you attend, I guarantee that it will be money well spent. Not only will you have the opportunity to rub elbows with some of the top vendors and leaders in the medical transcription industry, you will also have the opportunity to learn about market trends, network with fellow medical transcriptionists and learn how new products can help your business thrive. The contacts you can make and the information you can gather about competitors, suppliers, buyers and the overall medical transcription industry far outweigh the reservations you may have for leaving the office.



Philip Cohen is the President of PRN Funding, LLC, an accounts receivable factoring company that provides growth capital to small and mid-sized businesses that service the healthcare industry. Prior to founding PRN Funding, Cohen served as the Senior Vice President/General Manager of The MRC Group, where he was responsible for corporate development initiatives as well as the company's speech recognition product line. Web site: www.prnfunding.com E-mail: pcohen@prnfunding.com