



# EXHIBITOR ACADEMY, JUNE 2017

## MIND OF THE BUYER

## TIPS FOR BETTER BUYER ENGAGEMENT

### Note

The following article recaps a panel discussion held during the SHOT Show Exhibitor Academy, June 2017, called “Mind of the Buyer.”

### ABOUT THE EXPERTS

All three panelists are members of the NSSF Retail Advisory Council (RAC), including:

- Richard Sprague, of Sprague’s Sports and sister company Truck Mates. Sprague is also chairman of the RAC and is a true show veteran, having attended all 40 SHOT Shows.
- Jeanine Phillips, of Bob’s Little Sport Shop, comes having attended 7 SHOT Shows.
- Dick Abramson, of Centennial Gun Club, has 12 SHOT Shows under his belt.

### PROSPECTS ARE ON RECONNAISSANCE

With more than 1,600 exhibits and 12 miles of aisle space to cover at the SHOT Show, buyers will bring three to four people to help divide, conquer and see everything on their list. Pre-planning is a vital step for retailers of all sizes, and they often show up with a general idea of which exhibits are a “must see.” This means that, for exhibitors, pre-marketing is essential. A buyer will consider:

- What product lines do I want to fill in?
- What types of items am I looking for?
- What are the assignments for each team member?

### SHOW, NOT TELL, WITH YOUR BOOTH

**Accessibility Is Key.** If congestion prevents buyers from getting into your booth or to your salespeople quickly and easily, those buyers may not return later. And crowds aren’t the only deterrent – be sure your sales team spreads out around the booth so buyers aren’t met with an intimidating cluster of other attendees or sales team members. Rule of thumb: prospects should be able to step at least halfway into your booth.

**Show Commitment to Your Customers.** Your booth should communicate clearly that your product is made for buyers. Have your team ready to speak about how you will help dealers and retailers pull your product through the market. “There’s a lot of attention on the new social media, bloggers, the new guys that want to test or R&D your stuff,” Phillips observes. “The dealers are the ones selling it on a day-to-day basis, so put more attention here.”

**Buyers Will Find You Anywhere on the Floor, Eventually.** Panelists agreed that location on the show floor ultimately makes little difference to their mission – the name of the game is to see it all. Just make sure that when buyers do walk by, there is something visible to make them stop at your booth. Sometimes, it can be as simple as offering good candy. Sprague notes, “There’s better snacks and candy downstairs.”

**Highlight Your Merchandising.** Buyers need support in selling your product to consumers. Make sure your sales team can speak to the merchandising pieces provided for retail outlets. Do you have displays or videos they can use to market your product? Consider having some samples on display in your booth.

## VISUALS BRING BUYERS IN, PROFESSIONAL SALESPEOPLE MAKE THEM STAY

**Clear and Striking Signage.** What the booth is about needs to be very clear — are you a parts, firearms or specialty provider? As Sprague tells it, “If you see parts and pieces [of branding] that you recognize in your store, you’re drawn to that.” Phillips adds, “You could be the greatest salesman and have a really unattractive booth that is worth skipping, so presence visually is everything.” In addition to being clear on what products you provide, make it clear who your customers are.

**Bring Professional Salespeople.** Staff your booth with professional salespeople who are adept at reading body language and at qualifying buyers rather than pushing products on them. “Hey, come into my booth and I’ll give you this’ — it’s a turn off, it seems gimmicky at points,” shares Phillips. With limited booth space, your sales team should also take precedence over in-booth celebrities.

## MAKE IT EASY TO GATHER INFORMATION — FOR EVERYONE

**A Notetaking Prospect Is a Happy One.** Opt for business cards, brochures or other paper marketing collateral in booth that can be easily used for notetaking.

**Use the SHOT Show Scanners to Easily Take Notes on Prospects.** Panelists were unphased by having their badges scanned, so consider leveraging SHOT Show’s lead-generation scanners, which offer functionality to both attendees and exhibitors. Every scan sends your information to that prospect, and you receive their information in turn. It’s not just “scan and go,” though — you have the ability to take notes within the system.

**Order a SHOT Show Buyer List.** Exhibitors have a unique opportunity to purchase buyer lists through the SHOT Show. The buyer list includes mailing addresses; although the SHOT Show does not share emails, an e-blast can be sent to the SHOT Show buyer list on your behalf. The SHOT Show’s registration company will work with you one on one to help you buy lists only for what you need, such as specific retailers, e-commerce, or demographic areas. Pro tip: don’t buy your list until at least Thanksgiving — hold off as long as you can to get the highest number of buyers.

## FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP.

**All panelists shared their surprise at the lack of follow-up, even from salespeople at booths they spent serious time visiting. As Abramson lays it out, “We hit a lot of booths during those four days, so if you don’t follow up with us, we’re probably not going to follow up with you.” Phillips adds, “We’re still waiting on a follow-up from a year ago from one exhibitor.” Compared to phone, text message or direct mail, email reigns as the preferred choice of follow-up. Pro tip: offer to set up a time to talk through the email, and cut through inbox clutter by including “SHOT Reply” in your subject line. Give prospects a week to recoup from the return trip, then follow up within 30–60 days after the show (when they’re ready to buy). Consider extending onsite specials for a grace period after the show to enable smaller dealers to allocate their resources accordingly.**

**Show the Full Breadth of New Product Lines.** Panelists preferred a pre-packaged, recommended assortment for new product lines while still having the opportunity to pick and choose among existing lines that are familiar. As Sprague says, “The SHOT Show is hopefully a chance for me to see the entire product line, versus going to a distributor show or even a buyer show where you might only see 50 percent of the product line or even less.”

**Make Room for Storytime.** Make your products memorable by pairing them with a story, which then arms retailers with something to share with customers. “[Take] the Hudson H9 pistol,” starts Abramson. “Our customers know the story behind the Hudson H9.” What makes your product unique? That’s the start of your story.

**Advertise Where Your Prospects Look.** The SHOT Show provides multiple avenues for advertising, from the printed directory to the online planner and the mobile app. Consider the demographics of your prospects when deciding on ad placement. Whether going digital or print, make it easy for prospects to find your company in their pre-show planning and on site by using keywords in your company listing or by listing your booth information by your product line.

**Let Your Customers Sell Your Product for You.** Innovative and unique products are sure to catch the eyes of buyers during the show, but consider marketing that puts your product front and center year-round. A consumer poll is a powerful tool. “If you can get to the consumer market through your social media so they come into our stores asking for your product, the likelihood of us stocking your product will go up significantly,” shares Abramson. Even a single sample sent to the countertop of a retail store gets a lot of exposure.