



# ONE FOOT ON THE STAND

## HOW TO BECOME A LEAD GENERATION MACHINE AT EXHIBITIONS

**ENGAGE, CHANGE & RAISING MORALE**

**IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE - YOU JUST NEED THE RIGHT TRICKS UP YOUR SLEEVE**



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

© John Hotowka 2010

## IMPORTANT – The legal bit

The information in this report may be freely re-used in any online or offline publication provided it is accompanied by the following credit line – ‘This information was written by John Hotowka, and originally appeared in his report, ‘One Foot On The Stand – How To Become A Lead Generation Machine At Exhibitions.’ Available from [john@hotowka.co.uk](mailto:john@hotowka.co.uk).



## In short

From this e-book you'll learn some essential skills about working on an exhibition stand. You'll learn how to stop exhibition visitors in their tracks as they walk by your stand and engage with them. You'll learn how to extract vital information allowing you to establish if this person is a potential prospect or not and you won't be using ethanol either. You'll also learn how to close a conversation with a prospect as well as those unwanted visitors that sometimes take up your time and stop you from speaking to the people you want to speak to... potential buyers.

In short, you'll be able to generate as many leads as you wish. The more leads you generate the more sales you'll make. The more sales you make the bigger your bottom line.

But first...

## Why should you listen to John Hotowka?



I only did it because I needed the money. I wonder, would you have done the same?

Today I'm an [after dinner, motivational and business speaker](#) and magician with a fascination of how we effectively deal with change. I enjoy performing magic at corporate events as well as [speaking to 14 to 19 year olds](#) about life skills and entrepreneurship.

Alas, twas not always so. Sit back, crack open a bottle of your favourite liquid refreshment and harken to my tale about a boy who's passion it was to follow his passion and was so passionate about his passion that his passion became... a reality.

For seven years, after leaving college, I was a dispensing optician by day and magician by night performing close up magic in local restaurants and private parties. On Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989 I was made redundant for the third time as an optician, and there was me thinking opticianing was a 'job for life'. That weekend I was distraught and physically sick with worry and depression. I was 29 years old and my life plans were shattered. I wasn't happy with optics, all seemed to be lost, I felt so low. Little did I know a bigger and better adventure was just waiting to unfold.

Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1989 the decision was made. How? By asking myself some questions.

Question: What was I passionate about?

Answer: Magic.

Question: Could I earn my living doing magic?

Answer: I don't know but I'd like to find out.

Question: If I could, how long for?

Answer: I don't know, after all, I'm not done yet. When I do eventually get there I'll text you, I might even Tweet it.

If I'm going to be a full time magician where's the smart money then?' In 1989, even though we were in a recession (so what's changed?) I decided to go for the corporate market, plenty of dinners and events for a close up magician to work at.

Then I read in an American magazine about 'trade show magic'. 'Trade show magic?' What's that? There were actually magicians working on exhibition stands gathering crowds around their clients' stand and promoting products and services WITH MAGIC. Surely I could do that? And I did? Like I said, I only did it because I needed the money, but I didn't realise the fun and learning I was going to have.

In 1990 I worked at my first exhibition promoting industrial welding equipment. Eventually I would promote almost everything including caravan chassis, beer, industrial heat exchangers, pet care, double glazing, contract vehicle hire, drugs (the legal kind of course), low pressure piping, lead aprons, steel, floor cleaners, anti-corrosive coatings, finance, accountancy services and thread, that's right thread. All very much of a muchness really ☺

I was actually approached to promote condoms once. I'll save that story for the camp fire.

I would build up my exhibition work to an average of about 17 exhibitions per year. An average show being 3 days long, I'd do about 6 performances each day with a crowd of about 65 watching each show.

I loved it and I found myself working in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Croatia and Dubai. I'd almost been to as many places as my luggage. Then came 9/11 and the exhibition world changed; in particular the international travelling that certainly became less frequent.

Getting a crowd around a stand is dependent upon people walking by the stand, as initially two or three people will stop and watch some magic. A crowd attracts a crowd and as soon as I had a decent number around my pitch I would launch into the promotional patter and all, interwoven with my magic to emphasise the benefits. Once the show was over some of the audience would walk away and some would walk on to the stand. My client was happy and all was well with the world.

But after that fateful day attendances at exhibitions became drastically reduced. As there were not many people walking by the stand, it then became very challenging to gather a crowd. I could get half a dozen or so, sometimes even a dozen, but I had to work harder to get them. So I hit upon the idea of qualifying individuals and pairs of people as they walked by the stand.

Crowds were great as it made the competitors jealous, was good for PR and brand awareness. Frankly, very few of the audience would walk on the stand. Qualifying people was different. I soon realised not only could I qualify people very quickly, but I could get more people on to the stand and introduce them to the sales staff. Better still, all was done in a very short amount of time.

Qualifying was subtle and not very good for brand awareness, but so much better when it came to getting visitors on the stand and talking to the representatives. The more conversations the representatives had, the more appointments and therefore ultimately more sales.

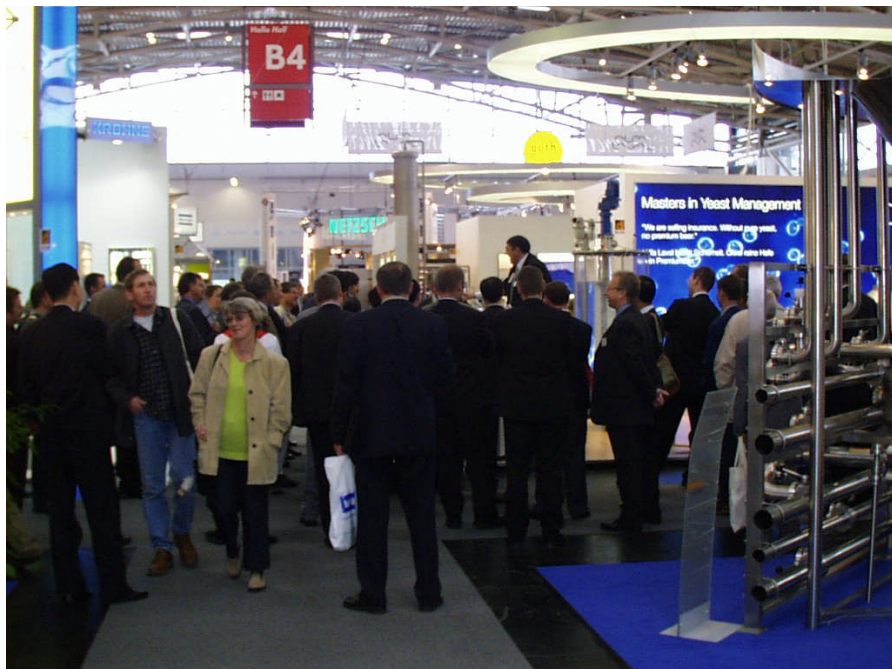
What you're about to read is a culmination of my experience as a magician working on exhibition stands. In particular what I learnt about the qualifying process to increase lead generation.

Let's be clear, you need to do your pre-show marketing, you need to ensure you have your stand attractively designed and it's very important to do your "after show" follow up. But that's not what I'm going to talk about, even though I will touch on those things.

My main focus is on what happens at the show. How do you engage with the visitor, how do you qualify them and how do you dismiss them and any unwanted visitors you may have?

I might throw in some other tips and observations to make your life at an exhibition easier, let's see how we go. Note that word 'easier'. I didn't say 'easy' because working at an exhibition is hard graft and you're going to learn some ideas which will help you.

For a little more information about my experience [click here](#).



### **Before we go any further... a word in your shell-like!**

There are many types of exhibitions. Some have very strict rules and regulations with everything stated in a thick book. Others are very easygoing and, unless you get a complaint almost anything is acceptable.

Your objectives may vary at an exhibition. You may only want to create brand awareness, or product/service awareness or to network, or to carry out market research, or simply to chat with people (I've known it happen).

So I'm going to assume it's a relatively easy going exhibition and your objective for showing is to generate leads.

I'll assume you've done your homework and you know that your target customers will be attending the show.

It's incredible how many organisations don't do their homework and attend exhibitions that their target customers don't attend and then complain the show wasn't any good. The fact is, it just wasn't good for THEM.

We'll assume we're in an exhibition hall where there can be anything from half a dozen to a hundred exhibitors. There are stands around the edges of the room against the walls and in the centre of the room. If you were to look down from above, the room would look like one of those



mazes found in a science laboratory that mice run around in (come to think of it, that's exactly what happens, but with people not mice). We could be at the NEC or Earls Court in the UK or a large gymnasium.

We'll assume you're not going to use a magician, juggler, robot, cocktail bar, bowling alley, stilt walker, golfing range, a lookalike, racing arcade, semi naked women, a one legged tap dancer, pick pocket, casino, a man that can pick up nails with his nose or any other attraction.

There's just you and your colleague or colleagues on the stand. Maybe you're all on your lonesome. I'll touch on how to use attractions effectively later, for the minute we're just employing ordinary peoplepower.

By the way, there are so many variables I won't be able to cover every eventuality, so all I can offer is a guide. Once you've been to a show or two you'll work out your own way of doing things.

Also, like most things, you'll find my ideas are based on good old fashioned common sense. As you read what I have to say all will be obvious to you. Sometimes we just have to have common sense taught to us.

In short... it's not rocket science you just need the right tricks up your sleeve... and here they are.

### **Why 'One Foot On The Stand?'**

Oh yes, just one more thing. Why did I call this missal, 'One Foot On The Stand'?

The objective is to get the visitor from the aisle on to the stand. Often the edge of the stand acts as an invisible barrier and it can take a big psychological step to take the smallest physical step on to the stand. Once they have one foot on the stand there's a good chance we can engage with them and see if our offerings can help them.

Are you ready to begin? What do you mean you've been ready for a while get on with it John? So I shall, and off we jolly well go... Tally Ho!!

## Pre-show work

Before the show there's so much to arrange. A good way of increasing the foot-fall is by doing some pre-show marketing. I encourage you to send out a mail shot to your target customers inviting them to the stand. Ideally offer some sort of incentive maybe a discount or the opportunity to win a prize maybe even millions of pounds (when they arrive give them a lottery ticket).

At the very least, let them know which show you're going to attend and the location of the stand.

You might even pre-qualify your invites. For example, send key buyer invites printed on red card and influencers on green card.

Or, if you have as your clients, solicitors, doctors and lawyers you can colour code the invitations then, when they arrive on the stand, you'll know instantly who is who and which approach to take.

I know someone who sent out playing cards where Jacks were gate keepers, Queens were the influencers and Kings the buyers. The playing card was exchanged for a small gift and their business card put into a prize draw.

One of my clients had a racing car theme. Their invites had pictures of different types of racing car, each car pre-qualifying the visitors. When they arrived on the stand they were given the choice to participate in the XYZ Ltd Grand Prix (a racing car simulator). The winner won a major prize, a day at Silverstone.

Another client did something similar with golf. Whoever came on the stand was qualified and the appropriate action taken.

The advantage of doing your pre-show marketing is that visitors will be encouraged to come to you, as opposed to you having to go to them.

## Set objectives and manage expectations

Why are you exhibiting? Most companies exhibit to raise their profile, brand awareness and/or generate leads.

Many exhibitors can't afford to exhibit, nor can they afford **not** to exhibit. They can't afford to exhibit as the cost can be astronomical. Remember you're not only paying for the cost of the exhibition space and stand, you're also paying for the manpower and the cost of that manpower not doing what they normally do (i.e. selling on the road). Then there's the cost of promotion,



leaflets, advertising, staff extras, meals and a host of other costs, so do your budgets thoroughly.

Companies cannot afford NOT to exhibit as often, especially if they're well known within their industry. If they're missing from an exhibition rumours can begin that the company is in financial trouble.

Yet working an exhibition effectively can be very lucrative.

Very few companies actually sell at an exhibition. Yes, I know there are some exhibitions where sales actually happen on the stand, such as at the Ideal Home Exhibition where you'll see a demonstration of the 'Kamakazi Tai Quando Hiri Kari Karving Knife Set' that can actually chop off your thumb without you knowing until two days later. A crowd gathers to watch a demonstration of the wonders of what this knife set can do. It normally retails in the shops for £157.99 and today we're not selling it for £100, or £50, or even £20, oh no! If you buy right here right now it can be yours for only £9.99 and if you're not convinced we'll also give you a bottle of 'Eau de Sumo Wrestler' and an all expenses paid 2 week holiday to Las Vegas to sweeten the deal. The audience then flocks to buy a set and money will exchange hands there and then on the stand.

That doesn't happen with most shows. At most exhibitions initial contact is made with a prospective customer and the selling process begins in earnest AFTER the show.

## **So John, how many leads do we need to generate to pay for this thing then?**

I'm afraid this part of the book is not for the faint hearted and yet is probably... the most important part. Personally I find it boring, nevertheless it's a necessity.

Just how many leads do you need to pay to exhibit?

Set goals. Work out how much the venture will cost you. As you know how much margin you make on a sale, you'll know how many sales you'll need to make to break even. If you know your lead to sale ratio you can work out how many leads you'll need to break even.

Here's a calculation you can make to give you an idea. You'll need the following information.

**Cost** = Cost of exhibition, remember to take into account everything. Here are a few things to be going on with, stand space, manpower, registration, shipping, insurance, printing, pre-show promotion, electricity, lighting, installation and break down costs, furniture rental, design and manufacture of stand, telemarketing, accommodation, meals etc. – Let's say £4000.

**Margin** = Also known as Net Profit Margin, this is not the profit but how much out of every pound of sales a company actually keeps as earnings. If you're not sure of this figure use profit instead. We'll be using a percentage figure. – Let's say 25%.

**Turnover** = Total amount of sales, this is the gross figure.

**Price** = Average sale price per transaction. Let's say £250.

**Customers** – Number of customers needed.

**Conversion rate** – This is the percentage number of leads you convert to customers. Eg Every 4 leads you make one sale to one customer so the percentage conversion rate is  $\frac{1}{4} \times 100 = 25\%$ .

**The calculation is:**

Cost (4000) X 100 = 400 000 ÷ margin (25) = Turnover (£16 000)

Turnover (£16 000) ÷ Price (£400) = Customers (40)

Customers (40) X 100 = 4000 ÷ Conversion rate (25) = Number of leads (160)

Obviously you'll have to use your own figures but by this example to cover the cost of just exhibiting at this show you need **160** leads.

OK get the smelling salts out, you'll need it in a little while because there's one other calculation to make.

Let's say every four people you qualify you get a lead. Then in the example above you need to qualify  $160 \times 4 = 640$  people over the course of the show to cover the cost of the exhibition.

And at a show we're NOT looking to break even but **MAKE A PROFIT.**

Wake up... wake up... **WAKE UP!!!!**

Time for a little good news I've assumed in the above calculation one customer equals one sale. You may be in a business where you get multiple sales from a customer. If you get an average of three sales from a customer divide the last figure (640) by three or whatever the number of sales you get per customer.

Let's say our figure is  $640 \div$  number of sales per customer (3) = 213.3. So we need to qualify 213.3 prospects over the duration of the show. Assuming a three day show and that's  $213.3 \div 3 = 71.1$  lets say our goal is to qualify 72 people each day.

Assuming there are 6 'busy hours (traditionally the beginning and end of an exhibition day is quiet) =  $72 \div 6 = 12$  qualifications per hour. That means you need to be talking to one person every 5 minutes.

Is it really worth while exhibiting? I've just realised with the illustration above I could single handed kill the exhibition industry.

OK, OK, I've made up the figures and I know they're not so attractive. The fact still remains you have to do your maths to make an educated decision whether to exhibit or not and this is a good rule of thumb.

As I said, were not exhibiting to break even, so what would be a reasonable goal.



Also take into account the intangibles such as PR, goodwill and relationship building. Another question to ask yourself is “will you get customers further down the road two or three years later”?

It's very important you measure, measure, measure and measure again. Make a note of how many leads you DO generate anyway. After the show when you do your follow up, note how many sales you get and their monetary value. This will give you a good idea if it's worth exhibiting at the same show next time too. And if you do, what would you do differently?

## **Your behaviour on the stand reflects your brand**

You'd be staggered at some of the behaviour I've seen on an exhibition stand and quite understandable too, but only in some rare cases.

That space you've rented becomes your home. It's very easy to get very comfortable. Plus, after a while you will become bored, tired and sometimes a little... depressed (now where did I put that knife set I bought at the Ideal Home Exhibition?) The atmosphere is dry, you're getting hot and sticky, it seems like nobody wants to talk to you and now your feet are aching.

You've seen it happen, haven't you? You've even done it- so have I. We're in the car driving along and we get an itchy nose and we scratch it. I've seen some people do worse (not you or I of course). Why? Because we're comfortable in our cars, we're in a confined space except... we forget people can look in and see what's we're doing. The glass deceives us into thinking it's a solid wall, which it is, it's just that people can look in.

It's exactly the same on an exhibition stand, we forget we're not in a private locked room, people CAN look in, DO look in and see our behaviour.

Our behaviour reflects our brand.

I've seen exhibitors:

Eating burgers (what's more eating with their mouths open and the juice dripping from their chins)

Reading a book

Being aloof and rude to visitors who approach them on their stand

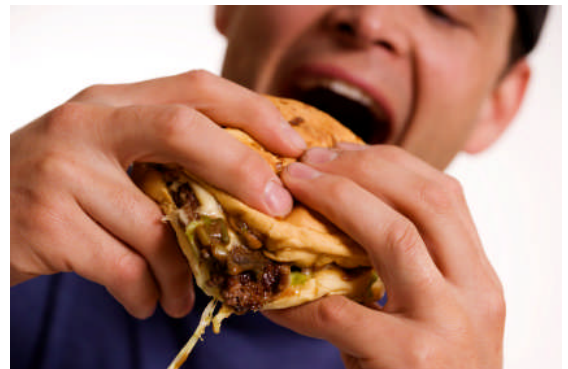
Play football (not as a demo but because they were bored)

Chewing gum (apparently medically proven to be good for the brain but alas not good for the image)

Throwing things at each other as if they were having a snow ball fight

Openly and obviously ogling the opposite sex (I'm talking about women here as well as the men)

Wolf whistle a visitor walking by a stand (obviously a male)



Carry out a conversation with a woman's chest (a male who was soon slapped in the face)

Picking their nose and having a really good go too

Adjust their underwear (this included the untying of the belt, loosening of trousers and revealing the glorious sight of some wonderful puce 'Y' fronts)

Lounging on a chair with their feet (sans shoes and socks) resting on a desk

Sleeping (and slavering, he looked so attractive... NOT!!)

Reading magazines (on one occasion the type of magazine vertically challenged people find difficult to reach in a newsagent)



If any of the above behaviour reflects your brand then fine, do it. Otherwise don't.

And boys, I'm a single, red blooded male and admire the opposite sex too, all I ask is that you please, please, please remember there's a time and a place for everything. If you see a woman that you suddenly deem to be the love of your life, whose face is such a vision that God must have given her the beauty of every angel in heaven, whose figure is so stunning that on a scale from one to ten she's a 97 and that her charisma is such that wild beasts are immediately soothed by her presence and birds are flying about her in adoration and you really, really, really must ogle, then at the very least... BE DISCREET.

I'm not saying we shouldn't have fun or enjoy ourselves because we should. In fact fun keeps the energy up and that is a good thing. It's about being aware of our behaviour and ensuring it's appropriate.

So at all times behave and be all those other words beginning with 'be' too:

- Be nice
- Be helpful
- Be polite
- Be dignified
- Be positive
- Be enthusiastic
- Be sure to use your common sense
- Be sure you treat others as you would like to be treated yourself
- Be smartly dressed in keeping with your brand.

Ensure you're stand also reflects your brand. You don't need to spend a fortune on display units and graphics. Today you can buy pop up banners that look very effective and attractive and at an economical price too.

I once saw a wealth coach exhibiting and he looked very dishevelled, his display tatty and his business cards were printed on those Vista Print budget cards. Nothing wrong with Vista Print

budget cards, it's just that if you're a wealth coach then surely shouldn't you at least look... well... wealthy?

A stand can get 'lived in' especially if you're busy, so do your best not to have bins brimming with junk and rubbish (if there's a bin in the hall nearby use that and let that look untidy). Don't have coffee cups, grains of sugar and dried liquid spills decorating your furniture.

As for leaflets... hmmm, I'll tell you about leaflets in the 'tip' section later.

On the stand and when walking around the show you are ON SHOW at ALL times so be aware of the unobserved observer.

A quick word about being helpful, if you see someone looking a little lost or who needs help, then help them. Many a time I've helped 'the lost soul' and quite a few times they came back to the stand I was working on to see what we were selling. On more than one occasion they gave us an order. Not because they were repaying us for our kindness in any way, but because they liked our helpful attitude, were interested in our product/service and so bought from us.

Being helpful CAN pay dividends, after all people sell to people and exhibitions is a place to build relationships, initiate new ones, re-ignite old ones and re-enforce current ones. Besides it's good karma.

Once your stint on the stand is over and you're in your hotel room or at home then do whatever you like.

## **Be focussed**

It can be so easy to be distracted on a stand especially if there are only a few visitors. If a friend comes on to the stand or an old colleague who just wants to chat that's fine, except that while you're chatting there could be potential opportunities wandering in the aisle in front of your stand and you're missing them.

I'll chat a little more about how to deal with friends when I come to discuss, 'How to lose 'em'. So stay focussed.

## **Exhibition etiquette**

There are some do's and don'ts, in truth these are strictly my opinion and I'll leave it up to you whether you agree with them or not and if you choose to abide by them.

If someone is walking in the aisle past the front of your stand they are 'fair game' you can attempt to stop them and engage them in conversation.

Notice I used the word 'attempt' because not everyone can be engaged - more about that later.

If a visitor is walking towards another stand do not intercept them, let them go.

If they're looking at another stand with interest leave them alone. I suggest you subtly watch them, don't stare, remember what your mother told you about staring. Just keep a subtle eye on them. If they walk towards the stand they're looking at, let them go. If they walk away, and it's possible to do so, then attempt to engage.

If a prospect, current client or friend is talking to someone on another stand leave them well alone. Do not go over to say “Hello” and certainly DO NOT bring them over to your stand after you’ve interrupted them.

All exhibitors are there to do the same thing, we’re there to ultimately sell our wares and we want as many visitors to see what we have on offer. So, treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.

When a prospect is on your stand and you’re having a conversation with them give them 100% of your attention. No looking over their shoulder for other potential prospects, or worse still, a ‘better’ prospect. You are with the person you’re with... until they leave the stand.

If there are several of you manning the stand don’t stand in a row in front of the stand, this is often perceived as a barrier to a potential visitor.

Manning a stand can be boring and frankly there are times we’d prefer to chat to our colleagues. If I’m standing on the edge of the booth with a colleague I’ll suggest that under normal circumstances I would consider looking over someone’s shoulder during a conversation to be very rude. I’ll explain that I am interested in what they have to say. As we’re at the exhibition to generate leads I suggest we look over each other’s shoulder at the visitors walking up the aisle. If either of us spots a potential prospect we just say ‘excuse me’ (even in mid conversation) and we go talk to that person. No one will become upset.

I’ll do the same with a fellow exhibitor if I am visiting their stand- in particular my neighbour’s. If during our conversation I see a visitor walk onto their stand, I’ll point them out to my new found friend then leave. Never get in the way of a potential sale, yours or anyone else’s.

This way the boredom is alleviated a little and we’re still focussing on our objectives.

I told you it was common sense.



## **A word or three about body language**

If you’re just standing there waiting to engage with a visitor, don’t stand with your hands in your pockets - it looks unprofessional. Do not stand with your hands behind your back- it can (on a subconscious level) look aggressive and don’t stand with your hands clasped or folded in front of you. It gives the signal, ‘Don’t come anywhere near me, keep away’.

Stand with your hands dangling naturally by your side. I know this can be difficult, how do I know? Because I have a challenge doing this, even today.

## The types of visitors

So who are these visitors then? Well here are some types we're likely to meet:

- The Buyers** - Or decision makers. No explanation necessary. The ideal exhibition would be aisles swarming with these decision-making people who hold the purse strings.
- The Influencers** - Very important and we need to build a good relationship with these people. They don't have the authority to buy, but if they like what you offer they can be the champion you need to eventually get the sale.
- The Fact Finders** - They're interested in what we have to offer, but are not likely to buy. They may or may not have some influencing power. We need to keep on the good side of these people, but not spend too much time with them.
- The Students** - Ahhh - the students. The buyers, influencers and fact-finders of the future. We need to keep on the good side of these people, but not spend too much time with them either.
- The Spies** - Competition alert, competition alert!! These are visitors doing - how can I put it politely 'Market Research'? They may be the competition or they may be people who are thinking of setting up a business themselves and want to see how the land lies before they invest. They may be considering exhibiting the following year.
- The Snakes** - These visitors have decided not to invest in exhibiting at the show but will intentionally directly sell to the exhibitors and visitors. More about these people later.

Some shows are very helpful and will colour code the badges of the visitors ie, red are exhibitors, black the press, blue technicians etc

If you know your target customer and there is a badge colour that corresponds, your life will be made easier as the pre-qualifying process will have been done for you. Otherwise you're going to have to do a little initial digging. Don't worry I'll show you how.

Now for the juicy bits

## How to stop 'em

So there you are, you've done all your pre show work, the stand graphics are stunning, all the leaflets are perfectly stacked and positioned just where you want them. The carpet has been vacuumed and everything that is polishable is polished. You've brushed up specially for the occasion, you're so gorgeously dressed you wouldn't be out of place at the Paris Fashion Show. The stand is so bright it gleams like a beacon and any one who gazes upon it will need to wear welder's goggles to protect their eyes.

You have created... a visitor magnet.

Surely, once the exhibition opens you'll have more prospects on your stand than you can wave an enquiry pad at.

You can even spy them in the distance.

The visitors are under starter's orders, the doors open, they wrestle and jostle through registration and flood into the hall. You can hear the buzz, they're like a swarm of locusts making their way around the aisles. The buzz is getting closer and closer and close and closer and closer to your stand. Here they come. They're only a metre or two away from you.



Any second now someone will come on to the stand and enquire about your offering. So you wait... and wait..... and wait..... and wait.....and...

Some of them are looking at your stand, but no one is approaching you. They're just walking past. Well, we're not going to approach them, because we don't want to come across as pushy or desperate, do we? Besides if they're interested they'll come and talk to us, right? Wrong!!!

Amazingly, we can have our offerings emblazoned all over our stand, even spelt out in smoke all over the sky and yet... the majority of visitors, unless we have a well known brand, will have no idea what we do and how we can help them.

Sometimes, being a well known brand can work against you, as visitors can assume what you're offering, when in actual fact you're offering something completely different. Or you might be launching a new product/service.

So what to do?

The way I see it "we is going a fishing we is". The bank is our stand, the river the aisle, the fish the visitors, the bait the technique to engage with them and the rod is... well I don't know what the rod is! Maybe I shouldn't have started this fishing analogy in the first place. Even so, I'm sure you get my drift.

### **Attitude**

Think **HELP** - do not think **SELL**.

**Selling** is about making a sale for the sake of making money/profit.

**Helping** is about finding out if our offering can help the visitor overcome a problem or achieve a goal and is more likely to develop into repeat business. Even if your technique to engage visitors is perfect, you may find you stop ten people (or more) and they are not interested in your offering, just keep at it. It's so easy to become despondent and lethargic. Do your best to keep your energy up because attitude is everything.

Do not be pushy or too eager (imagine our friend on the left approaching you) just relax. Look at it like this, all we're going to do is make some new friends.



Above all else do your best to enjoy yourself.

Our objective is to get them talking about THEMSELVES. What they do and if they have any challenges where we can help. Notice that word 'help' again not 'sell' but 'HELP'. I've mentioned it before and it's worth mentioning again.

Why do we encourage them to talk about themselves? Well, there are several reasons and I'll explain in more detail when we get to the, 'How To Hold 'Em' section.

Telling them how we can help them with our products and services is not going to happen until much later in this process.

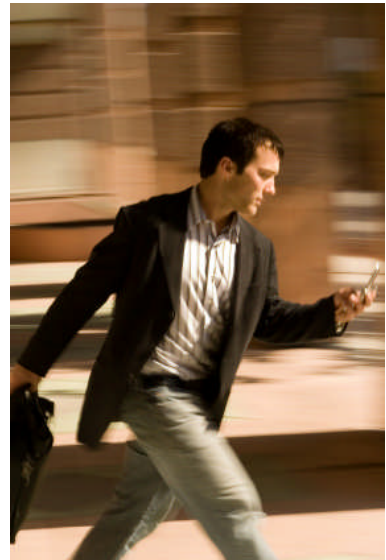
Let's have a look at some of the different types of visitors and how we can engage with them, or not as the case may be.

### **The Missile**

I'm talking about those missiles that are launched from military aircraft and relentlessly chase after their quarry, no matter how much the target weaves and winds, the missile is on their trail and will only explode when it hits the target.

I haven't been to an exhibition yet where a visitor has exploded into smithereens- something to look forward to I suppose 😊 I have seen plenty of visitors who walk by a stand with what I call 'intent'.

They're obviously heading somewhere, either to a meeting, or to sort something, they may even be desperately heading for the rest room. Wherever they are going they won't have the time to chat and hear about what we have to offer. So let them go don't even attempt to engage with them.



### **The Gift**

We all like gifts, people just give them to us and we have to do very little work to get them.

A gift at an exhibition is a visitor who walks by our stand and decides to walk on the stand and talk to us. They may even have decided to come to the show specifically to see us. They're interested in what we have to offer and are every easy to engage with. They may be buyers, influencers or fact finders whoever they are they want to explore our offerings and see if we can help them.

If you get a gift on your stand go straight to the 'How To Hold 'Em' section do not pass 'GO' do not collect £200... your rewards could be far greater than expected.

### **The Amblers**

The Amblers are not the next door neighbours to The Borrowers. These are the visitors we can easily engage with and prospect... there's gold in dem there 'amblers' I tell ya.

The majority of the people we are going to engage with are amblers. These are visitors wandering around the exhibition. They've either seen everything they want to see and are looking to see if there's anything they've missed. They may be killing time until their next

appointment or are just wandering around to see what catches their eye. These people... amble, they amble around the aisles.

They may be on their own or they may be with a colleague or two, either way they amble.

Basically there are two types of ambler

Those that stop to look at your stand, these are the 'staring ambler'. Those that amble by your stand showing no interest in you whatsoever, these are the 'ambling ambler'.

### **THE BASIC TECHNIQUE**

Your mission, should you wish to accept it, is to engage the visitor in conversation, get close enough to their badge to read it (it might give you an idea of what their company does) and get them to talk about THEMSELVES.

To engage with either ambler you must be:

**BOLD, POLITE, POSITIVE and above all FRIENDLY**

Do not be:

**TIMID, DESPERATE, OVER EAGER and above all FORCEFUL.**

Just chat to them, find any excuse to approach them and talk. You would be amazed how many will respond and respond positively. If they don't talk or run away don't worry, someone else will be along soon.

To initiate a conversation, I've even been known to compliment men on their tie and women on their jewellery. If you ever do that be careful and ensure you come across as sincere.

Do your best to be natural and appropriate, not forced

Here are a few conversation starters. If I've seen someone ambling by the stand, I've...

- asked them if they have the right time (I have a perfectly good watch and yet I pretended to set the time according to the answer given).
- asked what's been the most interesting thing they've seen at the show, a good lead in to asking if they're looking for anything in particular at the show?
- asked if they knew where the nearest facilities were, I already know as it's one of the first things I check out when exhibiting.
- enquired whether on their travels, they have they seen where the XYZ Ltd stand is.
- wondered if could I borrow their exhibition brochure for a moment as I'd like to look up where a particular company is and I've lost my copy (actually, I know exactly where my copy is).
- tried any number of other gambits to start a conversation.

Asking for help works well as most of us like to help people.

So a conversation might go along these lines:

You: 'Excuse me, I do apologise for interrupting, I wonder if you could help me please? I don't suppose you have the right time?'

Ambler: 'Sure, it's A minutes past B.'

You: If they have a nice watch complement them on the watch otherwise:

'Thank you very much I appreciate... (look at their badge) excuse me but I'm sure I've heard of (name the company) what do you do?'

Ok, I've made it sound easy and often it is. Most times there may be a few more exchanges of conversation but it has to be played by ear.

During the first hour or two of the show try different approaches. Sometimes the same script but with one different word in the right spot or the addition of a different buzzword or phrase can make all the difference. Search for the right key phrase and refine your script to make the visitor want to spend a little time with you to talk.

Don't talk about your products or services unless they're showing a direct interest - in which case go for it. It's about asking about themselves. I'll explain why in the next chapter.

### **THE 'LEAFLET PULL'**

If you're having a challenge with the idea of just starting a conversation then 'The Leaflet Pull' is a simple technique to employ.

As the ambler walks by approach them and say, 'Excuse me, I can see you're busy going somewhere, please take one of our leaflets. As you can appreciate when exhibiting we want visitors to be aware of what we have to offer but we don't want to be pushy. Read it at your leisure and if you're interested, our details are on there - you can call us later.'

Offer one of the leaflets to the ambler, as they reach for it just before they take hold of it pull it back, don't snatch it back just calmly pull it back and follow up with:

'I'm sorry, I've just noticed from your badge you're from XYZ I'm sure I've heard of XYZ what does XYZ do?'



Notice the psychology and in particular the non-aggressive approach.

You've acknowledged they are 'busy and going somewhere' and you're implying that you're not going to keep them long and just give them a leaflet (who can refuse a leaflet from someone who is polite).

Then you notice the company name and encourage them to talk about themselves. Our favourite topic is usually us or something we have an interest in.

The whole point here is to get them to stand still. If they're moving it's difficult to engage. If they're stationary, providing our manner is non threatening (ie we don't look like we're going to sell them something), we're in with a chance to engage with them.

The idea is get them talking about themselves and for two main reasons. They are more likely to chat, as they might think they have an opportunity to 'sell' to you, but more importantly it's the start of the next phase 'How to hold 'em', which I'll come to in a moment.

As I said, if the person does not want to engage, either just let them go or politely say something like, 'Sorry to have troubled you. If you need us, you know where we are. Otherwise enjoy the rest of the show'.

### **THE 'PREMIUM EXPLANATION' PLOY**

Using a premium that needs some explanation is a great way of engaging with visitors.

I used to give away a simple card trick. As a visitor walked past the stand I'd hand one out and as soon as they took one, I would quickly offer to explain what it was. I'd demonstrate it then explain it. Then, as I was about to dismiss them I'd suddenly notice their company name on their badge and go to the next stage.

The objective is to stop them. If we can stop them we have a chance to engage with them.

### **BUT WHAT IF THEY HAVE NO BADGE, JOHN?**

The reason they do not have a badge is either because:

- The show does not issue badges
- They have lost their badge
- They are spies (not necessarily your competition)
- They are directors of large organisations (highly likely to be decision makers)

I think they are worth pursuing, especially if it's quiet.

I would pretend they looked familiar and say, 'I'm sure we've met before. Which company do you work for?'

And once again off we go, "Tally Ho"... I must stop saying "Tally Ho" - that's twice now.

## **How to hold 'em**

Having stopped our prospect, the next phase of our interaction is suggested in an old nursery rhyme.

Simple Simon met a pie man going to the fair;  
Says Simple Simon to the pie man let me taste your ware.

Says the pie man to Simple Simon show me first your penny;  
Says Simple Simon to the pie man indeed I have not any.

And what a wise pie man he was. Before giving anything away, he qualified his prospect and that's the next phase for the wise exhibitor.

The reason why we ask about THEM is because often our offering can help our customers in different ways. They're looking for solutions. Something that could help them to achieve a goal or solve a problem or issue.

For the sake of simplicity (and let's embellish a little so I can make a point), let's say we sell gardening tools. If we ask if they are interested in gardening tools the answer could come back as 'no', as the person you're talking to can't see how a gardening tool can help them in any way.

If through a series of well worded questions you find the person you're talking to is looking to partition his garden then it looks like some form of fencing can help. Even though your core business is garden tools and your 'label' is someone who supplies garden tools you may also sell other things such as...fencing.

How many times have you told someone what you do and used a 'catch-all' label? Then, in a later conversation with them you've found that they were looking for a specific product or service and went elsewhere, when in fact you could have helped them.

We're going for a rifle approach here; instead of the old scatter gun approach. In other words, our aim is to uncover their actual needs and not guess or assume their needs.

Our objective when qualifying is to CASUALLY STEER (note the words I use) the conversation to discover what challenges they have or solutions they are looking for.

Your actual script and line of questioning will vary depending on your objectives at the exhibition and what you're ultimately selling.

Here's a guide to the type of information that might be useful. No doubt you'll have some more apt ones for your offering. They're in no particular order and once I list them they'll be obvious:

1. The name of the individual you're talking to and the name of their company.
2. Their position in the company – are they the buyer, the influencer or do they have no influence.
3. What does their company do?
4. Are they looking for anything specifically at the exhibition?
5. Problems they are looking to solve, or challenges that they may be having.



6. Who is their current supplier? Are they happy with them? What do they like about them and how could they improve?
7. Are they looking to change suppliers?
8. If there is a need for your offering, what is the decision making process and in what time frame?
9. If they don't need what you're offering now, when will they start considering suppliers?
10. Do they have the resources available for purchasing?

Do your best to qualify with as few questions as possible. My guess is you don't need all the information listed above. So before the show, make a list of the information you need to build a picture of your perfect customer.

Do your best to be friendly, non-aggressive and as conversational as you can with the questions. Don't go in to 'Interrogation mode' all of a sudden .

Listen to what they say. If they don't mention a challenge they have or a need for your type of offering, you might casually throw into the conversation what your product or service is and if they ever use that type of thing. Only do that as a last resort.

If there is a possibility that they might be able to use your offering or there's a definite need, then suggest a course of action. Swap business cards and ask for permission to call them after the show to arrange a meeting, or send them some literature, or keep in touch by newsletter, email, post, pony express or carrier pigeon or any other reason to contact them after the show.

You may consider writing all the information on an 'enquiry sheet' or 'lead card'. In other words make a note of the conversation say, on a sheet of paper, staple their business card to it and follow up after the show.

What's that? Oh 'enquiry sheets' and 'lead cards' are the same thing, it's a sheet of paper with all the important information you need about a prospect whose interested in your offering.

On there you might have:

- Date of the show (or meeting)
- Prospect's name
- Company
- Position in the company
- Address
- Phone number
- Email address
- Products/services they are interested in
- How they'd like to be contacted do they prefer email/phone/carrier pigeon
- When to contact them
- Level of interest
- Decision making process
- Comments
- Action promised

## How to lose 'em – The hand shake of farewell

Alas all good things must come to an end.

Some people don't know how to finish a conversation, some people feel rude concluding a conversation. Reason being, we look at visitors exactly as that... visitors. When we were young we were taught, if we have a guest in our home when the time is right they'll leave. When we get older we experience the visitor who outstays their welcome and can't take a hint. So I'm about to teach you some ways and means.



### THE BASIC TECHNIQUE

It's all in the body language, tone of voice and... 'The Hand Shake Of Farewell'.

Whoever you are addressing ALWAYS be polite and, if needs be, firm.

At an appropriate moment say something along the lines of, 'Well it's been a pleasure talking to you, thank you for your time (hold out your hand to shake theirs- they will automatically shake it) and I look forward to seeing you again soon, enjoy the rest of the show'.

Now let's look at some variations.

### THE PROSPECT

You've come to a natural end to the conversation and agreed a course of action. At an appropriate moment say:

'Well it's been a pleasure talking to you, I'll (repeat the course of action you've agreed) thank you for your time and I look forward to contacting you shortly. Enjoy the rest of the show'.

As soon as they leave the stand make sure you write any notes you need, before going through the 'Stop 'Em, Hold 'Em, Lose 'Em' process again. If you don't make notes you'll forget.

### THE MISTAKE

So you've stopped someone, engaged, qualified them and found... they're not interested in your product/service or they'll never need your offering... ever.

As soon as possible at a convenient point in the conversation say something along the lines of:

'I was curious what your company did, thank you very much for your time (offer hand to shake) I really appreciate your time and I hope you enjoy the rest of the show'.

Or

'We do (go through a very brief explanation) and I was curious what your company did. I don't think we're going to be in a position to help each other. You know what it's like at exhibitions we want people to be aware of what we do, but we don't want to be too pushy. Thank you very much for your time (offer hand to shake). I really appreciate it and I hope you enjoy the rest of the show'.

## **FRIENDS**

How you deal with friends is up to you and usually depends on how well you know them.

I don't know about you, but I would rather talk to my friends all day than work... well most times.

The way I see it, I can be with and talk to my friends almost anytime. At an exhibition I have a finite number of hours to generate as many leads as possible. While I'm talking to friends valuable prospects could be walking by the stand.

If your stand is busy they'll quickly take the hint to leave, what if your stand is not busy? What if you're just standing waiting for your next opportunity to appear? We can only do one thing at a time. If we are talking to someone, we can't keep our eyes peeled for the next person to engage.

Always be open and honest.

I suggest, you acknowledge them and, before they can launch into a conversation, say:

'X it's wonderful to see you (or what a surprise seeing you here). Listen I'd love to chat but as you can see, I'm manning my/this stand and even though it's quiet I have to be available to talk to any prospective customers who might pass the stand. I'm OK for a minute and a half, but I really need to concentrate on what I'm doing. Would you mind if I call you later?'

Exchange any pleasantries or snippets of news, then politely bring the conversation to a close and say 'Goodbye'.

## **THE SNAKE**

Ah yes, "The Snake". I mentioned The Snake earlier. This is someone who has deliberately not paid for a stand but who has decided to wander round the exhibition and sell to the exhibitors and visitors.

There is a point of view that you've paid for the stand space and you are therefore entitled to sell. If people want to sell to you, they should at least be a fellow exhibitor.

The fact is... some snakes are useful.

Exhibiting is also about networking and there may be products and services that may be useful to you. Or there could be some mutually beneficial information or partnership to be explored.

The point is Snakes want to talk to you so, if you think it's appropriate, you can arrange to talk to them AFTER the show. Which is what I suggest you do, giving you the maximum amount of time talking to people who may buy from you and engaging and qualifying the amblers.

When a snake walks onto your stand proceed with caution, as they could be a prospective customer.

If you're not sure whether they are selling or buying, a good question to ask is, 'May I ask, what is it you're looking for?'

If they're buying, they'll state their problem or how they think you can help. If they're selling they'll tell you their proposition.

If it's obvious they are selling (and they are not fellow exhibitors) and you're not interested in what they have to offer, cut them short. Simply state:

'I'm sorry if I appear rude but I have paid to exhibit here and as you can appreciate, I really want to maximise my time and opportunities to get a return on my investment. Please give me your card and if I'm interested I'll give you a call.'

If you are possibly interested then:

'I'm sorry if I appear rude, I am actually very interested but as you can appreciate I really want to maximise my time and opportunities while I'm here. Let's exchange cards and I'll call you after the show'.

Or suggest they call you!.

### **THE PERSISTENT ONE**

OK, so you've been nice and they're not taking the hint. If it's a prospect you might have to grit your teeth and wait until they decide to go, but if it's a snake there is... 'The Hand Shake Of GO AWAY'.

Cut them short again and say:

'I do apologise and I really would love to chat. Thank you for your time. Extend you hand, which they'll take and this time squeeze firmly and gently, **VERY GENTLY**, and pull them to one side, as if tugging them away from you. Don't throw them across the room, I emphasise **firmly and gently**.

They should take the hint.

### **THE RESCUE**

If you're working with several colleagues you need to look out for each other.

I would clarify before the show a hand signal which signifies 'we need rescuing'. By rescuing, I mean when talking with someone, we need to end the conversation and all the other techniques have failed.

When the time comes to finish the conversation and we cannot get away, we would stand with at least one arm by our sides and with the fingers of that hand we'd form the 'OK' sign or a fist or whatever we had agreed. As soon as a colleague spots that they would come over and interrupt the conversation, stating that we were needed (urgently) on the phone by a customer/head office or whoever. I'd then explain that, as I was manning the stand, I'd switched off my mobile, so it must be urgent. Then I would say "I really do have to go, thank you for your time, many apologies etc" then escape.

Or we'd come up with some other reason.

### **Follow up the lead**

Whatever you promised the lead you would do, **DO IT!!** Follow up all your leads. You've worked for them so you deserve to reap the rewards.

## Attractions, demonstrations & prize draws

If you're doing demonstrations on the stand and by demonstration I mean something that visitors can watch while standing in the aisle you ARE on to a winner.

Often exhibitors have a plasma screen or lap top playing a loop of film. They think visitors will stop and watch, often they don't. The reason is that what is being played doesn't mean anything to the visitor. The film shows how the latest 'interwoven laser loop' is manufactured. The problem is that nobody knows what an 'interwoven laser loop' is and who cares how it's made? They want to know what it can do for them, what the benefits mean to them.

We need human contact. People sell to people.

Cooking demonstrations are brilliant. They can be noisy enough to attract visitors to the stand as well as the delicious whiff that will delicately waft its way around the hall, attracting visitors like the Pied Piper.

You might consider using a magician, juggler, robot, cocktail bar, bowling alley, stilt walker, pick pocket, casino, sketch artist or any other attraction.

They might need your help to start the crowd and providing there is traffic walking by the stand a crowd will build a crowd. As the crowd builds, see if you can spot any potential connections you'd like to make. When the demonstration is over, approach them and start a conversation. Ask them what they thought, then ease into your qualifying questions.

Let's use the example of a caricaturist. The artist will position themselves near the edge of the stand. Usually it takes a while before anyone is brave enough to have their caricature done. So have stand staff sit in the chair while the artist does their thing. Eventually visitors will come on to the stand for a drawing. While they're posing this is the perfect time to qualify them. If a queue forms, start chatting to the people waiting (for 'chatting' read 'qualifying').



If you have premiums that you are giving away such as pens, sweets, or whatever, do not hand them out without qualifying the person who asks for one. Always use the opportunity to strike up a conversation and qualify them.

### THE BUSINESS CARD DRAW

The same goes with the business card draw. Qualify everyone who wants to put a card in the draw. It'll save you going through them later and missing any potential leads because you don't recognise the company name.

Also, if you qualify someone who is a potential prospect but doesn't want to come on to the stand, you can ask them to pop their card in the draw then you have their details and you can follow up after the show.

A good idea was given to me by Sam Devonshire of [www.4itrecruitment.co.uk](http://www.4itrecruitment.co.uk). He suggests the prize should be a service/product you offer. With this approach you may well have fewer cards at least the people giving their cards are interested in the prize and therefore your potential customer.

This is a great way of pre-qualifying so your follow up after the show is much more targeted and less time consuming.

### **Tip section**

Drink water and plenty of it. I think drinking water from a bottle does not look good, but is acceptable. Exhibition halls are often very dry places and water is essential.

No coffee .... it gives you 'coffee breath' and it dehydrates you.

Mints – Even if your breath smells like a mountain breeze, always carry mints with you. I suggest using those breath strips as they melt in your mouth in seconds. Chewing mints or speaking to a prospect whilst eating a mint does not look professional.

Know where the nearest loos are. As well as using them for the obvious reason you can also refresh yourself periodically by wiping your face and neck with water.

Have an early night the day before the exhibition.

Observe the flow of traffic and watch for patterns. How do visitors approach your stand? This will give you an idea of any adjustments you need to make when approaching a visitor.

Be nice and helpful to your neighbours - you never know when you might need their help.

During breaks enjoy a breath of fresh air – take a walk and preferably outside the building if you can.

Beware of being sold the space right by the Registration points. Often, exhibition organisers will sell this as a prime site as everyone will HAVE TO walk by your stand and every one will do exactly that, walk by your stand. I'm talking mainly about the big national shows not the smaller local ones. When visitors arrive they're busy fiddling with their badges, some like to take in the whole show before settling down and wandering around, some will have appointments to go to. If you're in qualifying mode and you start qualifying as visitors enter they'll say they'll come back later (which they won't). If you try to catch them on the way out of the hall they're usually focussed on leaving the show and so won't want to talk to you.

Beware of exhibitions that have seminars bolted on to them. They're actually seminars with an exhibition bolted on to it! Usually the visitors will attend to hear the speakers and attend the seminars, the organisers have an exhibition and the money raised by exhibitors funds the event.

The visitors may wander around the stands during the first morning and then that's it, they've seen everything they want to see. Even if the organisers arrange to have lunch and coffee breaks in the middle of the exhibition hall the delegates just network among themselves. You may get the odd one or two wandering around the exhibition, but that's it.

Of course, that's not always the case. Before you decide to exhibit at any show always do your homework. See if you can attend first and, if you can, obtain a copy of the exhibitors at the last show, call them for their opinion before committing a chunk of money, time and energy. Don't allow stand staff to congregate together. It can form a psychological barrier and discourage visitors from walking onto the stand.

Don't set out brochures systematically, neatly or in patterns. Visitors will consider it a display and be less likely to take one, as nobody wants to spoil a display. If they're in a leaflet rack, then fine, make sure they look tidy. If you have a pile of leaflets or business cards on a table it's OK if they look a *little* 'untidy'. Try to make the pile look like people have been taking them.

Try not to hover uncertainly around visitors, it gives the wrong impression.

When you leave the exhibition, take off your badge. You're obviously a visitor and a possible target for muggers.

Wear your badge on your right lapel. When you shake hands, you usually do it with your right hand bringing your right lapel closer to the person you're shaking hands with and so making it easier for them to read the badge. Ladies, please do not locate your badge in the depths of your cleavage, as this may cause embarrassment.

Don't neglect anyone. Always acknowledge the presence of a visitor on the stand, even when you're occupied - because the next visitor could be a Buyer, or the Chairman of your holding company.

If you spot a customer whose name you've forgotten either own up to it and apologise or get another member of staff to make the initial contact and have them tell you the name.

### **OH MY ACHING FEET 'N BONES BUT MORE SO MY FEET**

When you stand for hours at a time, leg muscles and ligaments contract and tighten, causing painful feet and legs and feelings of fatigue. Here are some tips to make life easier (not easy but easier) on your feet.

This is not the time to wear-in brand new shoes. I suggest the smartest old pair you have.

Take two pairs of shoes with you and swap them over every two hours. Different shoes will push against different pressure points on the soles of your feet. It's best you have two different styles of shoes.

Use 'Gel Soles' made by Scholl. They'll help to keep your feet comfortable.

Boys, cotton socks for you, they'll allow your feet to breath.

And girls, I know how you like your high heels, I know how they make you feel and I have to admit I like the look of a nicely turned ankle too **BUT** (did you notice how big a



'but' that is) HIGH HEELS AIN'T GOOD FER STANDIN' IN ALL DAY LONG d'ya hear what I'm sayin' girlfriend? I'm sorry but John has your best interests at heart, wear flat heels or at least as flat as you can.

### **And finally...**

Well that's it. There's obviously more to it and as I said at the beginning there are many variables, it really is down to common sense.

Be bold, find your own style and rhythm, be yourself and you won't go far wrong.

Above all else have fun.

If you'd like to discuss any aspect of this report, have any questions you'd like answering, have any ideas of your own you'd like to share, or would like some training please contact me at [john@hotowka.co.uk](mailto:john@hotowka.co.uk).



### **VERY IMPORTANT BIT (at least to me)**

John Hotowka is an [after dinner](#), [motivational and business speaker](#) and magician based in the UK. He's not a bad [conference host](#) either.

When required he can just entertain at events and/or communicate an insightful and motivational message.

He helps organisations deal with change during tough times with his morale raising presentations and has an uncanny knack when it comes to connecting with an audience.

He's also passionate about inspiring young people (14 to 19 year olds) with his ['Think MAGIC'](#) presentation about life skills and entrepreneurship.

If you are organising an event or you know of someone who is, please visit [www.hotowka.com](http://www.hotowka.com) for more information. Better still when would now be a good time to contact John at [john@hotowka.com](mailto:john@hotowka.com).