

Stick People

I have a confession to make: I am now the not-so-proud owner of a selfie stick. Considering how often I've rolled my eyes at stick-wielding tourists and trade show attendees, this is a monumental change of heart. And while I don't pretend to understand the Millennial who hosts full-on, one-woman photo shoots at my local coffee shop, I've decided that in solidarity with my new selfie-stick sister, I must show respect — despite my inability to comprehend her motivations.

But contrary to popular belief, digital self-portraits aren't just about vanity and narcissism. According to EXHIBITOR's most recent Social Media Marketing Survey, more than one-third of readers are currently tracking social-media impressions to help justify their programs and diversify their deliverables. What's more, 79 percent anticipate the value and importance of social media will increase in the coming year. And one surefire way to generate a boatload of likes and a few new followers is to enable or incentivize photo sharing on popular social platforms.

The speed with which exhibit and event pros have embraced social-media metrics is truly remarkable, in part because they're more readily available and easily trackable than traditional metrics such as return on investment. It was just a few years ago, while talking with Intel Corp.'s Victor Torregroza, that I first heard the word "Instagrammable." Since then, the term has been used so frequently that it's now in the Merriam-Webster



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Dictionary, which defines it as a descriptor for things that one might deem worthy of sharing on social media. According to Torregroza — who is famous for reminding us that like diners at a restaurant, trade show attendees "eat with their eyes" first — if your booth (or some component therein) is not Instagrammable, then it may as well not exist.

So what exactly makes a stand Instagrammable? From a design perspective, an Instagrammable exhibit is one that's so alluring it prompts attendees to instinctively whip out their smartphones, snap pictures, and share them on social media. But if your booth is more stalking horse than supermodel, have no fear. You can also incorporate Instagrammable *elements* into your stands, be they sumptuous product displays or full-blown photo or video activations, to ratchet up the "shareability" of visitors' experiences. And before you poo-hoo it as a superfluous or irrelevant attribute, shareability is important — critically so, to some brands — as it extends an exhibit-marketing program's visibility far beyond the convention center's confines. In other

words, your audience isn't limited to the show's registered attendees. The world is your oyster, and social media can help you shuck it.

Today, impressions on platforms such as Instagram can prove as valuable (if not more so) as badge scans and qualified leads. Granted, your primary focus should still include traditional sales-related goals, but if you wholly ignore society's obsession with the Instagrammable and easily shareable, you do so at your own risk. Plus, even if your target audience isn't currently active on social media, you better believe the young professionals waiting to replace them are.

So when in Rome, do as the Romans might have done if selfie sticks existed in the ancient world. Because while you're busy counting the business cards in your booth's fishbowl, social-savvy marketers are considering sightlines, devising Instagrammable elements, and using photo activations that play to our selfie culture — then incentivizing attendees to send their images into cyberspace with hashtags that enable the easy tracking of social-media metrics. And as they leave you and your company in their brand-awareness wake, you can bet they're pulling out their selfie sticks to immortalize the achievement. ■

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