Face Time: What's It Worth To You?

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

Maybe it’s time to get your team together and make this your focal point for a few days every quarter—if only to get a chance to really understand the market. In an increasingly cut-throat economy, the last thing you’d want is to miss something that could make you more competitive.

Since college, my good friends have steadily spread out geographically. Whereas we once coexisted in the eight block radius surrounding our university campus, I now have friends on both coasts and everywhere in between, not to mention Europe and Asia.

A few weeks ago I was online, scouting ticket prices for a long weekend in California to visit some friends. I found myself getting frustrated by the escalated ticket prices—the flight was not this much last year—and did a mental cost-benefit analysis.

In the end, the benefits are always going to carry the most weight, because when it

comes to maintaining a friendship, investment is key—and sometimes the phone just doesn't cut it. There's just something about being there in person.

With several key trade shows occurring this fall, I got to thinking about how much time I would be devoting to being on the road, pounding the uncomfortable concrete floors of cavernous expo halls.
Still, despite the personal and financial commitments these trade shows require, the value attained from them is, for lack of a better word—invaluable.

For me, reading about the benefits and specs of a particular product is adequate on paper, but to see it in a live demonstration—oftentimes with a product manager or engineer on-site to field specific, technical questions—is worth more than we might give credit to.

Another thing about trade shows that I believe to be undervalued is this concept of face time. What better way to get a true understanding of the market, and which types of solutions are available to you, than by sitting down and having a conversation with an expert? At this point, you put a face to the name, and make your own appraisals: Is this a company you trust? Are they asking you the right questions? Are they willing to work with your team to create a solution based on your specific needs?

Just like maintaining and improving a valuable friendship sometimes requires travel, time, and money, so does maintaining and improving a facility. Often in times of tightened budgets, travel is one of the first costs to be cut. But beware this type of logic—when new information on technology and possible improvements becomes seen as ancillary, the potential for stagnation rears its ugly head.

Besides, getting out on the road is a great way to force your own hand when it comes to research. In truth, how often do you take time out of your busy day to do thorough and adequate research of what's available to you in terms of product technology and maintenance solutions?

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We'd encourage you to check out our trade show previews for both National Manufacturing Week and ISA, starting on page 20—and, in the future, check out the real thing. There's just something about being there in person.

See you there!

Email Anna at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1]

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