

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Three Ts That Are Important for Becoming Active in an Industry: Trade Associations, Trade Shows, and Trade Journals

One thing that's important for a start-up is to become active in the industry it's entering. Activity leads to learning about and understanding the industry, finding business partners, and becoming recognized as an industry leader. Three important Ts that lead to industry activity are trade associations, trade shows, and trade journals. Start-ups should consider utilizing these Ts as a part of their early and ongoing activities.

Trade Associations

A trade association (or trade group) is an organization that firms in the same industry form for the purpose of collecting and disseminating trade information, offering legal and technical advice, furnishing industry-related training, and providing a platform for collective lobbying. In addition to promoting industry-related issues, trade associations typically provide a variety of other services to their members. For example, the American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute, which is a trade association of watchmakers and clockmakers, provides its members with training, a database of hard-to-find parts, technical support for watch and clock repair, bulletins with up-to-date product information, and an extensive library of industry-specific educational material.⁶

Trade associations are typically governed by a paid staff and a volunteer board. Busy CEOs and entrepreneurs are motivated to serve on trade association boards, not only to influence the direction of the associations but because their service provides them visibility and a platform to network closely with other members of the association. These types of interactions can lead to businesses forming partnerships and working together in other ways.

There are 7,600 national trade associations in the United States. The vast majority have websites that list their activities and their members.

Trade Shows

A trade show (or a trade fair) is an exhibition organized to create opportunities for companies in an industry to showcase and demonstrate their products and services. Some trade shows are open to the public, while others can only be attended by company representatives and members of the press. Over 10,000 trade shows are held annually in the United States. There are several online directories, such as the Trade Show News Network (www.tsnn.com), that help organizers, attendees, and marketers identify the most appropriate trade shows to attend. The largest trade show in the United States is the International Consumer Electronics Trade Show, which is held every January in Las Vegas, and is not open to the public. In 2014, it included more than 2,700 exhibitors, 150,000 attendees, and 5,000 tech journalists.

Along with displaying their products and services, businesses attend trade shows to study their rivals, meet members of the press, and network with industry participants. Companies must rent exhibit space at trade shows. Some of the high-quality shows, which usually last just under a week, cost upward of \$20,000 to attend. Small companies are often able to share exhibit space and split the cost. Trade shows offer prime opportunities for networking in order to generate business and to establish new relationships and nurture existing ones. In fact, there are many articles and "how-to" guides published in periodicals and posted on websites that teach businesses how to maximize their time at trade shows and establish business relationships.

Trade Journals

Trade journals or magazines are usually published by trade associations and contain articles and advertising focused on a specific industry. Very little general-audience advertising appears in trade journals. They may also include industry-specific job notices and classified advertising.

Some trade journals are available to the general public, while others are very specifically controlled—meaning that you must be an industry participant to receive the journal. This practice ensures advertisers that their ads will be viewed by people in their target audience. Many of the articles in trade journals are written about companies in the industry. It enhances the stature and visibility of a company to have a favorable article written about it in a premier industry trade journal.

Along with trade journals, some industries have peer-reviewed journals that contain both technical articles and heavy advertising content. The articles are often co-authored by people who work for vendors that advertise in the journal. *BioTechniques*, which is concerned with the life sciences area, is an example of an industry-specific peer-reviewed journal that follows this format. These journals blur the distinction somewhat between trade journals and peer-reviewed journals.

Although trade journals do not provide the direct networking opportunities that trade associations and trade shows do, the visibility a company can obtain by being featured in an article or by running ads can result in multiple positive outcomes.

Questions for Critical Thinking

1. Pick an industry in which you have an interest. Make a list of the premier trade associations, trade shows, and trade journals associated with that industry.
2. How can an entrepreneur assess whether offering to serve in a leadership capacity in a trade association,

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