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## ROBIN BLAKELY SPECIAL REPORT

SPECIAL REPORT  
Social Media Series

# THE MAIN EVENT

Communication through social media channels creates new connections at tradeshows.

by Robin Blakely, American Society of Baking

Tradeshows and social media are a winning combination when it comes to making an impact online and face-to-face simultaneously. But, like all good things, success requires proper planning. LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter tactics don't magically fuse with tradeshow preparation without attention to detail.

It's critical to start with an action plan that adds specific social media steps to normal tradeshow readiness routines. Up front it helps to realize that even the most basic booths or tabletops at tradeshows require a lot of high-energy coordination skills. With that in mind, keep every social media step simple, manageable and closely connected to what you're already managing.

Think about integrating social media with the tradeshow schedule by considering a plan part-by-part: before, during and after the show. By creating designated social goals aimed to showcase your tradeshow appearance, you can make sure your company doesn't get lost in the sea of events while also maximizing your investment by working smarter on the tradeshow floor.

### Building awareness

Don't miss the chance to properly set the stage. The months, weeks and days before the tradeshow are valuable periods that many companies forget about because they are focused on organizing the displays, appointment calendars and transportation logistics.

Set aside time to incorporate the online and social side of marketing. You invested in a tradeshow appearance; don't act like it's a big secret. Get social.

The goal in this stage of planning is to announce that you will have a booth at the event. The goal is to stir up early interest in the fact that you will be part of the scene. Start talking on social platforms about what you will be doing in your booth. Find ways to promote scheduling face-to-face time with tradeshow attendees before their limited calendars are totally packed.

Use social media for outreach, but do your homework. Target specific attendees by staying apprised of the tradeshow information available. Study conference apps and websites to determine who will be at your tradeshow and what your meetup goals should be. For example, American Society of Baking (ASB) uses an app at BakingTech that can be accessed on smart phones, tablets and desktops to keep conference details at attendees' finger tips. Leading up to the event, include specific moments on your promotional calendar. At the very least, announce your participation one month out, then a week out and then as a daily countdown.

Once you arrive at the tradeshow, keep posting. Before the show even officially begins, share photos of the booth being set up in real time. Welcome everyone to the event. Remind people to stop by your booth. Be fun and share photos, waving and welcoming the attendees and those who stayed home. Post snapshots of the onsite team so attendees know who they will meet



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at the booth. Use short video bits to break the ice. Tell them how to find you; provide the booth number in text and visually in photos. Try creating a YouTube invite video or email e-vites to contacts.

### Making connections

In the flurry of the big event, don't lose sight of meeting your marks. It's common to feel overwhelmed at tradeshow. So much is happening with so many different people that the minutes fly by, and suddenly the day is over. Find a way to keep your strategy mobilized. The goal is to stay ahead of the constant waves of activity. You must invite attendees to your booth in real time; cut through the frenetic chaos of the tradeshow's intensity, and secure attention with business customers, prospects and influencers while geographically sharing the same landscape.

During the show, it can be difficult to capture online so many valuable opportunities that are happening moment to moment at the actual show. However, catching the attention of attendees while they are nearby can make a huge difference in turnout for your booth.

Keely Siciliano, senior manager, digital marketing at Dawn Foods, said it's also vital to make use of hashtags during all stages of the tradeshow. "While marketers may want to create and promote their own event-specific hashtag, always using the tradeshow's promoted hashtag in addition to your own will maximize your booth's exposure," she said.

Plan for the inevitable tradeshow distractions by mapping out at least one post each day for the entire show. Try to do more than one post, but make sure that at least one will happen no matter what. Clearly visualize what you want to say to people at the show, and don't forget to purposefully address people who wish they were at the show but couldn't come. Prepare an opening-day message in advance. Pre-plan posts that catch people's attention and invite them to stop by and meet you. Develop short educational messages that help define what people will learn when they stop by your booth.

Be sure you know your smartphone and your social media platforms so that you can easily upload photos and make responsive comments. But don't be afraid of having fun with new technology features. Live

Social media can help build anticipation for tradeshow booth events like virtual reality experiences.  
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Bakers are looking for other ways to harness the popularity of social media like turning emojis into cookies.  
Bud's Best Cookies

streaming on Facebook and other platforms allow audiences to watch in-the-moment broadcasts and share the excitement of the event. Sergio Caballero, regional sales manager, FoodTools, said the company recently started "Going Live" on Facebook and Instagram for its booth giveaways.

"It's fun to have people walk up and say they just saw us and get the items we were handing out," Mr. Caballero said. "That gave us a good lead into showing our new equipment."

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He added that FoodTools uses different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Mr. Caballero said LinkedIn offers several benefits since it's focused more on business. The company can reach thousands of industry professionals and baking groups like ASB, IBIE, BEMA and the American Bakers Association.

### Following up

After the tradeshow, it's time to go back to regularly scheduled social media posts. That said, don't forget to integrate stories and photos from the event for the

next few weeks — and even beyond.

"We still follow up with thank-you emails and calls direct to the attendees, but we've added a recap blog post, follow-up newsletter email and social media photos from the tradeshow floor," said Chris Clemens, marketing manager, FoodTools. "Tradeshow are a big investment, and we try to keep the show vibe alive for a few weeks following the actual event."

Claudio Bauza, senior director of sales and marketing/business development at Nexcor Technologies, is also keenly aware of the benefits of social follow-up. "After the tradeshow, and sometimes during if we have the time, we send out LinkedIn invitations to the people we meet on the show floor," Mr. Bauza said. "Even though we have their contact information for follow-up, connecting with them on social media adds another channel between us where we can communicate news and information about our food safety software."

Ms. Siciliano offered a different tactic that works well for her team. She said social media is a great place for marketers to advertise directly to tradeshow attendees after the event. A list of attendee email addresses gathered from people who visited your booth can be used on Facebook to create Custom Audience ad groups.

"Coupled with the right message, those ads can be far more effective at converting leads into customers than ads with general audience targeting," Ms. Siciliano said.

### Looking into the future

As social media evolves from consumer audiences to business-to-business markets, many baking leaders wonder if it is worth the expense to invest in social media planning.

According to Al Cason, president and chief operating officer, Bud's Best Cookies, Birmingham, AL, social media is simply too important to ignore. "Like it or not, social media is here. A company can either embrace it and let social media help form the personality of the company or they can ignore it and be left behind," he said. "Most of our company's social media is geared toward the public, but we've found that some of our social media posts have been of interest to investors."

As strategies for business-to-business communication develop, tradeshow will continue to push innovation onward. Because, as industry professionals know, there is no place like a tradeshow to make connections.

*Editor's Note: This is the final installment of a three-part social media series from ASB. The previous installments can be found in the July and August issues of Baking & Snack.*

