



WAVE Trade Show Tips for Young Professionals

Whether it's your first time attending an industry event, or if you've attended several, here are a few ways to make the most of the experience

Know Your Goals

If you're attending as an employee or as a business owner, know what you want to accomplish while you're there. Typically these will fall into a few key categories: Education/certification, product purchases, vendor relationship building, new product sourcing, studying competing products and networking. You only have a few short days, so while you want to get a lot done, you won't have time for everything, so know beforehand what's the most important things on your to-do list.

Communicate Beforehand

Your boss may have specific classes for you to take, exhibitors to meet or events they want you to attend. If they aren't scheduling everything for you, make sure you've mapped out a plan and share it with them. Attending events is expensive — show that you value the experience and your job by being proactive before you even land.

If you have key exhibitors/vendors you need to meet with, try to get meetings set up beforehand. Most will make time for you whenever you show up at their booth, but if they have you on their schedule you know they'll make the time.

Plan Ahead

Don't wait until the last minute to sign up for the classes and certifications you want to attend. Some classes, especially certifications, will have handouts or books that you may need to get before you show up. And several can only take so many students — don't be the 15th person to sign up for a 14-person class.

Even if you aren't taking any CTUs or certifications, read through all the seminars to see which may be the most beneficial to your current position or business struggles. When the alarm clock goes off for an early morning class, if you're already registered you'll have a much better chance of actually getting out of bed.



"Are we looking for a specific new category or brand to carry? We're always looking for new products and new technology that make life better for our customers and team members." She says it's always a great time to look at the brands and products your competitors carry, too. "All of this helps with forming your upcoming year's strategy."

—Rita Rowlen

President of Ultra Modern Pool & Patio
Wichita, Kansas

"We meet ahead of time and look at the exhibitor list to decide if there are specific products we need to search for at the show. We also work to reach out ahead of time to make appointments with vendors that we might want to do business or spend additional time with."

—Don Riling

Owner of Olympic Hot Tub
Seattle, Washington

"Be sure to walk the entire show because sometimes you will find a unique product at a small booth off in the corner."

—Jim Bishop

Owner and President of
PoolMart & Spas
Clarkston, Michigan

"We realized that, if someone had an open mind and wanted to be unique, it could be done by looking and finding different products than what is sold by everyone else. This is where our excitement for going to trade shows started and now, after over 20 years, we still go with the excitement of just finding one thing that will make our business better for the upcoming season."

— Tom Landi

Landi Pools & Games
Vineland, New Jersey



Try to plan your time on the show floor as well. You may think you can make it to all of the booths, but as you stop and chat with vendors and colleagues, it's easy to run out of time. Depending on your goals, you may want to plan to walk the entire show floor on the first day, marking the booths you want to come back to. Or, it may be a better use of your time to plot out the booths you absolutely need to get to and forget about trying to see everything.

Make Notes

You'll bring home business cards and literature, only to immediately forget who that person was or why you were interested in that product. You'll want to take notes not just in your classes, but also on the show floor. Some companies will meet after each day of the show to discuss what they've seen and learned — others will have employees give presentations when they get back home. Do yourself a favor and write down as much as you can so that you can not only remember what you've learned, but impart that knowledge to the rest of your colleagues.

Network, Network, Network

Take the time to get to know your vendors and colleagues from around the country. Talk to the people you share a table with in the concession area or who sit next to you in a class. Go to the networking events thrown by the show and your vendors. Take whatever opportunity you can to get to know the people and players in the industry. Bring a stack of business cards and hand them out at will. It's amazing what can come of a chance meeting at a trade show.

Don't Overdo It

These events are supposed to be fun, but try not to overdo it. It's easy to order a third round when you're not the one picking up the tab, but don't forget your goals. If that third margarita might mean you'll miss your 7 a.m. class, take a pass.

"[Attending the Expo is] a good opportunity to see where the industry is at a glance — view new products, get ideas and possibly try new things. I think networking with your current vendors and peers can be the most valuable part of a show. Organize your time — set up meetings ahead of time with those you need to. Bring lots of business cards, and of course, hand sanitizer!"

—Norm Coburn
New England Spas
Natick, Massachusetts

"It is very difficult to divide up the time between the education seminars, the trade show, and the current vendor mingling and dinners. We make our decisions based on our priorities: education first so we can take care of our customers, then we make sure we visit with our current vendors to see anything new we are interested in from them. Then we search for anything else that we may not already have in our arsenal that may be of interest to our clients."

—Jamie L. Braddy
Business Development Manager
Parrot Bay Pools and Spas
Fayetteville and Raleigh, North Carolina

"When I came back from that [intense class on margins — how to price your product and how to put your product on sale and maintain your margins], tens of thousands of bottom-line profit was generated from that one class....We shored up money leaking out the side."

—Sue Rodgers
Owner, Oregon Hot Tub
Portland, Oregon

"Keep in mind that you have breakfast, lunch and dinner for as many days as you're there. You can get in a lot more meetings that way. If I can bring back value in either pricing deals, new technology or information that my staff can take advantage of, then it's a good investment. Organize your time so you can spend it with key vendors and peers. Often, the most value comes from discussion with others who deal with the same opportunities and challenges that you face."

— Norm Coburn
President and Owner, New England Spas
Natick, Massachusetts

"It gives you an opportunity to brainstorm, share ideas, discuss issues and identify a plan to get resolution. You get a chance to meet folks you may not have, have nice personal interactions that don't have to be limited to business discussions, and talk about the industry in general."

—Don Riling
Owner of Olympic Hot Tub
Seattle, Washington

"Get to the show the minute it opens and plan to spend all day working the show. Try to schedule meetings for either before the show opens or after it closes."

—Brian Quint
Co-owner, Aqua Quip
(Seattle)