

SUPERSTARS

Company: Exhibit Experts

Phone: 437-3634

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Type of business: Tradeshow display company

Home town: Catonsville, Maryland

How long in Arizona: 10 years

Hobbies: Rollerblading, hiking

Motto: "Always give more than expected."

Susan knows what it takes to make your exhibit at trade shows and events a success. As owner of Exhibit Experts, she works with companies in developing an exhibit, from concept to finished display. Professionally and personally, she has proven that "staying power" is key to overcoming obstacles. Susan learned about setting up exhibits while distributing a children's book which she had written. She chronicled her career in *How to be a Weekend Entrepreneur*, bringing her national attention. After reading her book, a representative from USWest asked Susan for a proposal on how they could improve their exhibit. "I ran to the library, checked out a book on writing proposals and conceptualized a display for them," she says. "I literally bluffed my way through this first project, but I was determined to make it a success." The exhibits were a hit and USWest remains one of her largest clients today. Just as it looked like Susan had finally realized her niche, she encountered new obstacles. While going through a divorce, her business partner had taken off, leaving her in a dire situation. She was left with no choice but to work for a competitor who eventually sold her his business. In 1998, her sales reached well over 1 million dollars.

What made you choose this industry? It was quite an evolution of sorts. I began to learn the exhibit business from the trenches and realized I really had a talent for



Susan Ratliff

Interview by: Linda Forsythe

teaching other professional people how to achieve success through exhibit marketing.

What was the biggest crisis when you started? I obligated myself to a 12-month retail lease space agreement fully expecting to share the space and expense with two other business associates who unfortunately deserted me after only 2 months in the new location.

What was your best business decision? To take work as a sales associate for a competitor which led to the opportunity to buy his business after seven months.

How do you market your products? I cultivate repeat business and referrals from existing customers by providing superior products and continuous support. I attend and participate in as many exhibiting events as possible.

What would people be surprised to learn about you? That I have written three books on event marketing and teach exhibitor-training seminars around the country.