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Conference

Dynamic Displays
Graphics
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TRADE SHOWS: 7 seconds to capture your customer

BY ANDREA ROGERS

Susan Ratliff, president of Exhibit Experts, treats her business like a ball game. Ratliff sets her clients up with the best equipment for a tradeshow display, teaches them how to connect with the customer and coaches them all the way home. When the cheering stops and the dust clears, what remains are the smiles and a continuing relationship with a business owner who strives for success.

The qualities that Ratliff brings to her business — open-mindedness, creativity and attention to detail — make Exhibit Experts special. Added to this is her personal tradeshow experience. This package of priceless knowledge and skill is shared generously with her clients.

Ratliff's tradeshow expertise started in 1989 when she decided to leave a 16-year career in sales and marketing to stay home with her son. At the same time, she wanted to include business in her life. An advertisement in *Entrepreneur Magazine* led to an inquiry, and soon Ratliff had a weekend business with About You! Books. These computer-generated, personalized books for children sent Ratliff into another league. She became the 2nd largest distributor in the nation! On the way, she gained immeasurable experience about what to do to make a profit at a tradeshow.

Her computer became her journal, recording both errors and achievements. Other exhibitors began to seek Ratliff out for her advice. When she realized that the void of information available on

tradeshow could be filled by her years of not taking, she put it all together in a book, *How to be a Weekend Entrepreneur*. As the tradeshow industry became more sophisticated, Ratliff updated her information, recently releasing her newest book, *How to be an Exhibit Expert, Making Money at Tradeshow, Job Fairs and Events*.

Ratliff's natural business sense next led her to the tradeshow display route. Here she established herself with Featherlite Exhibits as a sales representative. When Larry Campbell decided to sell the business, it was Ratliff he wanted to sell it to. Now, as president of Exhibit Experts, Ratliff represents one of the top fine manufacturers in the United States. Her client list includes, Bank One, US West Communications, America West Airlines, and Arizona State University. As the exclusive Phoenix representative of Featherlite, Ratliff is able to give "the absolute best service. I'm not satisfied until I create a display that really produces for a customer," Ratliff states. "I also educate my clients on how to maximize their impact by increased visibility at a show."

Trade shows are a marketing venue of our age. Nationally there are 9,000 tradeshow a year, generating 84 billion dollars worth of business. Arizona alone draws thousands of exhibitors each year. With this type of competition, even the best displays can use an extra boost. "The display has seven seconds to show a central idea, who the company is, what they are selling and why I would want it," Ratliff explains. "This has to be done pictorially, with little text."

Ratliff offers training seminars with a display sale to ensure tradeshow success. The seminar is a valuable training experience for businesses or organizations that want to unify their sales staff. "Our goal is not just to sell a display, but to create a visual sales tool that exemplifies your company's image, creatively showcases your product or service, draws customers to your booth, compels them to interact with your staff and leaves a lasting impression when they go," she says.

After the hardware is selected, the graphics are designed and the physical display is created, it becomes the job of the sales team to carry through. Ratliff aims to assist in every way.

To visit the Exhibit Experts showroom or book a training seminar, contact Susan Ratliff at Exhibit Experts, (602) 437-3634. To order *How to be an Exhibit Expert, Making Money at Tradeshow, Job Fairs and Events*, send \$15 to Exhibit Experts, 4012 E. Broadway, Suite 307, Phoenix, Arizona 85040, or fax to: (602) 437-0955.

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