

"I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges" ...

Tips on Picking the Best Technology for Your Show, Pros and Cons of Common Technologies

1. BARCODE BADGES

Barcodes of the 2-D variety are easy to produce for your lead-retrieval needs. They essentially hold enough to store key contact information. Exhibitors can scan the code with a reader and collect a database of contacts.

- **Pros:** This technology is the least expensive.
- **Cons:** If the barcode is damaged, it can't be read. At sessions, it requires attendees to cooperate to scan their badges to gain an accurate record of attendance. Updating information encoded in the barcode requires printing a new badge. Reading problems are common due to hall lighting reflecting on badge holders.

2. MAGCARD BADGES

This technology used by more than 55% of all shows has the longest track record. While they are slightly more expensive than barcode badges, costs can be recouped by selling sponsorships on the badges. SMART-reg International can provide equipment so badges can be printed on site.

- **Pros:** It's a proven technology familiar to everyone with a credit card.
- **Cons:** The magnetic strip can get demagnetized. Stores less data than an RFID badge.

3. RFID BADGES

RFID technology offers many features the more traditional badges can't. Currently, there are two types of RFID technology being used in the Trade Show business – long range and short

range. SMART-reg chose to use the short-range technology (which can be read at three inches) that utilizes the world-wide MIFARE standard, because it provides the most security.

- **Pros:** Able to carry much more data than the alternatives. Exhibitors can easily collect information beyond just a name and phone number – if show management permits. Data is password protected. Can be used by show management to replace tickets or verify attendance at continuing education classes. The SMART-reg All in the Badge™ RFID badges can even be encoded with a cash value that attendees can use for show services or at the show bookstore. The SLD-5 reader from SMART-reg can be used for exhibitor lead capture in addition to Attendee authentication for events etc.
- **Cons:** Attendees may have false perceptions about "big brother" watching their every move. Long Range RFID badges hold much less information, and can't be used to replace tickets, cash value etc. and lead retrieval capability is limited.

DETERMINING YOUR NEEDS

Ask yourself these questions before selecting a lead-retrieval technology:

- How important is direct cost? Would you be able to sell a sponsorship to make up the expense?
- How exactly will attendees use their badges? Would it be helpful to use badges to verify attendance at sessions or for-credit continuing education events? Would you like to be able to eliminate tickets for special events?
- What do exhibitors prefer? Some exhibitors in certain industry sectors

prefer a certain type of lead retrieval system.

- What do attendees prefer? Will they be put off by someone pointing a laser at their chest to read the badge?
- Is it important to track attendee movement?

COST CONSIDERATIONS

RFID is more expensive than other traditional forms of badges and lead capture technology. RFID badges cost an average of 60 cents each, compared to 14 cents a piece for a magcard badge, or a few cents to print a barcode badge. However, show organizers should look at these prices in relation to total expenses and how the technology could be used, says Arnie Roberts of SMART-reg, "RFID can be more expensive on the face of it, but you can get an instant ROI. Your actual costs might be minus 20 cents to minus \$1.20 per badge. For many of our clients it can reduce expenses immediately by eliminating the need for tickets, special badge holders, and some extra form of lead capture medium."

For example, one SMART-reg client was dismayed at a food-and-beverage bill that was \$100,000 more than expected. Attendees had loaned each other their badges to allow friends to get access to a free meal, running up costs to much more than had been planned. Had RFID badges been utilized this would not have happened.

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