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Are You Gambling With Your Firm's Investment Conference Expo Room Table?



Your potential 'in print' problems

For the money management firm looking to meet and network with prospective investors from family offices, endowments, foundations or institutional plan sponsors, investment industry conferences have the potential to provide a useful pay-to-play means to do so. Buying attendance at an investment industry conference often comes with more than just tickets for admission. They frequently come with the ability to display and market your services at the conference's expo room, where tables are assigned to the participating money management firms. Here in the expo room, which also almost always serves double duty as the 'general mingling and meeting room' where the coffee urns and pastries are, the money management firms may cross paths with investors they did not previously know and who they otherwise might not have had the opportunity to bump into.

But is your money management firm gambling with how it goes about dealing with marketing from its conference expo room table from the 'in print' perspective?

The key 'in print' gambles my financial communications and sales marketing consulting firm has seen money management firms take with their expo room tables over the years tend to fall primarily into two key categories.

Banner 'billboard' display problem

Can a prospective investor see you from a distance? Do you look like you have a real business, or do you give the appearance that you're running your investment firm out of your kitchen? Can investor attendees discern from the displays at or on your expo room table who you are and what you do?

These are not issues that only crop up with novice money management firm owners; big established firms have suffered from mishandling what we classify as the banner ‘billboard’ display challenge.

When you’re driving and find yourself approaching a billboard you tend to give it a glance and, in a matter of seconds, you absorb who is doing the advertising and what they are marketing. Floor standing and tabletop banners deployed by and on investment conference expo room tables fulfill the same role as billboard ads do along roadways.

It is in your best interest to come equipped with signage you place on or by your table or booth where the firm and strategy names, and important headline content, can be read from around twenty feet away. Some investor attendees do not relish having to get within five feet of an expo room table to read who they just walked up to. Not wanting to get pitched by every salesperson at the investment conference, this type of investor attendee would rather miss out on a strategy that might actually interest them than be confronted with having to query the salesperson at the table to learn what that firm is and does. Make it easy for these people to identify you and classify your strategy offering as they shop around, and you will increase your odds of attracting and having dialogue with more investor attendees.

Where do the bigger, more established money management firms tend to go wrong with signage? Quite a few show up at such events with their own logo branded tablecloth and full-sized booth-type backdrop displays. So, they don’t have a *Can I see you from a distance?* problem. There are times, however, when such firms, known for just one particular investment strategy, begin seeking out investors for a new and different strategy they recently launched, or one they had kept low profile and now decided they want to put more of an asset raising marketing effort behind. The error I’ve seen in some cases like this is where the money management firm’s display has no mention of the particular investment strategy they are at that time looking to promote — such content is only laying on their tabletop, and only the prospect who comes to their table’s edge can see that. Prospective investors at the conference that already know the ‘older’ version of what type of portfolio(s) the money management firm runs may feel there is no need to get closer to the expo room table if they have no current need or interest in the ‘older’ offered strategies. A firm needs to figure out what message it wants to telegraph in its signage.

Marketing collateral problem

The next gamble has to do with what reading material a money management firm decides to put on offer at its investment conference expo room table. A poor choice of marketing collateral can lose you some of the investor attendees who pick up and flip through your documentation. Here, the issues are both the content and the documentation’s look and feel.

Marketing collateral content needs to give a clear snapshot view of who the firm is and what it does. It should reveal something about how it runs its portfolios, communicate some of the personality and character of the investment firm, and intrigue a prospect enough to want to learn more.

This is where content of some marketing collateral piece should deliver what Frummerman & Nemeth calls a money management firm’s short version storyline. Such content has more detail about investment approach and strategy implementation than what the typical investment firm sticks in its flipchart pitchbook, but is far less detail than what should comprise its round one in-person sales meeting explanation of how it thinks and runs its investment process. Moreover, that sales meeting requires an additional marketing collateral piece that delivers the money management firm’s beyond-the-numbers long version storyline; but that’s another topic for another day.

Yes, data is important as well. Have you generated alpha? Show it. Is there performance attribution information that can demonstrate a particular skill set? Show it.

Next comes the look and feel. The graphic design and layout of the marketing collateral must be professional looking and easy to read. For some marketing collateral pieces, commercial printing is the way to go. There are document types where taking the in-office desktop published laser or inkjet printed route simply looks like your company is not as operationally stable as competitors occupying other investment conference expo room tables around yours.

You want to make certain your money management firm's documents do not look like they were quickly and sloppily put together — or even worse, contain easily spotted errors. (I'm sure you've seen examples of this kind of thing over the years from some other money management firms.) This can lead conference investor attendees to decide they found an immediate reason to reject: if this is the lack of attention you give to your own marketing collateral, how much attention will you be giving in managing the millions they might have considered allocating to your portfolio?

Don't take these two types of 'in print' gambles with your table. Thoughtful preparation can increase the odds that your firm's investment conference expo table can do its job in helping you attract sophisticated investor attendees, with whom to network and begin establishing some new sales marketing relationships.

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About the author

Bruce Frumerman is CEO of Frumerman & Nemeth Inc., a 32-year-old financial communications and sales marketing consultancy that helps financial services firms create brand identities for their organizations and develop and implement effective new marketing strategies and programs. Frumerman & Nemeth's work has helped money management firm clients attract over \$7 billion in new assets, yet they are not third-party marketers.

Frumerman & Nemeth is internationally recognized for its work in crafting for clients the beyond-the-numbers story of *how they invest* — content that investment committees actually discuss, debate and vote on behind closed doors when considering firms on a short list for potential investment. Importantly, this is required due diligence content that cannot be communicated in pitchbook format.

Frumerman & Nemeth's work also includes providing strategic consulting on product and strategy-specific branding, crafting the required strategy-specific content detail and designing and producing the marketing tools needed to make it through the two-month to two-year institutional selling cycle. Clients also employ Frumerman & Nemeth to help promote the intellectual acumen of management — helping them get speaking opportunities, write and give speeches as panelists or stand-alone speakers at industry conferences, and through media relations marketing services.

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