



## Best Practices Guide on How Suppliers Can Best Work With Retailers

To help Suppliers have more productive interactions with Retailers, ABC Kids Expo surveyed leading industry Retailers and asked them, “What do Suppliers really need to know about working with Retailers?” Most of these best practices can be applied to both your exhibit and your day-to-day business interactions.

### Your Exhibit

- **Setup your booth beforehand**, inclusive of products/displays/graphics to minimize mistakes. Determine where the flow most likely will come from and the best angle/vantage points to display your brand/products. Make sure it isn't too crowded and try merchandising it how it would look in a store.
- **Make your space stand out!** Retailers are looking at hundreds of booths. Stand back and make sure your lighting, graphics and signage will make them want to stop to visit you.
- **What's new?** Every buyer asks this question - put your new items out where it's easily seen with signage pointing this out.
- Have some **refreshments** - amazing what a bottle of water or coffee does for someone.

### Be Prepared to Do Business

- If you want Retailers to sell your product, **make it advantageous** with margin, clean distribution, assets, and presence. Make it as easy as possible, and take away as many hurdles as possible (terms, accepting credit cards, drop shipping, etc.)
- Have a **pricing and distribution strategy** and be prepared to discuss it. Understand the types of potential Retailers and channels who shop the show. Know how the distribution plan is going to benefit the Retailer.
- If you are going to sell direct online, explain how you will **protect a Retailer's interest** that has invested in your product.
- It's important to understand the **freight** piece of your business and how that will affect your Retailers' margins. Suggest ideal shipping quantities, offer to guarantee a certain freight rate if you can, etc. “This is becoming a bigger issue for us even on small, UPS/Fedex size packages as well.”
- Retailers appreciate short, sweet **success stories** about other Retailers with the vendor's products. Tell Retailers about your tools to sell that story, from packaging to displays, to marketing.
- Be **ready to write an order**. Pen, order form with quantities and pricing, stapler, and carbon copy. Orders that can be entered in a computer and immediately emailed to the customer is also preferable. Retailers often complain of written show orders that never get placed, processed, shipped, and completely lost all together. Many Retailers will be totaling orders before they leave the show.
- Make sure you can give a **reasonable and accurate ship date** for the product(s), confirm the order via email, and provide a secure portal for processing credit cards.
- Show specials:
  - Always have a **show special** that is achievable and worth the Retailers' while to actually write the order.
  - Don't give Retailers who don't attend to the show the same specials and discounts. Retailers are investing their dollars to be at the show and would like to be rewarded for such.
  - Consider one-time extended terms on show orders (60-90 days) helps. Every single show order written basically comes due at the same time (30 days) after the show/shipment and can be crippling to cash flow.
- If you do business with big box stores, be prepared for all sorts of **ancillary charges** like co-op allowances, freight allowances, damage allowances, etc. This can add up to over 10% of the cost of goods if you don't know up front and build into your costing.

- Have a **Retailer locator on your website**. Add Retailers to the locator as soon as they are shipped product.

### Marketing

- Setup **appointments** before the show - the Retailer list is available for download - take advantage of readily available tools.
- If a Retailer is on the fence, don't be hesitant to offer to ship a **sample** to their store.
- Attend the **industry party**. "I've done lots of 'business after hours' with brands I would never have seen or heard of otherwise. Networking is the oldest sales technique there is."

### Staffing

- **Be friendly, not pushy**, especially at the trade show, which may very well be your first and only impression.
- **Treat every Retailer equally**.
  - Specialty Retailers may not be big boxes, but they can grow a product slowly and steadily and create demand for it in the marketplace.
  - Know that all your Retailer customers are influencers of your brand. Big or small they promote your product not only to their customers but more importantly to their network of other Retailers.
  - Treat everyone the same. Just because you may not "like" someone, they are stopping in your booth because they are interested in your product. Many smaller accounts equal a larger account.
- **Boothmanship**:
  - Stand and greet your visitors as you greet your customers in store. It's no different. If you and your booth staffers are tied up with other customers, a simple greeting and smile acknowledging you know they are there and assurance that you will be with them as soon as you can goes a long way. Make sure you are attentive during the entire show.
  - Don't interrogate someone interested in entering your booth. Many Retailers don't set appointments, don't have a sales rep, and would just like to see what you have. Making Retailers wait 5-10 minutes outside while you find someone available to "hand hold" us is offending. Do welcome Retailers into your booth and explain someone will be available soon to answer questions but feel free to browse in the meantime.
  - Don't introduce or make a sales pitch about your neighbor's booth and products. "This puts us in an awkward situation."
  - Don't let sales reps hover around the front of the booth, congregating in the aisle talking amongst themselves.
  - Put your phone away - it's human nature not to want to intrude so if you look too wrapped up in your email or Instagram, no one will stop.
  - If you don't know a buyer, don't call out the name that you see on their badge as they walk by. "If you yell into the aisle "come over/have you seen/excuse me" or use my name by clearly looking at my badge, I will automatically tell you I'm not interested."
- **Respect their time**.
  - Retailers know you want to get to know them, but be efficient in your transactions and don't try and hang on to sell them more.
  - Allow Retailers space to window shop and don't be offended if they move on quickly. There're hundreds of booths to cover and they don't always have time to hear the story of how you created xyz product.
  - Honor the show special post show - don't force Retailers to come by your booth when they're scrambling to get things done.



- **Listen to the Retailer:**
  - No means No, but not forever - if the Retailer isn't interested, just say thank you for coming by. If the Retailer's needs change, they will remember you as a potential supplier instead of someone they'd never do business with.
  - If a Retailer doesn't carry cloth diapers, you aren't going to convince them in 2 minutes to carry them. Make a note to contact them after the show to discuss how your product fits.
  - If the Retailer isn't interested, don't spend an inordinate amount of time trying to convince them – it will just upset them.
  - Be careful with folks who portray themselves as international distributors. They could just be after your information.

### Follow-Up

- Allow Retailers up to a week for **turning in orders after the show**. It's impossible to do this with all brands at the show. "I often write bigger orders when given the appropriate time to review the line without distractions."
- **Communication** is key! Get back to Retailers within one business day if at all possible if they call or email you with an issue (and hopefully, an order!). Protect your integrity by keeping your Retailers accurately informed of all developing situations effecting deliveries. Retailers are putting their integrity on the line when they pass that information to their customers.
- If you use Reps – and to reach the specialty market you should - Suppliers should **immediately pass Retailer leads to reps, and reps should contact the customer within 48 hours**. Reps can arrange to do store training once the product arrives at the retail store.
- Take suggestions from your Retailers. They are on the front lines. Don't automatically turn a blind eye to design, finish, etc. suggestions.

### Retailer Support

- Don't **undercut pricing on your own website** (if you have one) and sell below the pricing your Retailers are selling your product for.
- Provide meaningful **Point of Purchase materials and training manuals** for sales associates.
- Be sure you have **web-ready images and copy** for all your products. Use appropriate sized images that load quickly when sending email attachments.