

How to do a **CONSUMER** Hi Fi Show*

PROBLEM: How can you get more excitement, more customer exposure, more free publicity, and even more outright *sales* from your Hi-Fi Show participation?

SOLUTION: Just follow these four simple rules:

1. Know what you want your Show participation to achieve, and target everything you do toward achieving it.
2. Make a real Presentation, and make sure your audience experiences ALL of it!
3. Make sure that everyone knows his part and can do it perfectly!
4. Plan *EVERYTHING*. Leave nothing at all to chance!

Knowing what you want to achieve

We've all "done" Hi-Fi Shows, and we've all seen what usually happens: The average showgoer entering a display room sticks his head into the doorway just far enough



This Show Special was written to help U.S. dealers exhibit at audiophile and retail-oriented events like the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, New York Audio Show, Newport Audio Show, and others. With just a little thought, though, virtually all of the material presented here can be made directly applicable to distributor/dealer Trade Shows or to consumer Shows with dealer Trade Days. Entire document copyright Roger Skoff 2013. All rights reserved.

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to see what's happening, stays like that for a few seconds to “check-out” the system or what's playing, and then grabs a handful of sales literature and moves on to the next room.

In terms of the Exhibitor's real goals of promoting his store, promoting his products, and making sales, the showgoer's ten-second presence does no good at all, and, in fact, may actually be a negative: Besides reducing the exhibitor's limited supply of literature, the showgoer — who didn't really *hear* the demonstration — may think that he DID hear it; may think that what he heard *WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH* to warrant further listening; and may think (when a friend later asks him about what he heard at the Show), that he's perfectly justified in dismissing what he “heard” as unworthy of serious consideration!

The way to avoid this kind of situation is to CONTROL your display and CONTROL, at least while they are in your room, the actions of those who attend it! And, to control things — to make them happen as you want them to — you have to know just what it is that you're trying to accomplish.

EXHIBITING AT A SHOW REALLY HAS THREE PURPOSES. FOR YOUR DEALER-SPONSORED DISPLAY TO BE SUCCESSFUL, YOU MUST RECOGNIZE AND TRY TO ACHIEVE ALL OF THEM.

The first purpose is simply **TO SHOW THAT YOU'RE THERE**, and to establish, by your presence and the quality of your presentation, that you're a real company, worth dealing with when it comes time to make a Hi-Fi purchase.

The second is **TO SHOW WHAT YOU HAVE**, not only in terms of the products you carry, but also the professional skills you have in selecting and assembling high-quality systems and setting them up to sound their very best — even in the often dismal acoustical environments of a Hi-Fi Show!

The third and final purpose of exhibiting at a Show is **TO MAKE PEOPLE WANT TO BUY WHAT YOU ARE THERE TO OFFER**.

For some Manufacturers or Distributors, just “showing the flag”, and handing out brochures accomplishes two of the three purposes listed, and may be reason enough to justify their presence at the Show. As a Dealer, though, **YOUR exhibit must accomplish all three — and even more!** Not only must it show people that you're there, show them what you have, and make them want to buy it, **it must also make them want to buy it from YOU, instead of from the internet or some other possible source.**

Making Your Presentation

- 1. What IS a presentation? What does it consist of? And what is it supposed to DO?**

To put it most simply, your presentation at a hi-fi show (or even in your own store), is everything that you do or *don't* do that can affect people's understanding and opinion of you, your store, and the products you sell. *EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT* – from which products you choose to display; to how you choose to display them; to which of your people you choose to work your room; to how those people act and dress; to how the room is set up on the inside; to what you do for signage out in the hall.

- 2. Types of Presentation: Which is best for YOU?**

There are four types of presentation that can be made at a Show. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, so selecting the one that's right for you is an important decision that deserves some serious consideration.

“Open Door, Silent” — This type of presentation is best for “one-on-one” conversation with serious Prospects. When showgoers wander into your room at the Show you'll be able, just as you would at your own store, to tell them each, individually, about the wonders and glories of the toys and goodies you have on display, and, if you're lucky, get down to some serious selling, without loud music to interfere with your pitch. The problems with this approach are that, without music playing to lure them in, your room may get fewer lookers than it might otherwise and if not, in order to make your presentation truly one-on-one, you might need more people to staff your room.

“Open Door with Music” — This is the most commonly used type of presentation at any Hi-Fi Show. It's also the one most commonly screwed up! The reason? Because all you do is put on some music and let people filter into and out of your room whenever they please, it's easy to fool yourself into thinking that you're accomplishing something when in fact you're not! If your room is getting lots of ten-second “Heads-in-the-Door”, and giving out lots of literature, but you're NOT talking with people and making sales or real appointments to visit your store, then you're one of the many exhibitors who are doing it wrong! The biggest advantages of the “Open Door with Music” presentation are that music WILL attract showgoers to your room, and an open door WILL let them enter at will. The

disadvantages are that your open door will just as easily let your visitors walk out again, and, with people wandering in and out all the time, you never get the opportunity to give a complete demonstration.

“Closed Door, Silent” — This one's a little bit tricky, in that “silent” doesn't really mean *silent*. It just means no *music*. Instead, you offer a “SEMINAR” on some specific audiophile subject that will attract people to your room. Your seminar should run either 25 or 50 minutes, including a “Question and Answer period”, and you should schedule it to repeat every half-hour or hour, as appropriate, with a 10 minute break between programs. The seminar, itself, can be conducted either as a lecture, as a “test” (with audience participation), or in whatever other format you think will fill the room. Good lecture topics include **“How to quickly and easily improve the acoustics in your listening room”**, and [When you can, always use “How...” or “How to...” in the name of your topic] **“How simple “tweaking” can give you a \$1,000 improvement in the sound of your System, ABSOLUTELY FREE!”** One “test” that's guaranteed to have 'em lined up in the hallways is **“Power Amplifiers (or Cables) — Can you REALLY hear a difference?”** And there's LOTS more that are nearly as good! Whether you select the lecture or the test format, IF YOU DO A GOOD JOB OF IT, the “Closed Door, Silent” type of presentation can be a fine source of interested audiophile customers for your store who will already “know” that you and your staff are experts in your field.

“Closed Door with Music” — Just as the “Closed Door, Silent” type of presentation can give you your best opportunity to show off your store, your staff and your special skills and knowledge, the “Closed Door with Music” type can – IF YOU CAN GET YOUR ROOM TO SOUND REALLY GOOD — give you your best possible opportunity to show off the actual performance of the products you carry and to make a convincing “pitch” for them based on that performance. Just remember, though, that if you're going to expect people to come into your room and STAY THERE throughout an entire “Closed-Door” demonstration, what you *show* them, what you *play* for them, and what you *say* to them MUST be sufficient to catch and HOLD their interest. No Show-time sight could be more heart-rending (or more counter-productive) than that of the mangled bodies of potential customers lying trampled by bored-to-tears audiophiles fighting to claw their way out of your room!

3. Let 'em know WHO you are; let 'em know WHERE you are; let 'em know WHAT YOU'VE GOT; let 'em know IN ADVANCE

Whichever type of presentation you choose, the results you get will be *greatly* better if you advertise. That doesn't just mean running ads in your normal advertising media to let people know that you'll be at the Show (although you definitely SHOULD run them). IT MEANS DOING *EVERYTHING* YOU CAN DO TO SPREAD THE WORD AND TO GET PEOPLE TO COME TO YOUR ROOM!

DO run ads. DO put up posters (With Show information and YOUR STORE'S NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER) in your local record shops and music stores. DO call all of your "regulars" to invite them to the Show, and DO ask them to tell their friends. DO (if they're available) give out free or discount-priced tickets to the Show (WITH YOUR NAME STAMPED ON THEM) to everyone who comes into your store.

Once you're AT the Show, DON'T just rely on the door-card provided by the promoters, but DO pay a few bucks to a sign painter² for a bigger, better sign to hang on the wall in the hallway, or (if it's allowed) to mount on an easel outside your room. Also, if the venue for the Show is large or confusing, and there's ANY possibility that people could miss your room, hang "THIS WAY TO..." signs at all of the doorways, elevators, and hallway intersections. Even if such signs aren't necessary, if you can get away with it, do it anyway! Constant reminder that you're there can be a constant goad to come see you!

DO have all of your staff people at the Show dress the same, and DO have them become "walking billboards" for your store by wearing BRIGHT (but business-like), DISTINCTIVE CLOTHING WITH YOUR NAME ON IT. That way, wherever they might be seen at the Show — in your room, or even at lunch, or visiting another display — they'll always be spreading the word!.

DO turn the paying customers into "walking billboards", too. It's simple: When they stick their heads into your room to grab literature, just hand them a LARGE, BRIGHT, DISTINCTIVE "Trash Bag" WITH YOUR NAME ON IT to put that literature in! With masses of Hi-Fi Crazy showgoers wandering around flashing your colors, everyone will know you're there, and your exhibit (if you do everything else right) is sure to be the hit of the Show!

² PEOPLE *WILL* JUDGE THE QUALITY OF YOUR MESSAGE BY THE QUALITY OF YOUR SIGNS, so whether you're going to use them anywhere at the Show, in the stores of other cooperating merchants, or even in your own store, **ALWAYS HAVE SIGNS PROFESSIONALLY PAINTED!**

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Outside your room, if you're showing or demonstrating equipment, PUT A SIGN ON THE WALL LISTING THE BRAND NAMES of everything on display in your System or that you want people to buy. If you're doing a seminar or a test, PUT UP A SIGN TELLING WHAT THE SUBJECT IS. If your presentation is "Closed-Door", make sure your sign gives the program interval (every half-hour, every hour, etc.), or the next time people will be admitted. You should also put one of your people (a pretty girl is good) just outside the door, to answer questions, hand out tickets (if you use them), and keep the crowds waiting for the next "show" in an orderly line.

Inside your room, a sign should (even though you set out plenty of business cards for people to take) give the name of your store, what city it's in (but NOT the address), and your phone number. If you are playing music, another sign should LIST YOUR ENTIRE DEMONSTRATION SYSTEM, including every component and every cable, by brand and model-name or number. *(Unless your system's really a "Giant Killer", though, for a VERY modest price, or unless you're offering it as a "Show Special", DON'T GIVE ANY PRICES. Instead, MAKE PEOPLE ASK YOU FOR THEM —* That will give you a qualifying conversation opener that you can turn into a SALE, either on the spot, or after an appointment at your store.)

4. Setting-up your display room: What to do; why to do it.

The ideal set-up for your display room will depend on a number of factors: How big your room is; its shape; what type of presentation you intend to make; how many people (both staff and showgoers) you expect to be in it at any given moment; and so on. What this all means is that **the specifics of *your* particular setup for *your* particular room can only be determined by *you*, AFTER you've seen the room.** Even so, some basics do apply, and are worthy of your consideration:

Sound — if you're going to be playing music, allow yourself plenty of time to get your system set up properly, and sounding good! DO use acoustical treatments (Sonex, Tube Traps, Room Tunes, etc.³) DO experiment with speaker placement, and even alternate total System placement. DO do whatever you can to get your System and your display room working well together. If necessary, take a full extra day for set-up. It's worth it. PEOPLE *WILL* JUDGE NOT ONLY THE PRODUCTS YOU CARRY, BUT THE QUALITY OF YOUR STORE BY THE QUALITY OF THE SOUND THEY HEAR!

³ Remember that you're spending THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS to participate in the Show. Don't waste all that money and lose your opportunity to do good Show business by skimping on the things that will make your sound GREAT, instead of just merely good!

Seating — If you're doing an "Open Door, Silent" presentation you may not need *any* seating, or, at most, just one or two chairs for your own people working the room. For an "Open Door with Music" presentation, just A FEW chairs (perhaps two or three rows of two or three chairs, each), ALL ARRANGED TO BE AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE SYSTEM'S "SWEET SPOT" will be more than sufficient. Another successful approach for an "Open Door with Music" type of presentation is to have NO CHAIRS AT ALL. This allows for maximum circulation of people through your room, and TAKES ADVANTAGE OF the "Head in the Door" syndrome. **(ONE VERY IMPORTANT THING:** If you do decide to go with no chairs, **RAISE YOUR SPEAKERS UP ON EXTRA TALL STANDS** [have them built, if you need to] **SO THAT THE TWEETERS ARE AT EAR-LEVEL FOR A STANDING PERSON.**) Most speakers are designed for ear-level operation, and one reason why "Head in the Door" showgoers tend to think so little of the sound they hear is that, because they are standing-up to listen to speakers designed for a sitting-down listener, they're hearing the speakers at a wrong point on their vertical axis, and they simply can't sound right or image properly!) For "Closed Door" presentations, the trick is to get as many seats in the room as you can, WITHOUT crowding or creating a safety hazard by having insufficient aisle space. If you're doing a "Closed Door with Music" presentation, **you must also consider the sonics at each listening position.** If what you play doesn't sound good to a listener too close, too far back, or too far off to the side, you need to adjust your seating plan. showgoers won't care WHY what they're hearing sounds bad. All they'll care about is that it *DOES* sound bad!

Plants — Large, tall plants (preferably with big leaves) will not only dress up your room, but, if properly placed, they'll also improve your acoustics. (They act as random diffusers and absorbers) ***Always* have plants in your room, REGARDLESS of your type of presentation.** If you don't own any plants or don't own enough to properly set up your room, a local nursery or interior design firm may be willing to rent you what you need.

Equipment — How you show your equipment is another thing that will be affected by the type of presentation you choose. For components or speakers that are actively making music, setting up your display to *look* good is important, but less critical than setting it up to *sound* good. For equipment that's for display only, LOOKS ARE *EVERYTHING*, and artful arrangement, the proper color and choice of display furniture (stands, tables, etc.), spotlighting [you can buy suitable lights for as little as about \$10 at your local hardware store], and other Interior Decorators' "tricks-of-the-trade" can make the difference between a display that is just "ho-hum" and one that will have

gangs of Hi-Fi Crazies lined-up in your room waving money. A point that Master Merchandisers always remember, and that you should never forget is: **DON'T TRY TO DISPLAY TOO MUCH!** Pick only the products that are **NEW**; that you have an "EXCLUSIVE" on; or that you think will be of the greatest interest to those who visit your room. Remember, too, that **A SINGLE object, well displayed will ALWAYS look more important than many objects displayed equally well**; and that **Cluttered displays look cheap**. Space *between* things makes each item a center of attention.

Literature — The common practice of setting out a single rack or table of literature near the door works just fine for the "peek-and-grab" type of showgoer. Because *YOU* want people to come all the way into your room, though, a **clearly visible** table set **AS FAR FROM THE DOOR AS POSSIBLE** might be a good idea to help lure them in. (It's the old grocery store trick of putting the milk on the back wall, so you have to pass through the entire store to get to it) Something else that you can do, at least for an "Open Door, Silent" type of presentation, is to place the appropriate literature **NEXT TO** each of the components you have on display. That way, when the showgoer sees something that interests him, the literature **AND YOUR BUSINESS CARDS** are right at hand.

5. **The *Presentation* part of your Presentation: What do you play? What do you say?**

What to Play

Unless you're doing a "Silent" presentation, the music you play, the order you play it in, and the sound quality of your demonstration will all have major impact on the success of your exhibit. **The recordings you select to play will be just as important as the equipment you play them on, so BEFORE the Show starts, select your "playlist" and STICK TO IT!**

Whether you're running "Open Door" or "Closed Door", the only recordings you should ever play at a show are those that you *know* will make your system sound good. **DON'T TAKE REQUESTS, and DON'T PLAY ANY RECORDINGS THAT YOU DIDN'T BRING.** There's no way of knowing what kind of awful trash — either musically, soundwise, or both — a showgoer might bring and ask you to play, and if you play it for him, and it **IS** bad, it **WILL** hurt your presentation: Bad music will drive people out of your room. And even worse, bad *sound* will drive them out of the

room thinking that you have a bad System! Unless you know the recording well enough, and LIKE it well enough to have brought your own copy, **DON'T PLAY IT!**⁴

Even your own favorite recordings should be auditioned in your display room, (after you've got it set up as well as possible) *BEFORE* showtime. Different rooms have different acoustical characteristics, particularly in terms of bass and imaging, and even a recording that's an Ultimate-Killer-Godzilla-Rock'em-Sock'em-Showstopper at home or at your store *could* prove to be a dud in the room you have at the Show!

After you've auditioned a number of recordings, and picked out those that sound best in your display room, it's time to choose which ones you'll actually use for your demonstration. In doing this, always remember that:

1.) Too much of a good thing *isn't* a good thing. **DON'T play just one or two kinds of music.** The broader the range of musical selections you play, the more chance you'll have that SOMETHING will appeal to every member of your audience; the better the "workout" you'll give your demonstration System; and the more opportunities you'll have to show off all of its good features. For this same reason, unless you're doing an "Open Door with Music" type of presentation, **NEVER play any recording all the way through.** Most showgoers have limited attention spans, and unless you give them enough variety to keep them interested, you'll lose them!

2.) Just good sounding isn't enough. **Each of the recordings you play must also have ONE thing that it does obviously and outstandingly well.** This is your "kicker": the thing that will make showgoers — even "Head-in-the-Door" showgoers — give you their serious attention. As with the types of music you play, **the more, and the more *kinds of*, "show-off" performance you can dish up, the better your System will seem, and the more blown-away your audience will be.** Give them one recording that images like crazy; another that has massed violins that *sound like* massed violins (NOT just one BIG one); still another that'll knock their heads off with deep, *clean* bass. Give them one with a terrific female vocal; another with incredible dynamic contrasts. Another that... Well, you know what we mean. Go for it! In *this* case, **MORE IS BETTER!**

⁴ Showgoer play requests CAN be turned to your advantage: Tell the showgoer that you're sorry, but during the Show you have to stick to a pre-arranged play schedule. Then offer him the opportunity for a PRIVATE audition of whatever he'd like to hear, either before or after Show hours, or in a closed session at your store. If he's interested, ask him to meet you immediately after the current demonstration to make the arrangements. **When you meet, be sure to get his name and phone number, so you can follow-up!**

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3) TOO LOUD IS TOO LOUD. **NEVER demonstrate at excessive volume!** It's discourteous to other exhibitors, and it doesn't even work! Every recording has its own "natural" volume level — the level at which it will sound best and most lifelike. That's the level you should play it at, and **NEVER ANY LOUDER.** Really loud music may attract people to your room from other parts of the Show venue, but, once they get within range, it will do just as much to drive them away!

What to Say

As important as your music and the quality of your sound are, **the real key to the success of your presentation will be what you say, NOT what you play.** The reason for this? Simple: No matter how well you set things up, not everyone in your demonstration room will have a seat in the "sweet spot"; not everyone will have the ears or the listening skills to hear all of the neat things your System is doing; and not everyone will be impressed by (or even notice) the same things to the same degree.

That's why you want to tell them what they're hearing; tell them what's so good about it; and tell them why that's important.

The formula followed by the most effective and *convincing* public speakers has always been **Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them.** That's the formula you should follow, too!

In the introductory part of your talk, whether for a full-scale presentation, or just to introduce a recording you're going to play, **tell them what you're going to play** (which components; which recording) **and tell them what they're going to hear** (*"You'll hear each individual instrument, perfectly defined, perfectly placed, surrounded by its own envelope of "air", within the overall ambience of the concert hall"*) While the music is playing, **tell them what they're hearing.** (*"Notice the imaging; Notice the perfect focus, Notice the amazing quality of the soundstage, See how you can tell the exact size and shape of the hall".*) When it's finished, **tell them what they heard and why it's important.** (*"You just heard the Whizbang 9 preamp, the Velociraptor 2000 amplifier, the Catapult Banshee loudspeakers, and a full set of Mindbender Reference cables in an absolutely phenomenal display of imaging and resolution. This is the kind of performance you need for your own System at home, and no other combination of products priced anywhere near so modestly can give it to you"*)

The formula *works*, and by selecting the recordings you play so that each has a “kicker” — that ONE very important special thing that you can *talk about* — you'll find it very easy to put into effect.

Not only does the formula work, it works for EVERYTHING. If, instead of having music, you decide to do a “Closed Door, Silent” presentation, you can still use it. Here's how:

For a Lecture:

- (Introduction) “Hi, today we're going to be talking about room acoustics, and we're going to tell you exactly how you can improve the acoustics of your own listening room.”
- (During your talk) “If your room is shaped like *this*, the “Boom Tombs” should be placed *here* and *here...*”
- (Conclusion) “Well, as promised, we've shown you how, with just a little effort and a few dollars' worth of acoustical materials and treatments, you can make a considerable improvement to the sound of your listening room” **And DON'T forget to add:** “If you have any further questions, or need to buy any of the things we've talked about, come see us at the Store. We'll be happy to help in any way we can.”

For a “Test”

- (introduction) “What we're going to be doing today is some serious listening to find out if power amplifiers really *do* sound different. The amplifiers we'll be listening to will be the Velociraptor 2000, a solid-state unit, and the Glowplug 6, a tube amp using just a single Western Electric anode. We're going to play the same music, at exactly the same measured volume level through both amplifiers, and we're going to ask YOU to tell us if you can hear the difference.”
- (During the test) “Okay, we've just heard one of the two amplifiers. Now we're going to play the same music at the same level through the other one.. Listen carefully. Is the sound of both identical? Or can you hear differences? If you can, what are they? Frequency response? Tonality? Imaging? Is

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the bass the same? The treble? YOU'RE the one who will make the final decision, so *whatever* you think, after the music stops, mark it down on your testsheet"

(Conclusion) "We've just done some serious comparative listening to two different amplifiers to find out if they really *sound* different. You've heard them for yourselves, and ..."

Just as a final note, we told you that the formula works for EVERYTHING, and we've shown you how, even for a no-music demonstration, you can use it to your advantage. Well, "everything" really *means* EVERYTHING. It's NOT just limited to presentations given at a Show. TRY IT IN YOUR OWN STORE. YOU'LL BE AMAZED AT HOW MUCH IT WILL HELP YOUR SALES!

Making sure that everyone knows his part

One of the biggest and most common mistakes made by exhibitors at all kinds of Shows and events is the failure to let each of the people who will be part of the exhibit team know EXACTLY what his or her duties will be, and to provide the tools and coaching necessary to properly perform them.

If you're going to give a verbal presentation, **REHEARSE IT UNTIL YOU CAN DO IT PERFECTLY!** If your salespeople are supposed to make sales on the spot, **LET THEM KNOW THAT THAT'S WHAT'S EXPECTED OF THEM.** The same thing goes if they're just expected to invite (and set appointments for) people to visit your store. **LET THEM KNOW!** If you're going to do a "Closed Door" presentation, and have someone out in the hallway giving out tickets or doing "crowd control, **TEACH THEM HOW TO DO IT!** If someone is going to be answering questions, **MAKE SURE THEY EITHER KNOW THE ANSWERS, OR KNOW WHO ELSE TO ASK!**

Pick the right people for the job, tell them what's expected of them , TRAIN THEM TO DO IT, and GIVE THEM A SCHEDULE. You DON'T want to have all of your people go to lunch at the same time, or have someone "disappear" and have to wonder where he is!

Planning EVERYTHING

As you've seen, the success of your Show participation will depend not on any one big thing, but on how well and how thoroughly you do a whole series of crucial small ones. The best and THE ONLY way you can be sure that all of these things will be done (or even *thought of*) is to plan everything in advance.

When a Show is first announced, and you first make your decision to participate, THAT'S when your planning should start! Sit down and try to **think of every aspect of your Show participation**. Look at a map of the Show venue. What's the likely "traffic pattern" for the showgoers? Which room on which floor is most likely to be visited by the most people? That's the room you want to be in! How long will the Show run? Should you close your store during that time? Can you afford to? If not, who's going to mind the store while everybody else is off at the Show? Is the Show in your Home Town? If it's NOT, will it attract enough people from the area you serve to make it worthwhile for you to go? How will you and your people get there? What transportation and/or parking arrangements will you need to make? Will you need a hotel? How many rooms? For how long? What kind of presentation should you do? Which products should you display? What kinds of displays and special furniture will you need? How much of which literature for which products should you bring? How will you get everything to the Show? Will you be selling there? How much inventory should you bring? What will you do if you run out?

Now you've got the idea. It's easier than it sounds, and it WILL make all the difference in the world. DO IT!

And good luck at the Show!