How to Determine the Number of Samples to bring to the IFT Food Expo

There are two methods to determine the amount of sampling to bring to IFT Food Expo.

- The **Maximum Efficiency Method** assumes that you'd like to get your samples into the hands (or mouths) of the maximum number of your targeted attendees, without overspending. Kind of like the "Price Is Right" – closest to the actual retail price without going over.
- The **Self-Controlled Cost Method** allows you to set the absolute limit on the samples, and thus control the cost to transport, prepare and serve them. If you're OK with running out of samples during the show, this method is far easier to predict, and will allow you to spend only to pre-determined limits.

1. The **Maximum Efficiency Method** depends on these 5 factors (in order of importance):
   - The exhibit size
     - Small booths (10x10 up to 10x30)
     - Medium booths (20x20 to about 30x30)
     - Big booths (bigger than 30x30)
   - Whether the samples will available to everyone or restricted
     - Restricted to pre-qualified visitors
     - Open to anyone
     - An advertised attractant
   - The complexity and time required in the prep process
     - Is it absolutely ready to go? (no preparation)
     - Simple prep (how long?)
     - Complex prep (involved cooking, or other prep – extended time)
   - The number of people dedicated to prep and serving
     - One person some of the time
     - One person full time
     - ____ people full time (more than one dedicated person)
   - The booth location
     - Front of hall
     - Main aisle
     - Lower traffic area

The exhibit size is the first parameter to consider. In small exhibits the largest sampling that can take place will be in the 100's of samples per day, and will decrease from there based on other factors. The largest exhibitors can sample up to 2,000 – 3,000 samples per day, maximum. For planning purposes, start with 1 sample per square foot of contracted exhibit space per day, so a 10x10 exhibit should start with 100 samples per day.

Next, consider your sampling strategy. Will you feed everyone at the show (including neighboring exhibitors and the show's janitorial staff), or will you restrict your sampling to visitors who have been pre-qualified in some way. Even one or two simple questions can reduce the samples served by as much as 50%.

Next, look at the complexity of your preparation and sample serving process. Are you handing out fortune cookies that come pre-wrapped, or are you cooking a complete meal? Either way, I'd strongly recommend doing some practice runs before you come to the show to see exactly how long it takes. Then you can know your sampling capacity by multiplying it by the amount of time available (usually around 18 open show hours).

Next factor in how much human resource you're going allocate to this process. Will this be done by one person, when he/she has the time, or will you have a bunch of fully dedicated prep people manning the

operation? If it's the former, then again reduce your estimate by up to 50%, your people's priority should be talking to qualified visitors, not serving samples.

Finally consider your booth location, and the show's traffic patterns. Opening and closing hours are usually slower than midday hours. So again, unless you have the front & center booth position, it will take some time for the crowd to reach you once the show opens.

You'll need to estimate how much each factor will affect your sampling efforts. Unfortunately, there is no "one-size-fits-all" formula to help you with this. However, you do have a great resource you can call on, namely me, Trade Show Bob. As the former Exhibit Manager for Kerry Ingredients (the Godzilla of all samplers), I have estimated multiple samples for multiple shows and multiple booth sizes for the last 18 years. I'm now under contract to assist IFT exhibitors with any of your exhibiting needs, and stand ready to help you estimate your sampling needs. Please contact me at tradeshowbob@gmail.com for assistance. Oh yeah, I'm already paid for, so this service is free to all current IFT exhibitors.

2. The **Self-Controlled Cost Method** works like this:

Simply set daily limits, and when you run out, you're out. This will force you to be more selective with your samples – not giving them to everyone. This can work in your favor by creating a sense of "scarcity", while helping you control costs. You can use this to your advantage, particularly if your samples carry a high perceived value, i.e. something out of the ordinary.

As people approach you to try your samples, you can simply say. "We have a limited number of samples. Do you mind if I ask you a couple questions first?" You can then proceed to ask your qualifying questions, and when finished either invite them to sample, or not, based on the situation.

After you've run out, when people come by asking about your samples, simply say, "They were so popular today we ran out. What interested you about our samples?" You can then proceed to qualify them, and if they're qualified … say, "Can we set up an appointment for you either tomorrow or in the future to taste them?"

The daily limits you set can be based on either your budget, or roughly on the number of qualified leads you expect from the show. If you're a small (10x10) exhibitor, you can allocate 50 samples per day, and if you're careful, and properly qualify your visitors, you can be assured all your key visitors will taste your samples.

Realize, however, that the more you restrict your sampling, the better your samples must be to create demand for them. A simple bowl of chips, placed on your table, isn't enough to generate much excitement – at least not from me. Complex items with complex taste palettes, or unique preparation/presentation will go a long way toward creating demand for your samples, and ultimately promoting your products to the status of "hero" – even if you don't make sandwiches.

As I mentioned above, I've got lots of experience at estimating samples and their associated costs during my tenure as Trade Show Manager for Kerry Ingredients. I'm now under contract at IFT to provide similar services to any exhibitor who needs a little help zeroing in on this subject. It's a service that IFT pays for, so the cost to the exhibitor is nothing. Please feel free to ask me any question relating to your exhibit or sampling plans. I can be reached at tradeshowbob@gmail.com.