

Primer on NSTA Conferences for NAR Exhibiting

By Vince Huegele, NAR Education Committee Chairman

Here are some thoughts I have put together in planning and conducting a booth exhibition at the NSTA conferences that I hope will help others in continuing the practice.

Marketing strategy

In reviewing the marketing arena of trade shows, I have listed these strategies to focus our effort for NAR in attending the NSTA conferences. NSTA has several tradeshow consultants that are available and will send you email suggestions as well as offer webinars to understand the points listed below.

Primary Mission: to 'infect' teachers to use rocketry and NAR resources with programs like TARC through section and member connections, and encourage those already familiar and using rocketry to continue and advance their programs

Secondary: have these teachers' activities generate more NAR memberships

Goals

Create a larger NAR visibility and maintain teacher awareness

Collect names and contact info of prospects and users and follow up with invitations to rocket events

Build networks and connect individual NAR members and teachers

Metrics

150 or more total good prospect names and contact info over three days

Respond to leads within weeks to reinforce contact and connection

Follow up to find out how many contacted teachers used rocketry by three months

Targets: in priority order

High school physics and engineering teachers and administrators

Middle school physical science teachers and administrators

Enrichment, afterschool or gifted teachers and administrators

General science, chemistry teachers and administrators

The Exhibit appearance purpose is for the Engagement of guests to immediately **inform them-**

What is it? Flying model rockets.

Why should I care? Rockets teach a lot of science and your class can launch them and have fun.

Who are you? NAR, the organized body of sport rocketeers who help educators.

Follow up: Have an email greeting ready to go out to the contact names within a month of the conference. The note will invite them to a launch or other local NAR section event.

Preparations

Like conducting a large launch or any event there was a great deal of 'business' that has to be done to organize and execute the exhibit. You've seen trade shows before, but if you've never

directed the entire operation of managing a booth it may be a learning experience for you, but don't worry, you can figure it all out.

The first thing is to reserve a booth space at the respective conference. NSTA will want a deposit along with the form and we will be billed for the balance before the event. Later they will want to know what equipment and services you want to order for your exhibit. We typically get a 2x8 and a 2x10 table, both draped in red. Send in that order by the first deadline for a discount. There are many other exhibit items available but they are not necessary or affordable for the NAR exhibit. The rockets you bring will make your booth extremely noticeable and well competitive with the others.

One action to be on first is to reserve from NSTA a "lead retrieval terminal". They are free if you order it soon enough, like 2 months prior to the conference date.

<http://globalconventionsolutions.com/nsta> This is a badge bar code scanner that captures all of the teacher's info in one laser burst. It prints a hard copy of all entries, but you also get an e-spreadsheet mailed to you a week after the event. It sure beats a sign-up clipboard. After you've had your conversation with a visitor and gotten them excited about NAR, this is how you get their name to add them to the educators newsletter subscription and other rocketry event announcements. The leads are the primary product of the convention for NAR and why we are there. You will have to order an AC power plug connection to run the scanner, but you can also use it for your laptop to show launch video clips.

The conference allows admission of four people per organization who will be pre registered. Choose folks to work the booth who can be friendly and talk to strangers. You have to be able to smile, greet, meet and welcome visitors and repeat a 'sales spiel' about what NAR is and does. It's often not part of many rocketeers' personality to be this outgoing, but it can be faked for a few hours. The teachers attending are always nice so it's easier for introverts than it sounds.

Showtime

When you arrive, head for the conference area and look for the exhibitor registration to get your badges. Then refer to your floor plan to find the booth that should have our organization's name labeled on it.

Inventory for the exhibit to bring:

NAR panel display and banner

Box of student rockets, egglofters or TARC models; six good ones is plenty

sample motor casings, basic launcher and firing system

sample payloads or experiments

4" diameter HP or large 'wow' rocket for a centerpiece

Laptop to show launch video clips or play DVD's

Brochures, CD's to give out, specifically NAR applications, NAR education brochures, but also your own regional NAR section contact lists

If you have some display favorites, educational items or cool rockets to show, bring them on, just realize you will have to carry them in yourselves and then remove or hide the packing boxes. The

conference center will not loan you a cart, therefore it's good to have your own roller box or carton with handles. Set up the booth as shown in the sample photos.

Another thing to mention is our 'NAR booth uniform.' Teachers are typically casual and comfortable particularly on travel so we don't want to wear our Sunday best for this. A collared shirt with no tie is fine with a sweater or jacket depending on the season. Nothing fancy, just be cleaned up and decent. You will definitely want to have comfortable shoes that will allow you to stand up all day.

The NAR exhibition at the NSTA regional conference in Nashville December 1-4, 2010 went very well with an estimated 3000 attendees. I was pleased with how the booth looked and how we were able to interact effectively and productively with many of the teachers. It was also a lot of work. Like conducting a large launch or any event, there was a great deal of 'business' that had to be done to organize and execute the exhibit. Although I had supported exhibits before, I'd never directed the entire operation so it was a learning experience for me, but I pulled it off rather smoothly with the help of the local section who worked in the booth greeting visitors.



**2010 Dec
Nashville
NSTA
Regional**

The procedure is (I suppose) like speed dating, or the "elevator speech"; you have about *three minutes* to explain what you

do and how it is good for the teacher while listening to what their experience or interest is in rocketry. You want to convince them to use the resources you offer in the brochure but also to persuade them to receive or make contact with a local section. Ask them where they are from and then tell them if possible while they are there who their closest club is. You get their name to follow up with and then move on to the next visitor.

At peak traffic times we engaged a person every three minutes, moderate traffic was one every seven minutes and at slow times one every twenty minutes. The first hour the show is open there

will be tons of people, but during the last hours of each day you can sit down. The first day is the busiest and the last is the slowest, so staff the booth with your personnel accordingly.

We had plenty of rockets and hardware on display that would impress teachers but also appeal to them as possible projects for their class to build. I had a laptop running a video clip picture slide show and along with our handouts I felt our booth was as interesting and attractive as any one there the same size. We did not need any special gimmick to get attention, the rockets did that themselves.

2010 Dec Nashville NSTA Regional



We collected over 100 names of people interested in or already doing rockets. There were many people, maybe 85% who knew about model rocketry, but few who actually knew about NAR or what we did. Some thought we were a rocket vendor. As we gave them a brochure and information on sections and the Cannon Grant, they learned who we were and received our resources as a deliverable product. Quite a few teachers had used rocketry or had a family member who had launched models. Several were planning to do a rocketry unit and wanted all the info we could offer. I told them it really wasn't rocket science and that they could do it effectively too. Others even knew about TARC or were considering participating or had actually done TARC and told us their story. One person said, "Oh, *you're* the people that do TARC," as NAR was a new entity for them.

What I felt we were able to do best was to give direct and personal encouragement to the teachers to begin or continue their rocket activities, assuring them that they could do a launch and that we were around to help with advice or other resources, like are on our website. Our

presence at the conference was valuable for that. Many teachers were near to local section launches but didn't know about the clubs, so now they know and will look for us. We'll be able to follow up with that through the contact info we collected.

The marketing preview said that conferences attendees would preselect their booth visits. Most teachers who visited us intended to do so, rather than found us as an incidental encounter. They were looking for info either for themselves or for "a colleague who couldn't come but wanted to get some rocket stuff for them". Attending the conference was also a useful feedback device for me to learn that lots of teachers *are* actively using model rockets and appreciate their value as a teaching tool, so we must be doing a good job equipping them.

The NSTA is a prime market for the science teachers we want to reach who are the best users of educational rocketry. They know the value of it and like to use it if funding, administration and time on other subjects permits. It is our most effective fertile field and NAR should continue to maintain a presence with this group as an inroad to promoting rocketry.

Follow up

One critical goal of the conference is to make additional contact with the visitors, so we use the information they provide. The names are added to the NAR educator's newsletter subscription. The teachers' city information is reviewed to find the nearest section to them and a person in that section, often a TARC mentor, who can receive and track the response. Here is a note I sent out to the teachers after the 2010 conference. There is also a short plug to join NAR.

Dear Science Educator,

It was great to meet you at the NSTA conference in Nashville. Thank you for visiting the National Association of Rocketry's (NAR) booth. I hope you are enjoying the NAR website link we gave you and that it is helpful for you to enrich your science lessons.

I'd like to invite you to come to our rocket launches and find out about our activities. NAR is the organization of rocket people who can assist you and your students on rocket projects, answer rocket questions and support your launches so you can have fun and fly safely and successfully. Please connect to our rocketeer network through your nearest NAR section, which is

Music City Missile Club <http://www.mc2rocketry.com/>
Your educator contact there is Lance Baxter, phirstphred@yahoo.com

Thanks for your interest in using model rocketry to inspire our next generation of scientists. If you want to be more involved in flying model rockets, consider becoming a member of the NAR. The NAR is America's oldest, largest, and best-known organization for rocketeers and who produce national student rocketry programs like TARC and SLI. Check out our site at www.nar.org to join online and explore many more great sport rocketry resources!

Vince Huegele

NAR Education Committee Chairman

NAR: We Are Sport Rocketry

Sample Exhibit Configurations

NSTA Minneapolis Regional 2009 October 29–31



NCASE Fall 2006, DC





NSTA National 2009 with AIA New Orleans





<NSTA National with AIA 2012 Indianapolis



NSTA National with AIA 2011 San Francisco>

NSTA Regional Phoenix 2012

