



How to engage the public



It's worth remembering that as much as being a prop, your stall can be off-putting. Standing or sitting behind your stall creates a barrier between you and the people you are trying to reach. It's okay to have one or two people behind the stall but try standing alongside the stall or a few yards away where you can engage the public. A good way to attract the public is by giving out leaflets and using a short, prepared "patter" about local environmental issues.

Quite often, you may notice at street stalls and fairs that many people peer at your stall but act as if they are afraid to take any leaflets for fear of ruining its appearance. Take the initiative to break the ice by encouraging people to take leaflets that are free and directing their attention to your prepared, well-chosen opening lines to

It is useful to have a few opening words you can use to engage members of the public. This does not mean everyone has to have the charm of a comper or guile of a sales person – but you will need a few key lines that capture in a short space of time what you're doing and why you want this particular person to help.

Engaging people means getting them on your side or at least letting you tell your position. In a busy high street event, your

task is to get people to taking leaflets, signing up or donating 50p. This means using the right opening lines. Confrontational lines such as "Hello, will you help us stop climate change right now?" or "Hello we're of the Earth, would you help the environment?" just won't work.

The trick is to drop out of campaign speak and act 'normal'. So talking in code: "COP 4 is coming up and we're asking everyone to pledge to urge their MP to sign EDM 999 on CO2 and emissions trading" is unlikely to get you any response. As with any form of campaigning you do not have to present yourself as an expert – the chances are that you will know more than enough to get your core message across. And while you will no doubt expect to be challenged by even properly qualified 'experts', don't be afraid to say what you are – a concerned citizen.

Your opening lines are crucial. They take no time to say but have huge impact. They can stop people in their stride, change their impression of you (many people passing stalls think they know who and what you are but may later admit they thought you were something else). A concise, well-chosen opening will ease you into a dialogue with people and make them feel comfortable about stopping and spending their valuable time with you.

Here are some examples:

• “Hello, what we’re doing today is asking people to sign ... to help us with our campaign to clean up local air pollution. I’ll give you a leaflet and there’s lots more information on the stall you can take... will you sign?” This is p... you... something for them and asks them to help. And it takes less than 10 seconds to say.

• “Hi... your Genetically Modified Game? It’s over there on the stall, 20p a go and a free... like a go?”

- Get out from behind that stall - use the FOE poster set as a colourful backdrop for your stall.
- Use your concise, jargon-free patter to get initial interest and to explain the one simple thing you want them to do (take a leaflet, sign a petition).
- Maintain eye contact as much as possible.
- Try to find common ground between you and whoever you are talking to. For example: “Do you live locally? What do you think of the traffic problems round here?”
- Ask direct questions rather than making general statements. For example: “Do you know many people with breathing problems?” rather than “Lots of people here can’t breathe properly because of the fumes.” Although this may be true, it’s not as direct as asking what they think. Concentrate on what the person is saying or telling you – use that information to assess their interests and to take the conversation in the direction you want.

...ryday and... jargon.
... enough free information as possible and to contact you later for more help if
...ending their time at your stall.

Please... They may also like to leave their address so we can send them a
no... any other members of the group who are not busy chatting to
of...

It’s very uncommon to get difficult people but if you do find yourself chatting to an awkward person avoid getting into protracted arguments or disagreements. Your aim is to get your concise message across, to raise your local group’s profile. You will not do this by getting into arguments or detailed technical analysis with people. The trick is to... let go... the conversation. Do so politely, but firmly. Stopping speaking is another simple tactic if... persist... is also fine at any stage to say you don’t know or ask someone else in the group to... d.

Stall... find... local... able to... encourage...