

GO LIKE A PRO

FOLLOW THESE SUREFIRE TIPS FOR
A PROFITABLE 2025 SEMA SHOW
EXPERIENCE

BY MICHAEL IMLAY

With the 2025 SEMA Show just weeks away, now is the time to finalize your plans to attend the industry's premier automotive trade event, November 4–7, at the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC). As of press time, the Show was on track to total more than 2,400 exhibitors covering millions of square feet of exhibit space—literally filling the inside and outside areas of the massive LVCC campus.

"From cutting-edge vehicle builds to the latest innovations in the automotive aftermarket, the SEMA Show is where the world gathers every year to experience the energy, passion and innovations that define the specialty-equipment aftermarket," notes SEMA Trade Shows Director Andy Tompkins. "Year in and out, the Show is among the best investments any industry member can make to grow their business and succeed in an increasingly changing and competitive environment."

To get the most of your SEMA Show experience, Tompkins recommends leveraging the tried-and-true strategies employed by veteran Show attendees. The following is your 30-day checklist/planning guide for a Show experience that minimizes stress, maximizes enjoyment and, best of all, delivers a healthy return on your Show investment.

30 DAYS BEFORE THE SHOW

Cover Logistics and Create Your Game Plan

1. Confirm Hotel and Travel

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to book travel and hotel arrangements to save money. You should also determine how you'll commute to and from the LVCC and coordinate where you'll eat/dine in advance (see "Working Las Vegas," p. 60).

2. Define Your Show Goals

The next step may seem obvious, but it's important: Ask yourself what you intend to accomplish at the Show.

**GROUP YOUR MEETINGS AND OTHER
MUST-DO'S BY HALL OR SHOW
SECTION TO MINIMIZE CROSS-
CAMPUS TRAVEL.**





"Writing down your goals will help determine where to spend your time each day," notes Tompkins. "If your goal is exploration, be sure to leave plenty of gaps in your schedule for discovery. If your goal is arranging as many back-to-back meetings as possible with exhibitors, you'll want to create an efficient, manageable itinerary." Jot down your specific objectives, whether they be product sourcing, trend scouting or networking.

3. Use Official SEMA Planning Tools

Whatever your objective, the Show offers specific tools for schedule planning and navigating the many exhibits and features. The official online floorplan/exhibitor directory at semashow.com/floorplan allows you to search exhibitors by category, company, booth number or product category. There is also an online Show Planner at semashow.com/plan

(Above left) SEMA Education sessions deliver quality insights for business and professional development.

(Above right) Arrive at the Show with a clear list of objectives and exhibitors you want to meet, then keep notes of the contacts you make at the event.

(Below) Networking and infotainment events like the Show's annual Kickoff Breakfast offer attendees fun glimpse into the industry's latest innovations and trends.



that allows you to pre-select education sessions, events and exhibitor booths that you'll want to target as you build your itinerary.

But the best tool of all is the official SEMA Show app, which "puts the entire Show in your pocket," says Tompkins. "It allows you to bookmark exhibitors, make notes and schedule appointments, even provides turn-by-turn directions, and is available for free download through your mobile device's native app store. Just search for 'SEMA Show.'"

4. Identify Your "Must-See" Exhibits, Features and Events

Along with prioritizing the exhibitors you want to visit, you'll get more from your Show experience if you create an advance list of key "must-see" features and events you wish to attend. Most attendees will start with the New Products Showcase, now



located in the Lower South Hall right by main registration. Consider also the following:

- SEMA FutureTech Studio to see upcoming innovations.
- International Pavilion to connect with multinational businesses.
- Art Walk to peruse and buy automotive art for home or office.
- Outdoor activations and feature vehicle displays to expand your awareness of the latest aftermarket trends and innovations.
- Education seminars covering topics and delivering new ideas to advance your business, knowledge and career.

“Viewing Show vehicles and other activations and displays is about more than being wowed,” says Tompkins. “They’re a way to observe new products and innovations in real-life applications. You’ll be learning while having some fun. And, of course, SEMA Education and partner-led seminars

offer deeper dives into a variety of topics and technical information that can directly impact your business.”

AT THE SHOW

Forge Connections and Maximize Your Experience

1. Daily Navigation Strategy

To effectively tour a Show that encompasses multiple product communities and features, you’ll want to think methodically. Don’t bounce back and forth from hall to hall—leverage the Show’s categorized layout and group your meetings and other must-do’s by hall or Show section to minimize cross-campus travel. Consider the Convention Center’s Vegas Loop to cut travel time between the West, Central, North and South Halls.

2. Leverage the SEMA Show App

Before the Show, the SEMA Show app made for a handy planning tool. But now’s the time to really leverage the tool at the Show. Use it to scan

Show vehicles, activations and events like the SEMA Cruise are about more than being wowed. They’re windows into what’s driving industry trends.



ALONG WITH PRIORITIZING THE EXHIBITORS YOU WANT TO VISIT, YOU'LL GET MORE FROM YOUR SHOW EXPERIENCE IF YOU CREATE AN ADVANCE LIST OF KEY “MUST-SEE” FEATURES AND EVENTS YOU WISH TO ATTEND.



“...THINK METHODICALLY. DON’T BOUNCE BACK AND FORTH FROM HALL TO HALL — LEVERAGE THE SHOW’S CATEGORIZED LAYOUT...”

products that catch your interest at the New Products Showcase and map your way to the respective exhibiting companies. Similarly, you can scan feature vehicle display signage to learn which manufacturers’ parts were used in the builds and connect with them. “The app also includes a notes feature that can help you keep track of who you visit, what you see and what you discuss or learn for later follow-up,” Tompkins adds.

3. Networking and Evening Events

Casual exchanges with industry peers carry tremendous opportunities for developing new ideas and business connections. From before Show opening through the end of SEMA Week, the SEMA Show

presents several events that combine information, entertainment and networking in fun settings. We especially recommend the following:

- The SEMA Show Kickoff Breakfast, to be held 8:00 a.m., Tuesday, November 4. Each year, just prior to Show opening, the breakfast features SEMA’s New Product Awards, plus interviews with popular industry icons.
- The SEMA Industry Honors, slated for Thursday evening, November 6, at the Fontainebleau, gets underway with a 6:00 p.m. reception followed by a revamped industry awards program and a live entertainment after-party (see “SEMA After-Hours” on p. 100 for details).

The New Products Showcase should top every attendee’s itinerary. Using the Show app, the showcase connects the products you’ll discover there directly with the exhibitors who offer them.

- Throughout SEMA Week, the association's numerous councils and networks hold receptions, mixers and other events geared toward specific industry sectors and professional interests. Refer to the SEMA Show schedule (semashow.com) for further information.

- Starting at 4:00 p.m., Friday, November 7, the Show's multitude of display vehicles parade out of the Convention Center in the annual SEMA Cruise, a wildly popular event among Show attendees and the general public alike.

- SEMA Fest caps off SEMA Week with the industry's celebrated music and car-culture festival. It's a great venue for unwinding and networking after a busy Show (see "SEMA After-Hours" on p. 100 for details). Purchase tickets at SEMAShow.com.

4. Capture Connections and Content

This probably goes without saying, but throughout the Show, you'll want to exchange business information with everyone you meet. Star exhibitors in the SEMA Show app and make detailed notes or connect on LinkedIn. Note again that information scanned through the app remains accessible long after the Show ends.

5. Stay Updated Through SEMA Live

If despite all your planning you find yourself unable to catch a Show event due to another appointment, don't fret. Last year, SEMA introduced SEMA Live—livestream coverage of the Show focused on each day's noteworthy activities and personalities. Check the livestream regularly to review any events you may have missed; discover

any new exhibitions, demonstrations or other features you may want to visit when your schedule allows; or share Show content with colleagues and friends who couldn't attend the trade gathering. You can access SEMA Live via the Show's Facebook or YouTube channels.

AFTER THE SHOW

Debrief, Follow Up and Sustain Relationships

1. Organize Your Contacts

Once the Show has ended, you'll want to capitalize on your experience as soon as you're back at the office. Start by reviewing all the contacts you made, whether you saved them in the SEMA Show app or collected them through business cards. Prioritize them for follow-up, categorizing them based on urgency:

- Immediate: leads for follow-up within two weeks.
- Medium-term opportunities: leads for follow-up within six months.
- Long-term relationships: contacts to check in with at 12 months.

"We find that people who have an organized plan for follow-up tend to reap the most benefits from the SEMA Show," says Tompkins. "And considering all the time and effort you've invested in SEMA Week, why wouldn't you want to maximize your ROI after the event?"

"It helps to have a thought process about what you want to accomplish," he continues. "Are you trying to get a product from a new vendor

SEMA council and network events, as well as Show activities, are important tools for broadening your industry relationships.



"WE FIND THAT PEOPLE WHO HAVE AN ORGANIZED PLAN FOR FOLLOW-UP TEND TO REAP THE MOST BENEFITS FROM THE SEMA SHOW..."



or resolve pricing or another issue you've been having? Is there something you discussed that really needs to be addressed quickly? Those sorts of things will fall into your immediate follow-up category. But you'll also want to cultivate the many relationships that you've made offering longer-term opportunities."

2. Exchange Insights With Your Team

Whether you attended the Show alone or with other team members, a debriefing meeting back in your offices soon after returning will help solidify action items and keep the momentum going. At a minimum, the discussions should include products discovered, trends spotted and potential relationships forged with exhibitors and other leads.

"We've even heard examples of attendees distributing SEMA Live recordings and other con-

The Show's booth and feature vehicle collections serve up inspiration while displaying innovative products in their real-life applications.

tent they captured for internal training purposes," says Tompkins. "It's a great way for an entire team to benefit from the Show, even if they were unable to go to Las Vegas. You're basically extending the Show investment throughout your business."

3. Maintain and Cultivate Vendor Relationships

As you do your follow-ups with contacts, here's where the notes you took at the Show come in handy. Confirm the commitments made during the event, whether they be pricing, orders for product or samples or requests for information.

"You want to stay visible and top-of-mind through your periodic touchpoints," advises Tompkins. "Don't let them get lost in the ether. The power of the SEMA Show is its ability to bring industry professionals together, spark conversations and ideas, and initiate relationships. But truly capitalizing on the Show's power continues long after the Show ends." **S**