

5 Tips for First-Time IFA Convention Attendees

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The 2023 IFA Convention will be held at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, taking place from Sunday, February 26 through Wednesday, March 1. It's a five-day extravaganza, widely known as the biggest trade show of the year for the franchising industry. The theme of this year's show, "All In. All Here," reflects this acknowledgment. I first attended the annual IFA Convention in 2019, but I've learned so much since my first exposure to this all-important gathering.

I wanted to pass along some of the things I've learned over the years, including what to do – and what not to do. It's my hope that any first-time attendee will benefit from these five helpful tips.

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1. Attend speaking events and panel discussions

You know what makes the best salespeople the best? They have an insatiable appetite for learning. When it comes to the prospects you'd like to cultivate at the IFA Convention, you should strive to learn everything you can about what they have to offer. So, make it a point to attend the speaking events and panel discussions that reflect your target market. Listen intently. Take notes. You're making a commitment to learning

what they've learned. And it will make it much easier to connect with them in person down the road.

2. Don't bolt right after the show

A great deal of IFA Convention attendees bolt for the airport the minute their obligations are squared away, leaving a trail of smoke behind them. Ever wondered why? You've already spent a considerable amount of time, money and effort into attending this once-a-year event. So, you might as well stay that one extra night – or at least make plans to attend the final dinner engagement. Speaking from personal experience, I've found that some of the most intimate conversations I've ever had at the IFA Convention occurred during this occasion, long after most others attendees have already filed out. The closing cocktail hour and dinner party are all about fun and friendship-building. And I've also discovered that the connections you make there can be 100 times more impactful than 500 cold calls or emails.

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3. Do some advance outreach

Networking opportunities at the IFA Convention should begin long before you ever set foot on the trade show floor. So, take my advice and do a bit of pre-convention outreach. First, carefully review the trade show's agenda, looking for prime connections in your target market. Commit to attending their speaking or panel discussion sessions – then let them know about it in a friendly email. The name of the game is “no hard sell,” as you're not looking to close a deal ahead of the event. You're simply looking for a way to make an ice-breaking introduction. Email a select few in your target market, and share your interest in hearing their presentations. It's an excellent way to lay the groundwork for networking in person

later. It almost always makes it easier to get an audience with your preferred contacts. But even if you only get through to one individual, that's still a very big win.

4. Be selective with your time

The annual IFA Convention is big. Really big. You simply don't have the time or bandwidth to hit every single exhibitor – not by a long shot. Do some valuable pre-show reconnaissance, and plot your movement on the trade show floor ahead of time. When you do amass your list of preferred contacts and their booth information, stick to your plan. But when you stop by, don't do a fly-by business card exchange. Do your best to make that all-important personal connection with your preferred contacts. Do, or say, something memorable. Turn the charm up to 11. Look for things you have in common. At the end of the show, if you've secured 10 memorable conversations, that's much better than coming away with 762 business cards of no significance.

5. Look for additional shows to attend

If you don't end up with any leads, clients or new business following your first IFA Convention, don't be discouraged. Quitting is for quitters. And some research has shown that it takes a minimum of three years in the franchising space to become known. So, repetition counts. If you want to become part of the franchising industry's exclusive community, it takes effort, patience and persistence.

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