

5 Tips That Can Help You Seize Every Opportunity Your Next Industry Conference Has to Offer

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No matter what industry you're in, everyone can benefit from attending a professional conference. These large, multi-day gatherings are perfect opportunities to attend some seminars, learn a few things about where your industry is going, and perhaps most importantly, network with others in your space.

However, if you're new to attending industry conferences, you may not know how best to employ the limited time you have at one. The truth is, not everyone walks away from a conference having seized the same opportunities as someone who walked in with a game plan. So, in this article, you'll find five ways to make the most out of the marketing, networking and personal and professional development opportunities a professional conference affords you.

1. Make a plan

The first step you'll want to take is to make a plan for yourself well before the conference even begins. There's no doubt that a week-long conference held at a huge hotel can seem pretty confusing and intimidating. After all, how are you really going to know where to go, which seminars to attend, who to talk to and where to catch people during the bustle of a conference?

This is where planning is going to save you. Take some time beforehand to study the conference's itinerary, participate in pre-conference discussions online and learn more about speakers and other attendees with whom you may want to network. Planning like this is going to save you a lot of time in the long run.

2. Attend after-hours networking events and mixers

This tip is all about the networking portion of professional conferences, arguably one of the most important parts. Conferences that run for multiple days often feature some sort of social mixers or meet-and-greets for attendees in the evening hours. These are prime opportunities to get yourself out there and network with others in your industry.

Be sure to bring your business cards to hand out or, if you're an author, give away some free copies of your book. That book can serve as your business card at professional events such as these mixers. An autographed book – put in the hands of potential clients, collaborators or influencers you want to work with – is light years ahead of just another business card that many people would probably lose or forget about anyway. A book means people will remember you.

Even if you don't have a book to hand out, though, these after-hours networking mixers are a perfect way to spend some time at your next conference.

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3. Walk the hallways

The third tip to remember for making the most out of a conference is to spend time walking the hallways outside the

seminar rooms. The seminars and Q&As all have their place at a conference, but there's a structure to them that decorum demands you follow. You'll sit respectfully and hear what the speakers are saying.

In the hallways, though, you're going to meet people by surprise, have ad-libbed conversations, make business dealings and set up collaborations for the future. It can seem challenging to plan out something like this for yourself. After all, meeting up with other attendees in the hallways can seem like it just comes down to chance. In fact, there are things you can do to guide yourself into some existing hallways meetups, from following certain attendees' hashtags or social posts to observing what others are doing outside of the seminar time slots.

At professional conferences, it pays to keep in mind that learning happens in the seminar rooms, but magic happens in the hallways.

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4. Attend workshops and seminars

You should definitely take time to attend the workshops and seminars on offer at your conference, and there's a two-pronged strategy that you can employ here. On one hand, you should attend seminars on subjects that are unfamiliar to you but with which you'd like to become more familiar. On the other hand, make time to attend seminars on subjects that you already teach or practice yourself.

The reason is that other people in your industry could have different life experiences that cause them to have a perspective on your topic that you've never considered before. Maybe these speakers say something more clearly or succinctly than you ever have. Their unique insights could unlock

something in you and inspire you to teach your subject in their way from now on.

This isn't about stealing someone's style. It's about seeing whether another member of your own industry can say something that raises a nugget of wisdom out of your unconscious knowledge bank and into your conscious mind. That way, you can actively start to use it and become more competitive.

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5. Be flexible

Finally, you're going to want to be flexible with your schedule at these conferences. As mentioned, you should make a plan for attending your conference, but at the same time, you want to keep an open mind to the fact that schedules can change at any time. You may not make it to a seminar that you planned to attend, be it for some mundane snafu or the fact that you had such a long and engaging conversation with someone you met in the hallway that you missed the time slot.

That's okay! It's better to go with the flow anyway because that's often how the best personal connections form.

Conferences can spur your personal and professional growth

Whether you're an industry veteran or just getting into your game, conferences in your market niche can be a huge boon to your personal and professional development. From expert seminars to impromptu hallway networking, conferences can be the key to unlocking a new level of growth for you. Make sure you make the most out of your next one.

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