

Play to Win

Diving Back Into Conferences: Ways to Brush Up Your Form

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With in-person conferences, tradeshow and other large gatherings happening again, your skills may be rusty. Here are ways to get back into your best face-to-face form.

As I write this, I am in Las Vegas with over 830 others at the [Legal Marketing Association](#) Annual Meeting, my first association conference since before the pandemic. Leading up to this, my emotions have ranged from excitement (“I can’t wait to see so many people who will be there!”) to trepidation (“Hello, COVID”). But I’m here because I want to take advantage of the opportunity.

At some point, everyone will have a re-entry point. The world is opening up and in-person conferences, tradeshow, meetings and other large gatherings are happening again. After two years on the sidelines, your skills may be rusty. So, before you venture into the world of meetings, here are some tips to help you get back into your best face-to-face form.

Preparing for Conferences

The more you do in advance of the conference, the easier it will be when you get there. Here are some thoughts on what to do before you go.

Prepare [your elevator speech](#). Be ready to explain, in a brief and understandable way, the kinds of clients you represent and how you help them. Tailor this to the attendees or the industry that the conference represents. And have some “for examples” ready to mention.

Review the list of attendees. Do you have clients or other contacts who will be in attendance? Create a target list of people you’d like to reach out to in advance or see when you’re there. Send notes to some people. Let them know you will be there and are anxious to catch up.

Establish your objectives. What do you hope to accomplish at the conference? One lawyer I coach is going to a meeting in May and has set a goal of getting five new clients. Not every meeting will offer as many direct business development opportunities but you could try to:

- Reconnect with someone you haven’t seen in two-plus years.
- Talk to (or sit with) specific targets.
- Meet two new people.
- Meet other professionals and vendors that work in the same space.
- Attend specific presentations.

Set up appointments. Plan coffee or cocktails with people with whom you’re especially interested.

Prepare your materials. Will you bring business cards? If so, some lawyers are customizing them — for example, adding tips related to their practices on the back (e.g., “Five things to do when you receive a subpoena”).

Update [your LinkedIn profile](#). Many people now use the LinkedIn app to connect in real time at meetings.

Read the conference materials. Familiarize yourself with the program sessions and activities. Plan your days so you maximize your time during the conference and after hours (e.g., social events).

Announce your activity. Use social media to let people know you'll be there.

Execution Tips

Once you're at the conference, keep the following in mind:

- **Be positive.** Engage people. Everyone likes seeing a friendly face.
- **Be respectful of personal space.** Some people are back to hugging and shaking hands; others still prefer to keep their distance. Ask people about their comfort level before making contact.
- **Get the little things right.** If you do shake hands, use a firm handshake while you make eye contact and use their names. Wear your nametag on your right side, if possible. Be ready with your elevator speech when people ask about you or your firm.
- **Be prepared with some open-ended questions.** For example: What is your back-to-office situation? What are the company's biggest issues related to [your practice area or the conference theme]? Tell me about your role at XYZ Company. Be a good listener: Nod your head and ask follow-up questions.
- **Be enthusiastic when talking about your practice.** Show passion for what you do.
- **Make notes about new contacts.** Write on the backs of their business cards or the attendee list to memorialize details about the person, what you talked about and the follow-up you should undertake.
- **Recognize conference organizers.** Look for board members, conference planners and association management representatives to congratulate them on the meeting.
- **Use social media.** Use LinkedIn or Twitter to send out informative nuggets or takeaways from sessions that you attend. Post pictures with other conference attendees.
- **Visit the exhibit hall.** Take some time to learn about the vendors and service providers working in the area. This is a value-add for you and often for your clients.

Follow-Up After Conferences

Where lawyers tend to fall down is after the event. Yet the benefits of attending a conference will go up dramatically with diligent follow-up. Here are some suggestions:

- **Send [personal notes](#) with some value-added information.** This could be something substantive, like an article or a copy of a case, or something of a more personal nature, like a review of a book you discussed or a contact name.
- **Connect on LinkedIn.** If you haven't already connected, send personal invitations reminding people that you met at the conference. Look at their profiles for contacts you have in common.
- **Set up Google or other alerts to notify you of developments about good prospects** (be they people or companies). These alerts may identify opportunities for you to get back in touch.
- **Contact people who didn't attend.** Your presence at the conference can be helpful to those who couldn't make it if you send out a summary of some of your favorite sessions or share materials you picked up.
- **Review your activities and performance.** What can you do better the next time around?

When You Execute the Three Phrases Well

Every marketing activity should have three phases: preparation, execution and follow-up. Conferences are no different. If you implement all three well, you will maximize the potential return on your participation and investment.