



Maximizing the Conference Experience

11 Tips for Smart Attendees

Attending conferences can be an expensive proposition. Besides the cost of registration and travel, the opportunity costs resulting from being out of the office can be considerable. The shows can be overwhelming with multiple tracks of presentations and a show floor full of vendors competing for your ear.

Here are 11 tips to help you maximize the return on investment from your conference attendance.

Before the Event

1. **Book Early and On-site** - Book flights and hotel well in advance. It is best to stay at the host location for “after-hours” networking, plus you’ll gain time in the morning while also saving taxi fares.
2. **Identify Problems** - What conundrum are you trying to solve by going to this event? Articulate what you seek and set a objective before heading out.
3. **Pre-scout Solutions** - Review and research the vendors in advance for possible solutions. Smart attendees schedule meetings with key vendors in advance for undivided attention from the busy exhibitors.
4. **Pre-plan Sessions** - Scout the session schedule beforehand and highlight the sessions most relevant to the problem you are trying to solve. You can’t attend every session so by planning ahead you’ll get a good seat and leave ample time for networking and exploring the tradeshow floor.

At the Conference

5. **Note What you Don’t Know** - Make a “to research” list during sessions for thoughts, buzzwords, acronyms and ideas to review later. Trying to soak in every concept will distract you from your primary objective.
6. **Observe Innovation** - Look for emerging trends and inspiring new ideas to consider in addition to your problem solving. This is a great time to learn new best practices for possible adoption.
7. **Make Time to Meet People** - Take time for genuine, in-depth conversations with peers and jot down notes on business cards. Don’t try to meet *everyone*, instead focus on meeting fewer, more relevant contacts - including competitors.
8. **Pace Yourself** - Get some sleep, eat right to keep energy up and take time to step outside and breathe between sessions. Don’t get overwhelmed - have a laugh and enjoy the atmosphere.

After the Show

9. **Book Time to Digest** - Schedule necessary time after the show (even though you are *really, really* busy) to review the notes and materials you collected and evaluate solutions while ideas are still fresh and top of mind.
10. **Follow-up with Contacts** - Take the time to drop your new contacts a card or email. Doing so helps your next show be even more productive plus builds your personal reference library of industry experts.
11. **Create an Action Plan** - Review your findings and formulate a plan to further investigate and evaluate solutions. Share your knowledge and resultant action plan with co-workers who didn’t attend the show.