

Do You Get the Most Out of Live Events?

I must confess I was stunned to see a full ballroom in Dallas. I knew we had succeeded in offering a top conference in a bottomed-out economy when I noticed so few empty chairs in a facility that had been booked a full year before the economic collapse.

Truly, I could hardly believe my eyes.

What I also noticed was the extent to which every single conference participant went out of his or her way to extract the greatest value out of every minute spent there.

Something ironic is happening in our culture. With virtual communication the norm, now “old school” face-to-face and print communication has begun to stand out as extra special. Consider the following trends:

- Print mailings have four times the conversion rate as email.
- Conferences and MeetUps are all abuzz with people excited to be face-to-face.
- Public speaking remains among the fastest ways to build a business, and continues to enjoy a significantly higher conversion rate than blogging, sending ezines, and other forms of electronic communication.
- Our own conference call for proposals last year (which began pre-Lehman Brothers and ended soon after) resulted in the largest stack of proposals in our history. It took the program team months to read them all and choose the winners.

This is not a generational dynamic. It's a cultural one that spans generations.

So the first lesson here is that you must prioritize at least a few live events a year, whether as a speaker or as an attendee. You can't get anything out of an event you don't attend!

There's never a good time to go, so there's no point trying to find the best time of year, and often the best price can be had by committing early. That's why you simply need to commit the time in your calendar and pay the money so you aren't tempted to bail at the last minute.

Once you're there, here are seven top tips to help you extract every drop of value from the live event:

1. *Arrive early.* If the event is in another city, get there early enough to tackle the majority of your phone calls and emails prior to the opening keynote, so you don't constantly have to duck out to deal with business. You'll have to do this to some extent anyway, but give yourself a small cushion at the onset to minimize it. If the event is in your own neck of the woods, arrive at the start time. This is the easiest time to talk with others. Don't be fashionably late. If you tend to run late, aim to arrive an hour early so you actually arrive 30 minutes early.
2. *Split your time between learning about the subject matter and building your network.* Live events provide an unparalleled opportunity to build relationships. If you pack in every minute in sessions, workshops, and presentations, you will miss this unique opportunity. Unless you're racing against a CEU deadline, cut yourself some slack by leaving at least one time slot open each day just for meeting others, wandering around the exhibits and talking with the exhibitors, or chatting with the event leaders.
3. *If there are concurrent sessions, choose your concurrent sessions before you arrive* (or if there are lots of great ones, at least narrow it down to 2 – 3 for each time slot) so you don't waste a lot of time reading the program at the live event. That's time that could be spent arriving at the room in time to get to know other participants and presenters.
4. *If you are uncomfortable with the networking aspect of a live event, try imagining that this event is your party in your own home.* What would you do in that case? For starters, you would probably introduce yourself to people, ask them something about themselves, and make sure everyone has something to drink and knows where the food is. Ever since I tried this simple mind trick, I have found networking to be enjoyable instead of tedious. I can't recommend it highly enough.
5. *Send live updates via Twitter and Facebook, or send a quick synopsis to others after the event.* They will appreciate it. Likewise, take the initiative to stay in touch with others you met at the event. Many people say they will stay in touch but few initiate and maintain this contact. By initiating and maintaining contact, you are automatically a leader, and you'll be able to nurture the relationships from a distance until you see one another again.
6. *Pace yourself!* The guy in this photo fell prey to something that I personally have to monitor in myself all the time – over-commitment. Since I often work alone, I get all pumped at a live event and the next thing I know, I've gone non-stop from 7:00 a.m. until well after midnight, and the next day, I'm delirious.
7. *Be a presenter at the event.* You'll triple your network because people will want to talk to you without any prompting. You'll continue to establish credibility for yourself and your business among not only the attendees but others who later buy the download and CD's of the conference sessions. An attendee at my concurrent session in Dallas said she came to my session because she had made extensive use of my presentation at the previous conference, which she had bought on CD. I honestly had no idea that anyone

had bought the CD of my session! Many people will hear your talk, even if you don't know about it until several years later.

Live events are great! Make full use of the opportunity and you'll reap the rewards many times over.