



MAKING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION

Face-to-face networking for events and why there is so much more to it

The ability to create strong relationships is the foundation for any successful business or career. Managing these internal and external networks is also crucial to growth, competitiveness and profitability. This means the process of networking is no longer an option – but an absolute necessity.

There is a dual role for professionals in the events industry; we need to be well connected with strong reciprocal networks to show for it and we need to utilise our abilities to form networking relationships, or Netships™, for others.

The highest performing companies worldwide are differentiated by their ability to attract, leverage and retain business relationships, yet, 75 per cent of business people admit that their existing networks do not support the results they need and 99 per cent state they would like specific training on networking and network management.

HOW CAN I GET THE MOST OUT OF NETWORKING EVENTS?

Most people miss out on creating valuable connections because they shy away from networking. Let's face it, we are creatures of habit and often find ourselves getting quite comfortable by sticking to our comfort zones, which translates to sticking to people you already know.

For some, the mere thought of walking up to a stranger is enough to make them simply avoid networking altogether. To ensure you maximise opportunities, it's best to be clear on what your intention is for going in the first place, and then set some realistic goals for yourself.

Try setting goals to create yourself a target. Depending on the time allocated in breaks, it would be wise to meet a new person or deepen a connection with an existing contact (but not someone you sit next to all day at work). If you don't set the goal, you have nothing to be accountable for and no way of evaluating the true success of the event.

HOW IS THE EVENTS INDUSTRY CHANGING?

The events industry has a big task ahead. Both the global financial crisis and the rise of social media have impinged on organisational spend on membership and attendance of professional/industry networking groups. Collectively, we need to make networking at functions appealing again. There is also much more competition now and there are thousands of official networks throughout



Southeast Asia alone, each with a menu of events to choose from. The success of events in the future is going to come down to adding value and enhancing member experiences on several levels.

HOW IS TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA HAVING AN IMPACT ON FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING?

Initially, the rise of technology had a huge impact as people tried to replace the way they connect with faster, cheaper alternatives, but like all new things the initial excitement has started to settle. We will always need to look each other in the eye to create higher levels of trust and have deeper conversations. Some people have mistaken social media as all-encompassing – you need a balance. Nothing will ever replace the value and results from face-to-face networking to create initial relationships, but social media does have its place keeping us connected (if done well). It is imperative to understand that any technology is an enabler to a relationship, not a relationship itself.

HOW CAN I NETWORK BETTER?

It is important to have a networking strategy that encompasses both internal (within your organisation) and external (industry and professional) networking. Then, you need to think about how you can align it with either your personal or professional goals. The reasons to network are extremely varied; you may want to share information/experiences, collaborate/partner or simply buy/sell to each other (just remember, if you approach a networking event with the intention to sell, you will repel people).

Always keep in mind the needs of your members/clients – regardless of your position in your organisation, we have a collective role to ensure they have positive networking experiences and want to come back again and again.

KEY AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGES FOR EVENT NETWORKING IN 2012

- **OPPORTUNITIES:** Helping members connect; growing your own professional network to help you with career advancement
- **CHALLENGES:** Staying competitive; providing more variety; keeping members satisfied

Face-to-face networking is all about managing your visibility and making good impressions, so get active and purposeful and enjoy the benefits.

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