

Making the Most of Industry Conferences

Conferences, trade shows, seminars and other industry events are valuable additions to a communications/public relations program. They offer an opportunity for networking, team building, executive positioning and sharing your organization's story with clients, colleagues, industry analysts, potential hires, business partners and the media.

How do you make the most of this opportunity?

Whether you're an attendee, speaker, presenter, vendor or service provider, you want to optimize your time and leverage the experience to advance strategic objectives. On a practical note, if your company invests in your attendance at an event, including travel, hotel, meals and time away from work, you want to ensure it delivers value.

Here are a few tips for navigating industry conferences from a communications perspective.

1) *Choose the right event.*

Your staff or PR firm should identify industry or vertical market conferences aligned with your communications goals. If securing speaking opportunities is part of your plan, keep in mind the long lead time that's typical for submitting proposals. You also want to consider the event's reputation, attendees, subject matter and media interest to determine if it's a good fit.



2) *Set your priorities.*

Know going in what you want to achieve at the event. Major industry conferences typically have a full schedule, from keynote presentations to breakout sessions, social activities, vendor booths and more. Also, they often offer the opportunity to plan private meetings with clients or prospects and to arrange media interviews. Plan your time accordingly before you go.

3) *Don't think of it as a standalone event.*

While a single industry conference isn't the time to do a major overhaul of your organizational presentation (i.e., corporate deck) and key messaging, you want to balance tailoring your communications to the event's theme and audience without deviating from your core positioning. In other words, your messaging and presentation materials should be current and address the conference subject matter, as well as align with your big picture strategies. Be consistent.

4) *Tweak your elevator speech.*

Conferences provide opportunities to meet people and chat informally. Be prepared. You may only have a minute to introduce yourself to another attendee while standing in a coffee line or riding the proverbial elevator. Make it brief and tell people something about the value of your company or the impact of your services and products versus a generic line about what you do. You want to stand out and be memorable.

5) *Leverage social media.* Don't stay in a vacuum while you're away. Post about news or novel ideas coming out of the event in real time. Hashtag the conference. Make sure you connect this information back to your organization and what it means to your stakeholders. For example, the keynote presentation addressed x, y, and z, and here's what we're already doing about it.

6) *Document and follow up.* Take notes on the people you meet, ideas raised in sessions you attend and any commitments you make to provide more information. You may not recall everything when you get back to the office. Have a strategy for post-conference communications and act on it.