

CANNEXUS20

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FIRST-TIMERS' SESSION: NETWORKING TIPS FOR CONFERENCES

When attending a business meeting, conference or event, be ready to meet a lot of people and come prepared to make the most out of the experience.

Pre-Planning

- Your most important tool is your **business card**, so make sure you have a good supply.
- **Set goals:** How many people do you want to meet at the event? (This can be very helpful, especially if you tend to be shy in large groups.) Networking is not about the quantity of people you meet but about meeting the right people.
- **Research:** Check out the conference/event website (cannexus.ca), as it may now offer ways to connect with other attendees/presenters/exhibitors prior to the event. Take advantage of this opportunity – find delegates with common interests, set up appointments in advance with exhibitors, participate in online discussions and create your own profile.
- **Strategy:** Prepare a short 10-to-30-second introduction to yourself and include something interesting such as a personal anecdote that will help people remember you. And be genuine! Prepare answers to common questions you may be asked, such as why you chose to attend this event and what you want to get out of the event. Prepare questions you may want to ask the people you meet – these may come in handy if there is not a natural flow in the conversation.
- **Follow up:** Decide in advance how you will follow up with people – LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, email, phone calls and/or handwritten notes. If you need to, create your own system for making notes on the people you meet – it could be as simple as jotting down a bullet point on their business card regarding key takeaways from your meeting.

Networking

First and foremost, networking is not about selling – it's about creating relationships. Don't be afraid to be the one making the approach even if you are approaching a small group.

The key to networking success is to be prepared to help others and listen to their needs. Networking is a two-way interaction. With every contact you make, think:

- How can I help this person?
- Introduce them to someone else they may benefit from meeting
- Share best practices learned this year
- Recommend a product or supplier
- Tell them about something going on in their area

Remembering details about someone such as family members or significant accomplishments can be a great way to reintroduce yourself and make them feel important later on.

Keep the connection going. Depending on your connection with the person, you may want to:

- Exchange business cards and agree on a way to follow up with each other
- Invite them to attend a session with you and debrief together afterward

Post-Event

Here are some of the things you can do to increase your Return on Investment - ROI:

1. **Capture what you learned:** List the sessions you attended and at least three take-aways from each session; Make it your goal to incorporate at least one take-away from each session and create specific objectives i.e. "I will look up the new concept to understand its impact on my department" or "I will sign up for the speaker's blog" or "I will follow up with a fellow delegate that I met in this session."
2. **Create networks:** When you meet someone interesting, find out more about them and offer to introduce them to someone else who may be beneficial for them to connect with.
3. **Share what you learned:** Make it a goal to spread around the inspiration and learning to maximize your ROI.
 - Do a presentation or Q & A at your next staff meeting
 - If you have a company blog or newsletter, offer to write about your favourite sessions
 - Tweet about the education sessions, motivational speakers and networking opportunities
 - Share the conference handouts with your colleagues
4. **Follow up:** Between delegates, exhibitors, keynote speakers, presenters and the conference hosts, you have definitely met a handful of interesting people. Look out for opportunities to reconnect and follow up
 - Send an email reminding them of your meeting and an opportunity to stay in touch with Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter
 - Contact exhibitors whose services may be of value to your organization
 - Create a summary of your conversation with them and their offerings and present it to your manager and colleagues
 - Schedule a follow-up conference call with the vendor and your leadership