

law practice management

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DEVELOPMENT COUNSEL

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Make the most of conferences

Every year, law firms spend vast amounts of money and precious lawyer time attending industry conferences and seminars. Most expect benefits beyond learning — they recognise the value of networking, profile raising and promotion.

Yet few leverage the full potential of this marketing forum, mostly because they expect it to 'just happen'. Here's a guide for the next envoy from your firm to be given the privilege of being a conference delegate.

Off to a conference?

Make the most of business development opportunities when attending your next conference.

Rather than merely depending on the general networking possibilities, you'll benefit from a little pre-conference work.

Here are a few ideas

- If available, obtain the registrant list in advance.
- Pick out your clients who are registered.
- Identify your contacts, referral sources and targets for follow up.
- Selectively phone or email to arrange getting together at the conference.
- Make contact with any speakers of special note — alert them to your interest in their paper and arrange to get together.
- Use this opportunity to tell your clients and prospective clients about a forthcoming conference of direct interest to them — offer copies of papers or a briefing on conference content post-event.

These simple steps will help you make the most, in business development terms, of your investment of time and money in conferencing.

Making the most of your time at the conference

- *Seek out your clients* — let them know you're there and interested. Catch up with them and reinforce relationships this way.
- *Ask your clients to introduce you to their colleagues and contacts* — widen your relationships with their circles.
- *Meet the speakers and organisers* to widen your industry relationships and gain profile.
- *Exchange views with other delegates* about papers presented and issues canvassed — always a good way to build new relationships.

- *Get a copy of the registration list* — and select those to add to your database for future newsletters, seminars and other profile raising activities.
- *Don't just hang out with your own team* (colleagues and old friends) — rather, circulate!
- *Think through the articles or papers you've written relevant to the interests of attendees you meet* — and offer them a perfect reason to follow up.
- *Get input to your new ideas and plans* — ask for opinions and feedback.

By doing these simple things you'll make your time at conferences much more productive.

Conference contact follow up

Once you've been to an industry or professional conference and met lots of interesting people, there's more to do.

- *List the good ideas you've collected* — choose a couple of great ones and implement these. Determine timeframes.
- *Circulate useful conference materials* to interested colleagues and contacts.

- *List the contacts you've made* and decide how and when to follow up with each — add them to your database.
- *Prioritise follow-up contacts* and pick up the phone or dash off an informal email in the first week post-conference
- *Offer value to every contact* — whether an article, some information, an idea or an introduction to a useful network contact, make certain that you have some value to offer with each follow up
- *Follow-up with the conference organiser* to see if you or a colleague could present a worthwhile paper next year.

This way, you'll find that conferences produce more value than merely some immediate learning and industry contacts: they can be used to build useful business for you and your firm. ●



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