

Networking tips for Meeting Planners

Networking tips concerning the organisation of an event

Tip 1: Acknowledge and emphasize the importance of networking: don't fill your program to the max.

Start with acknowledging and emphasizing the importance of networking. Many organisers fill the agenda to the maximum with presentations and workshops. As a consequence there is little room for the participants to get to know each other. For some people the only reason they attend the event is that they can meet people they won't meet at other events.

Tip 2: Name tags

For every organiser it is clear that name tags are a must at (business) events. But sometimes we don't give enough thought about them. Here are some tips:

- **Always provide name tags.** Some people really need this to remember names. It also helps to get a conversation started.
- **Use a (very) large font to write the names of the participants.** People hate to glare at other people's name tags and also hate it when someone else does this.
- **Mind the type of name tags.** Especially women are very sensitive when it comes to their clothes. Many of them don't want to use stickers or name tags with needles. So use name tags with clips and preferably with clips that can be turned in several directions. When someone wears clothes without breast pockets, a clip with a 90 degree angle provides a good solution.
- Almost everybody wears the name tag on the left. But it is handier when you **wear it on the right** because when you shake hands (always right) the name tag is better visible.

Networking tips with regard to your own networking attitude

Tip 1: Host/hostess attitude

Always keep in mind the host/hostess attitude. The best comparison is your own birthday party. Most of us are in a serving role at our own birthday parties. We make sure that everybody feels comfortable, we introduce them to each other, we give directions to the bathroom and have fun as well. When you have this attitude on a business event, things will run very smoothly and people will be grateful!

Tip 2: Introduce people (and in the right way!)

One of the most important things in networking is introducing people. But we don't always do this in a good way. Some tips:

- **Listen first to people before you introduce them.** This means asking questions. Do this even if you know them already for a while. The world is changing all the time. Not only will you make a better introduction, but your relationship with those people will also improve as a consequence of your genuine interest in them.
- **Ask them how they want to be introduced.** Some people want to keep a low profile on one event and a high one on others.
- **Ask who they want to meet.** This can be a specific person (if they know the name) or more general (marketing managers from the IT industry in Germany).
- **After you have introduced two people to each other, it is OK to move on yourself.** But mind that you end the conversation properly and not run away without saying something. One of the things you can say is: "If you want another introduction, you can find me at the reception desk."

Some additional remarks about introductions:

- **Introducing people can be really helpful in the beginning of an event when people feel in general more uncomfortable.** For many of them it is unknown territory and they have to acclimatise. By introducing them to other people you help them through this uncomfortable period. They won't only increase the "return" of their investment in time and money, but they will also be very grateful to the one who helped them.
- **Why are introductions so important?** Even if you use tools like Spotme to find specific people, one still has to approach them to start a conversation. Many people have a hard time doing this. By introducing them to the person they want to speak with, you will help them both out.

Tip 3: Help the speaker

Help the speaker with ideas concerning improving networking with and between participants. Why? Because they don't know how to deal with this aspect themselves.

Most of the times they are the experts in their field of knowledge meaning they are more focused on the subject than on people. Many of them have difficulties making contact with people once they are "off stage".

The organisers have a responsibility to make sure they are comfortable all the time by not only helping them with logistics and practical stuff, but with introducing them to other people as well. This doesn't mean you have to "hold their hands" all the time and not spending time with other people. Just keep an eye on them or ask someone else to do this for you. Many participants will gladly volunteer !

Tips to improve networking in breaks

Here are some short tips to improve networking in breaks.

- **Always provide a list of the participants.** A nice addition to the standard list is to ask everybody up front to write a short description of:
 - What they do
 - What they are looking for. This can be everything except customers (that should be clear from “what they do”). This is a question to give other people a chance to help you and start building a relationship.
 - What they can offer without expecting anything in return. This can be: free white papers, specific expertise, contacts in a specific field of knowledge or geographical area, general business tips, advice regarding a hobby or personal interest,...
- **Give people enough time to network !** Most breaks are just there to go the bathroom and get a drink. And they also serve as a buffer for presentations that take longer than planned.
- **Provide a leaflet with tips about networking (see below).** By doing this the importance of networking is clear for everyone and people are encouraged to talk to other people. This will help some of them take action.
- **Let the master of ceremonies stress the importance of networking in the opening speech.** And if there are some tools or aids that are provided to stimulate networking (like Spotme), let him explain them.

Tips to improve networking in meetings

- **Make sure that people introduce themselves to other people.** Depending on the context this can be more formal or informal. One of the most important and most forgotten aspects is that they have to tell something about themselves or their organisation that is different or special. The other people need this to remember them!
- **Give people time to talk for a few minutes with their neighbour(s) to get to know each other.** Also have the meeting facilitator explain why this is important and let him/her give an example.
- **Have the participants share their thoughts on the topic on a few moments during the presentation or workshop.** In this way they don't only learn better and have more fun, but they will also get to know the other people better, increasing the chances that they will stay in touch afterwards.

Some concepts that can be used to stimulate networking at an event

Concept 1: Speed Networking

There are different variations on this concept, but the core is that you have several one on one meetings during a small amount of time. For example in Belgium there is the Speed Business Dating (www.speedbusinessdating.be) concept where you sit down to have a 5 minute talk with another person. After those 5 minutes you indicate whether you see opportunities to do business or not and then move on to the next person. You have 10 such talks in one session. Afterwards all participants get an overview of the matches of this session. At July 15th they had 1096 participants in all sessions with 37,7% matches and another 15,8% where only one party saw a potential business opportunity. Amazing what taking the time for each other for only 5 minutes can do!

Other organisations in this area are Speednetworking LTD (www.speednetworking.org) and Speednetworking.com (www.speednetworking.com)

Concept 2: Network Auction

A network auction is a concept whereby requests of the participants are auctioned. The other participants hear the question and if they can help this person or know someone who can help him they “bid”. The purpose is not to have one highest bid, but as many as possible. The matches are recorded and presented to the participants. The result is not only an answer to the question of the participants, but also a change in the atmosphere. People feel very grateful to have answers to their questions, realise the enormous amount of opportunities and forget their fear of making contact!

When I am asked to do a network auction, I always suggest combining it with a small presentation about what networking is all about and with the “Meet & Greet” concept to have even better results.

Concept 3: Meet & Greet

This is a concept that I already saw at various meetings, but I heard the name for the first time at a meeting of Managers for Managers, a Belgian networking club (www.m-4-m.com).

When people arrive at the event, they get a small paper with two numbers. The first number is the number of the table, the second number indicates the order in which people can present themselves to the other people. Number one is always for an “ambassador” who explains the concept to the new attendees and who keeps the time. Everyone gets 3 minutes to introduce himself to the other people at his table. This way shy people receive



enough attention. At one table there are on average 8 people. So at least you heard the Elevator Story of 7 people and they listened to yours. This is another way of getting in touch with people that you otherwise wouldn't have talked to. Several nice opportunities have already come out of this kind of meetings!

What's also important in the concept of Managers for Managers is that there are no chairs. People stand at their table. After the presentation round at their table they have the time to move around to meet people from other tables. Sitting on chairs would prevent this.

Let this examples inspire you to stimulate networking at your next event! Or even better attend one of the meetings of these organisations or hire them to assist you to implement a concept at your event.

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- Find out more about the **networking book "Let's Connect!"** (including a **FREE** light version) at www.letsconnect.be.
- Read more networking tips in the weekly blog The Networking Coach's Opinion: www.janvermeiren.com

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