

Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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Ask Friday!

With our Annual Meeting coming up in just a few short weeks, I wanted to dedicate this week's "Ask Friday" to the question of "how can I make the most out of attending a conference?"

You might think that just showing up and attending the events is enough, but with a little bit of strategy, your pre, during and post conference activities can really make a difference in your experience.

Pre-Conference

Before heading to the conference, take a few minutes to look over the agenda and the attendee list (if it's available). The agenda can give you an idea of what topics will be discussed and where you can

contribute - when you contribute to a discussion (especially in a conference like ours where the main purpose is to develop relationships), it can help people to identify you with a certain area of expertise, and make you a thought leader who is sought out for later conversations. It also makes you easier to remember.

Review the attendee list and identify who you'd like to build relationships with. This can seem a bit "icky," but you know where your clients are doing business, so it's a good idea to connect with possible referral partners so that you start to build that level of trust



necessary for referring work. You may even see someone on the list that seems to have a cool job, or a unique value proposition - meet these people just to expand your horizons if nothing else. When we stretch our comfort zones, that's when we really learn and grow.

One of our ILN marketers advises:

We suggest that prior to attending an ILN conference, our lawyers meet with their firm colleagues who will also be attending. They draft a plan outlining the goals and ROI in attending this conference, which include personal, firm, and professional. They review a list of other firms and individuals who will be attending. We encourage them to meet with other ILN attorneys who may want to refer business and build relationships. Attorneys should be as strategic about setting up meetings with ILN attendees as they are when gathering competitive intelligence regarding potential clients."

Another of our marketers suggests:

At ILN meetings, it is important to get out there and meet at least one new person. Network an entire room and visit with friends of the past, but don't pass up the opportunity to meet at least one new person."

Social networking can also be an important tool for conferences - and some would argue that Twitter's most valuable use is for conferences. [Nancy Myrland](#) identifies some [great ways to "get social"](#) in advance of a conference, which can really enrich your experience. These include some of my favorites:

- **Start using Twitter:** if you don't have a username, sign up for one. Find out if there's a hashtag for the conference and start following those who are using it. Connect with the people you'd like to meet in person.
- **Get involved on LinkedIn:** Many conferences will have their own LinkedIn group, and the ILN has our own group for member firms. Start asking questions and connecting with people in the group who will be there - it's like pre-building your relationships.
- **Blog:** If you have a blog, write a post about what you're most looking forward to about the conference. Share it with the people attending the conference that you've connected to on Twitter and LinkedIn. If you don't have a blog, ask someone if you can guest post with your thoughts about the conference - many people will welcome a guest post. (Hint hint: Any ILN members out there willing to guest post about our Annual Meeting are more than welcome to submit a post to me!)

During the Conference

There's also a lot you can do *during* the conference to get the most out of your experience and the most important thing? **PARTICIPATE.**

What good is spending the money to attend a conference if you're skipping sessions and events? You may think some events are silly or not worthwhile, but every event held by a conference organizer is an opportunity for networking - and I can attest that some great networking and business development happens over meals, over pedicures at the fish spa (yes, some of our male attorneys did this!), over feeding giraffes at an animal park. You can never know when you're going to make the right connection that could lead to a wonderful relationship, personally or professionally.

The other important side of this is to separate from your travel companions - I know it's more comfortable to spend time with the people you already know, but if you're just chatting to other attorneys or marketers from your firm the entire time you're at a conference, you're not networking. Meet someone new, sit down at an unfamiliar table at lunch, put your hand out to the guy in the corner checking his BlackBerry. **Be social. If conferences were only about the content, we could all stay home and just read a book.**

When you are attending the business sessions, really listen and participate. I know lawyers are often multitasking, and dealing with client needs at the same time, but when you can, really pay attention to what's being shared. Ask questions and see where you can share your own experience and expertise. This enriches your conference experience, and that of your fellow delegates.

Nancy also recommends carrying your business cards - it's starting to be less than necessary these days, but it's a great place to take notes on the new person you just met and give them a little reminder of who you are. Make sure that you bring enough cards to give one to everyone there - yes, it's a packing hassle, but you don't want to be the person who doesn't have a card to give.

Post-Conference

I would venture to say that your post-conference activities are the most important part of attending any conference - that's when you really cement the new relationships you formed and continue the ones you've had.

[Heather Morse](#) over at [the Legal Watercooler](#) suggests that one of the first things you should do is connect with the people you've met on LinkedIn (if you haven't done this already in your pre-conference activities). Use your attendee list to look people up on LinkedIn, and send them a personalized message (not the standard one) to remind them of how you connected. Then you're able to use LinkedIn in between conferences to keep up on what articles they're reading, what status updates their posting, and who they're connecting to that might be of interest to you.

Nancy also has some fabulous recommendations on [what to do when you're back from a conference](#), including:

- Reading the blog posts your colleagues have written over the course of the conference - this gives you an opportunity to comment on what they've written and further connect with them.
- Go through your own notes from the conference and write a few short sentences about what you've learned and your key takeaways - then share these with the other members of your firm. It emphasizes the value of your attendance at the conference, and in the case of the ILN, helps to get more attorneys thinking about how they can use the network.

I also love the suggestion of sending a handwritten note to those you've met - I admit to not doing this myself after the most recent LMA conference, but I did receive the most wonderful note from one of my marketing friends who also attended. I was so touched and the card is now featured on my living room mantle. *Relationships matter* and a handwritten note illustrates that.

Another couple of key recommendations I'd like to make:

- Take a look at your calendar: We all travel so much these days. Take a look at your upcoming travel and figure out who you might know in the cities that you're visiting. It's tough to take the time out of your schedule (especially if you're visiting clients), but even just meeting someone for coffee can continue the relationship you've started.
- Follow up with an email: If you haven't sent out your handwritten notes (tsk, tsk), you can follow up with an email to the people that you've met. Share with them an article they might find of interest, or reference a joke that you both laughed at during the conference.
- Share photos: People love to see themselves in pictures. Don't deny it, I know it's true. These days, everyone has a camera, even if it's just in their cell phone. If you've snapped a great or funny shot of someone, shoot them an email with the photo - it will mean a lot to them. We also share our photos on a group site that all members can upload to - again, hint, hint, ILN members taking pictures, please upload them to the site so we can all enjoy them!

What are your tips for making the most out of a conference?

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