

INTRODUCTORY

# HOW TO NETWORK AT CONFERENCES



The Ultimate Guide  
to Conference  
Domination

Presented by

HubSpot

Eventbrite

# Introduction.

**A**s an event planner, you're bringing the world together through live experiences. Whether your event goal is to help your sales team build stronger bonds with prospects, increase your brand awareness, support customers, or to build relationships with partners, making offline and personal connections is critical in today's digital world as online social networking becomes the norm. "Networking" is a buzzword that many of us have a serious love/hate relationship with. Sure — we all want to expand our network by meeting new people in our industry, but actually meeting them can feel like a middle school dance all over again ... a painfully, painfully awkward middle school dance.

The web has given us ways to navigate around uncomfortable networking. [According to Performics' 2012 Life on Demand Survey](#), 40% of people feel more comfortable engaging with people online than in person. Therefore, it's more critical than ever that event planners take active measures to encourage face-to-face networking whenever possible, and ultimately build strong relationships with potential customers, employees, partners, mentors, etc. This guide will help you better prepare your event to reduce those uncomfortable face-to-face networking situations, so the next time you step into a room of potential connections, you'll be as cool as a cucumber and ready to dive right into conversations.

SETTING THE  
STAGE FOR  
EFFECTIVE  
NETWORKING.

# It Doesn't Have To Be Awkward

If you downloaded this guide, you probably know you have some work to do when it comes to creating that spark between attendees, sponsors, vendors, special guests, and more. The basic assumption of networking at an event is typically a crowded room full of strangers that will not be able to easily and instantly make connections across social circles, unless the right environment and setting is created.

To make connections more natural and effortless, here are some tips to break down the barriers to interactivity that can often exist with traditional events, and create a greater sense of community.

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## TWITTER

Twitter is a fantastic resource for connecting with conference attendees ahead of time. Hashtags (#) are regularly used to facilitate conversations at events. For example, INBOUND 2015's official hashtag is [#INBOUND15](#). People attending this marketing conference can use the hashtag to tweet about the event, and find other people who are also talking about the event on Twitter. Here's how you can use Twitter to connect conference attendees ahead of time:

- 1 Encourage sponsors to Tweet about their attendance.** Your event has the most valuable asset your sponsors want -- the audience -- captive in one place. Make sure they're maximizing on their presence by making it easy for other attendees to discover sponsors and connect with them.

// So excited to go to [#INBOUND15](#) in September! Tweet if you'll be there, too. //

- 2 Start a conversation.** Prompt attendees to share what they are most excited for, or if they attended last year, what they liked most about last year's event. You can also tie questions to a contest, and reward tickets or event swag to the person with the best answer.

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- 3 Regularly check for new attendees.** Set up a Twitter feed in Tweetdeck, Hootsuite, HubSpot, or whatever you use to monitor your Twitter feeds. Create a new stream that monitors the #HASHTAG that promotes the event. This way you can keep up with the latest conversations that happen about your event.
  
- 4 Create a Twitter list.** To keep yourself organized, create a Twitter list of all of the attendees that you find. Title the list: “People Attending #INBOUND15” (substitute the appropriate hashtag) and make it public. This way, the people who you add to the list will see that you’ve added them to the list, making you look like a networking organizer. People love to follow leaders, so you’ll open up your networking opportunities.
  
- 5 Follow and tweet.** Find influencers in your attendee base; research their blogs and twitter streams. This way, you can understand if there are common interests that you can use to facilitate connections and introductions at the event.



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## LINKEDIN

LinkedIn has become the primary channel to facilitate social selling, so if your goal is to build relationships between sales reps and prospects, pay close attention! If attendees are not very active on Twitter, they're more likely to see a connection request on LinkedIn. Here's how you can use LinkedIn to prepare for your event:

- 6 Learn about people's backgrounds.** Sometimes you can't find out enough about a person's background from their Twitter feed. Use LinkedIn to search for the people you find on Twitter, and learn more about their professional background to see if you want to spend your time at the conference networking with them.
- 7 Make more personal connections.** If there's an influencer attending your event that you'd really like to ensure your sponsors or VIPs meet, sending them a connection invitation gives you a bit more space to explain why you'd like to meet up with them at the event.
- 8 Send a private message.** On Twitter, you can only send a private Direct Message if the individual is following you back. On LinkedIn, you can use an invite to explain a bit more privately, in case you don't want the whole world to see.

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## FACEBOOK

Facebook is a good way to help people who are attending your event find one another — if their profiles are public. Here's how you can use Facebook to prepare:

- 9 **Encourage connections.** Use your event social media handles to encourage people to connect with one another. Ask attendees to include information about themselves, the type of people they'd like to connect with, as well as a link to their LinkedIn profiles in case they feel more comfortable connecting via that platform.
  
- 10 **Create attendee subgroups.** Instead of relying on people to message one another on Facebook, you can use LinkedIn to create groups for industry, interests, or anything else that might help attendees better find like-minded individuals.

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## EVENT REGISTRATION

You should also use the weeks you have prior to the event figuring out what you want to say to people. What are your goals of networking at the conference? What do you want to learn from other people? Then make sure you plan the following elements:

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**Use your registration flow to amp engagement.** Make it really easy for attendees to find and seize the opportunities that will give them a more interactive experience. For example, you can offer separate ticket types or registration add-ons with intimate meet-and-greet opportunities, as breakfasts before the event or drinks after. To take interaction up a notch, you can even build in 1:1 sessions. By making this a part of registration, attendees actively buy into the experience that's right for their schedule, and have their expectations set.

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**Leverage your registration confirmation.** The automated email from a ticket purchase can be way more than a transaction confirmation. Use this important touchpoint to encourage immediate engagement while you have your guest's attention. Prompt app downloads, or drive attendees to an event community page to see who else is attending.

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SOLIDIFYING  
RELATIONSHIPS  
FOR THE LONG  
TERM.

## FOLLOW UP WITH ATTENDEES

After the event, encourage attendees to join the event online group, be it on LinkedIn or any other platform. This way, attendees will be able to find one another, even if they forgot to bring their business cards..

- 13 Craft a personalized follow up.** Consider sending attendees a personalized roundup of all of their favorite content pieces to easily access, and encourage them to share these with their colleagues or friends. This way, your event can serve as a common ground to grow relationships and start new conversations.
- 14 Further those relationships.** Consider reaching out to any mutual contacts you and your new connection have. They may be able to offer you even more advice about how to further develop your new relationship!
- 15 Exhale.** You're done. Congratulations on overcoming your social anxieties and networking like a pro.

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# Following Up **Strong.**

**W**e sometimes meet people at events that spark our interest even though we don't have any projects, mutual friends, or upcoming events to connect with about. It's because you never know who you may want advice or guidance from in the future. To build a strong relationship, it's always good to strike while the iron's hot. Chances are, you got their business card or can find one of them via social media. Follow up with a personal tid-bit from your conversation; they will appreciate the gesture and remember you in the future.

Plan on attending a networking event soon? Leave awkwardness at the door by walking in with full confidence. Whether wearing your favorite shirt, listening to "Can't Touch This" on the way out the door, or being on top of your industry news puts you in top form, remember the outcome of the evening is up to you.