



Make The Next Media Industry Conference Work for You

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A typical media conference is a remarkable event. In one day and in one location, you'll find industry professionals just like you, college students, representatives from local media, plus - experienced Hollywood professionals. You'll find a vast array of workshops on all phases of the industry, and special opportunities for networking, learning, and growing.

But I've discovered that attending the conference and making the most of the conference are two different things, and year after year, I see people missing important opportunities to receive maximum benefit from the experience.

I've attended both faith-based and secular media conferences for many years, and taught workshops and classes around the world, and I've learned some important secrets about gaining the most from these industry events. After all, what's the point of giving your time and expense, if it won't take you to the next level? It's not cheap to attend a conference, but I strongly believe that if everyone at your organization used these techniques, they would learn so much it would be worth bringing all of your friends or key employees.

So use this list. Pass it out to others, and take it with you to the next conference you attend. This year, let's *maximize* your experience.

- 1) **Invest In Yourself** – Debating whether or not to attend a Conference? To me – it's a no-brainer. I've decided if I'm going to grow professionally, I have to be

where I can find knowledge, resources, and relationships. I believe the minute we stop learning and growing, we start dying, and there's too much out there I haven't experienced. No one else is going to invest in you, and doors of favor will never open until you position yourself in the doorway. Your organization won't pay for you to come? Stop complaining and pay your own way. What better way to spend your money than investing it in your own professional growth?

- 2) **Do Your Homework** – Check out the conference website and start getting information about the locations, workshops, and schedules. Once that's done, analyze your own personal career situation as well as your company, to see what areas you need to strengthen. Then, evaluate the workshop schedule on that basis. It's never too early to plan what workshops to attend, who to see, and what you want to accomplish.
- 3) **Pre-Plan The Day** – Don't leave the conference to chance. Pre-plan your workshops and other events. I begin early working with my assistant Jeanette to set up my schedule for the day. Don't wait until the demanding hustle-bustle of the conference, when you're so busy it's difficult to think clearly. Start now to compare your areas needing growth with workshop subjects. With that done, you'll be able to relax and enjoy the conference. At some conferences, the schedule isn't finalized until you arrive, but when that happens, step aside for a few quiet moments with the program and determine your schedule for the day.
- 4) **Split Up Assignments** – If you're attending with friends or people from your job, divide and conquer! Don't waste time duplicating workshops and meetings. Instead, split up the workshops and meeting schedules in order to cover twice the information. Then, after the conference you can meet back at the office to exchange information, ideas, and experiences.

- 5) **Schedule Networking Opportunities** – Actively seek networking opportunities with other people attending the conference. You won't believe how many people you can meet, and how much you can expand your Rolodex.

- 6) **Meeting Workshop Speakers** - Often, after workshops, speakers graciously offer to stick around for a few minutes to answer specific questions or meet participants. In many cases, quite a few people line up to talk with the workshop speaker, so please keep some things in mind. **One** – Be considerate. Our workshop speakers have come at their own expense and taken valuable time to be there. Any time they stay after a workshop is a gracious act on their part, and should be treated with the utmost respect and courtesy. **Second** – When you do have an opportunity to talk with a workshop speaker – plan your question ahead. They don't have time to hear your life story, learn about your relatives in the business, or your theories about media. Prepare your question in advance and keep it simple and to the point. If they expand the conversation, fine, but don't expect them to set aside the next 45 minutes to talk. They have busy schedules, and we're fortunate that they chose to share their time with us. **Third** – Don't pitch them your latest project or concept. That is not why they came, and they aren't expecting to be "pitched." Plus, they didn't bring an extra suitcase to carry our video reels, scripts, or presentation folders home with them. I've discovered that when you begin respecting their time, and expressing gratitude for their participation at the conference, they will be far more open to talking with you than if you hit them with a pitch or make difficult demands on their limited time.

- 7) **Develop Peer Relationships** – Don't just come to the conference looking to meet people who could give you a job or help you advance your career. Come to meet other people who do what you do. Meet producers, directors, actors, executives – and others who are involved at your level in the industry. The bottom line? Expand your resources. Bring business cards and exchange them with all kinds of people. Start building a contact list of friends and associates in the industry –

people you can call for advice, equipment information, or expertise. For instance, I've found the more media professionals communicate with each other, the more successful and effective they become.

- 8) **After The Conference** - Many participants don't realize that the conference is only the beginning. After you go home, take the time to organize the business cards you've received, and write notes on them about the person or service for future reference. Also, look carefully through any printed information, CD's, videos, or other resources. Decide which ones can actually help, and organize and file them for immediate or future reference. The others you can toss or give to someone else – don't keep things that obviously won't help you. Then, hold informal classes or workshops with friends or other employees to share the information you received. Talk to them about your workshop notes, lobby conversations, and show them brochures and videos. Use your conference experience to expand the knowledge base of everyone at your organization.

Invest in Yourself – That's the key. Make the commitment at this year's conference to *pre-plan for efficiency, schedule for maximum impact, and utilize your time for success.* The potential of a Media Conferences are far greater than most people realize. So this year, don't take chances with your professional growth, and I'll see you at the next conference!

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