

YOUR 2019
Conference
SURVIVAL GUIDE

Ready or not, conference season is here!



But don't panic. No matter how big the conference you're attending is, we've got a guide to help you get through it.

**Behold, your 2019
Conference Survival Guide!**

Before the conference

In the months and weeks leading up the event, take some time to really prepare for your conference. Specifically, you'll want to...

1

Create a plan of attack

Most conferences will post the final schedule a month or two in advance. Take a good look at it and determine what sessions you'd like to attend. In addition, take some time to really think about what it is you'd like to get out of the conference. Is it to meet new people? To learn about new industry trends? Whatever it is, having a clear goal in mind will make the event less ambiguous and really set you up for success.

Tip: Jot the goals down in your phone! The day will come at you fast and it's always nice to have a written reminder of what you're there to accomplish.



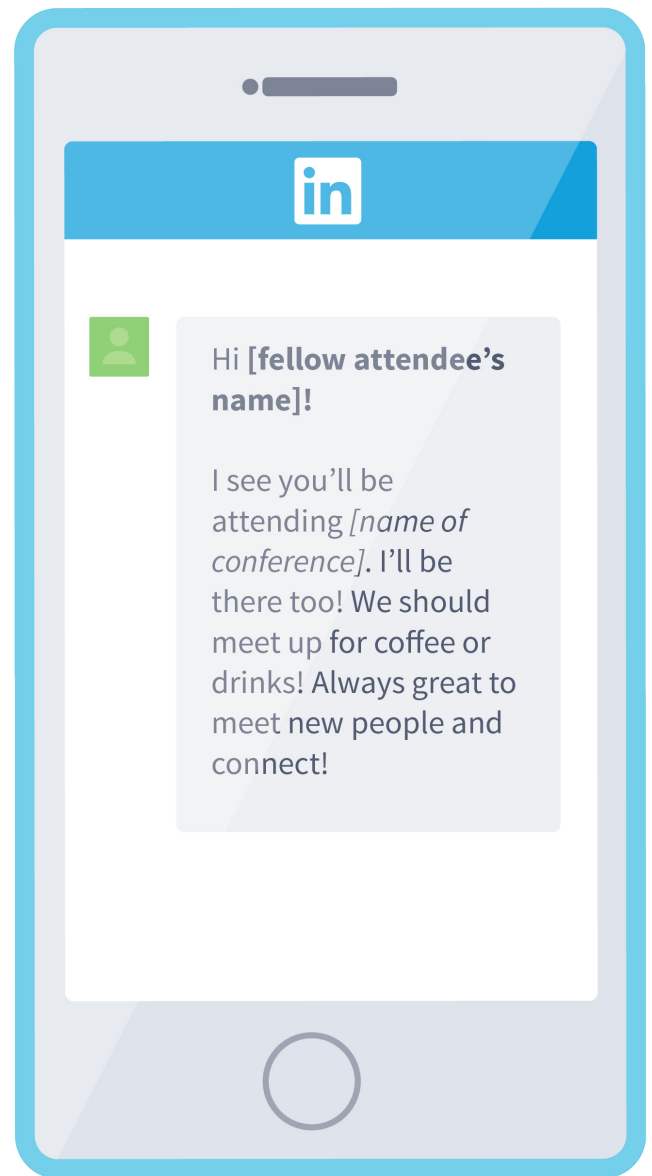
2

Leverage social media

Before heading off to your next event, see what's taking place online. Check out the organization's Facebook page and/or LinkedIn. Then, head on over to Twitter and check out the event's hashtag (if there is one). This is a great way to see what other people are talking about and who else might be attending. And don't be afraid to reach out to some of these people in advance. Let them know you're excited about meeting them! Making these connections early on can really put you ahead of the game.

To the right is an example of a simple message you can send someone, pre-conference, to connect.

Worse comes to worst and they can't meet up, you've still put your name out there and planted the seed for a potentially good connection.



3

Prepare your materials

Sometimes, packing for a conference can be JUST as stressful as attending a conference. To help ease some of that pain, here's a list of items that NEED to be in your suitcase:

Comfortable walking shoes

Conference centers are huge, especially those for bigger events. And since your sessions will likely be spread out, comfortable walking shoes are a MUST.

A light sweater or jacket

We all know how cold those conference rooms can be. Save yourself from shivering by packing a light sweater or jacket. (You can't concentrate if you're cold!)

Your laptop/charger

You'll want to take notes during sessions, and not to mention, catch up on work/emails in between. That said, be sure to bring your laptop and charger (or iPad, if that's what you prefer).

Your phone charger

Don't forget to bring a phone charger too! Especially if you plan on tweeting throughout the conference.

A stack of business cards

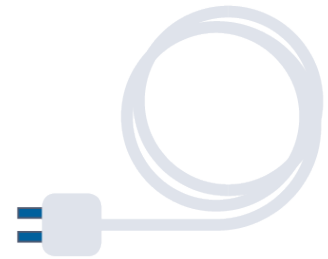
If there's one thing you can't forget, it's this. You can always buy a phone charger if you forget yours. Business cards? Not so much.

Tylenol

Conferences make for some *long* days. You're up early and out late, and sometimes, that leads to headaches. Pack some tylenol just in case.

Mints/Gum

With all the coffee you'll sure to be drinking, always have something minty on you to freshen up for those up-close and personal networking opportunities you can't pass up.



4

Pre-register for sessions (if you can)

We talked about creating a list of sessions you'd like to attend, but if you can, try pre-registering for those sessions. Some conferences will offer this online or via the mobile app (if there is one). But note: Even if you *do* pre-register for sessions, still print your schedule in case the app goes down or you have trouble connecting to Wi-Fi onsite.

Tip: If you are still truly against printing out your schedule or prone to losing things, screenshot it on the app! Either way, it's always nice to have a backup.

Conference Schedule

Session 1: 9:00-10:00 AM

Session 2: 10:30-11:30 AM

Session 3: 12:30-1:30 PM

Session 4: 2:00-3:00 PM

At the conference

Ah yes, conference time! While you're there, remember to...

1

Attend the educational sessions

This may seem like a no-brainer, but we're still going to mention it. Be sure to attend all of the educational sessions you signed up for (and maybe a few extras) and take good notes while you're there.

When the sessions are over, make it a point to thank the presenter(s). Not only will this help you stand out, but it's a great way to connect with your industry's top leaders.

2

Leverage the mobile app

This all depends on if the conference you're attending *has* a mobile app, but if they do, we highly recommend using it. Conference apps are great for navigating the venue, scheduling your sessions, and socializing with others.

3

Pay attention to social media

Now you don't have to post (although active participation is always better!), but you should at least follow other attendees on social media (particularly Twitter) and keep up with the conference hashtag.

Tip: A lot of people will tweet their notes during sessions, so if there's a session you'd like to attend but can't, check out Twitter for some basic key takeaways.





4 **Network, network, network!**

It can be intimidating to approach people you don't know, but really, that's what conferences and networking are all about. If approaching one person seems too hard, try approaching a small group of people and joining in on their existing conversation.

Tip: Prior to the event, try brushing up on some industry news and trends. That way, if your conversation goes stale, you'll have plenty of talking points to get you through.

5 **Above all, have fun!**

It's easy to get lost in the hustle and bustle of conferences, but you paid a lot to attend this event (and likely traveled a long way too), so relax and have a little fun!

Other networking tips:

Be a listener

Networking isn't just about talking. It's about listening as well. When you ask someone a question, make sure to actually listen to their response. Many people at these events are talkers, so being an active listener will help set you apart from the pack.

Be a connector


Instead of focusing solely on making your own connections, make an effort to connect others as well. If you're talking to someone and happen to think of someone else at the event who could be of help (or be helped by) this person, make that introduction. People will appreciate your extra effort.

Take notes

After chatting with someone, jot down a few notes about your conversation. You can do this on the back of their business card if they gave you one. Then, when it comes time to follow up with that person, mention one or two of those key points. Not only will this help the person remember who you are, but it will show them that you were actually paying attention to what they had to say.

Use your business cards

This may go without saying, but don't forget to actually use your business cards. You packed them for a reason!



After the conference

Whew, the conference is over. Now what?

1

Type up your notes

You likely spent a LOT of time taking notes, so don't let that information get lost. Shortly after coming home, take some time to type up your notes and save them in a place you'll be able to easily access later.

Tip: Don't forget to check Twitter! Did you tweet any key takeaways or "ah-ha" moments during your educational sessions? Did you "like" any major insights from other Twitter users/attendees? If so, be sure to include those in your recap notes. Tweets can be just as valuable as handwritten comments.

2

Meet with your team/ discuss key takeaways

Were you the only person from your team who was able to attend the conference? If so, that's an amazing opportunity you had! But now, it's time to share that wealth of information with others.

Get together with your team and go over what you learned/key takeaways. See what they think of your notes and if they have any thoughts or ideas to add. (Brainstorming is where the magic happens!)

3

Connect with other attendees on social media

Remember all that networking you did? Well now is the time to put it to good use. As soon as possible, try connecting with other attendees on social media. A good rule of thumb is to follow up with people within 72 hours of attending an event.

And note: When connecting with people on LinkedIn, don't just send them a standard "Let's connect" message. Personalize it based on the conversation you had.

Below is an example of a simple yet effective LinkedIn message:

	Search <input type="text"/>
	Hi John,
	I really enjoyed meeting you at [Conference XYZ]! I'm the Executive Director at [Association ABC], and I really enjoyed hearing about your organization's new fundraising initiatives. I'd love to stay in touch and chat about those initiatives again sometime.
	Please don't hesitate to reach out!
	All the best, Susan Akers

4

Prioritize your action items

Consider this an extension of your team discussion. As you're talking with your team, figure out which items and to-dos you'd like to execute first. What are your biggest needs? What problems are you trying to solve? Go off those and plan your next steps accordingly.



So there you have it! Everything you need to not only survive a conference, but *thrive* at it — before, during, and after the event.

Planning a conference or event of your own?

This guide has everything you need to plan and promote your next event! Click here to check out our

9 Steps to Event Planning Success!



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