

## 10 tips for being a good guest at a networking event

Networking events are one of the best ways to build and cultivate referral relationships. Yet many people are hesitant about taking the time to attend these events. Here are some tips to help you to turn up ready to conquer your next networking event.

1. Research your event and register early. Find an event that is worth investing your time in. Look for a topic that interests you or a group of professionals that you are interested in meeting. Once you have found the right event for you, register straight away and mark the date, time and place in your calendar. Don't forget to set a reminder. Event organisers anxiously watch RSVP numbers and use these as a basis for all aspects of event preparation, so they will appreciate your prompt response.
2. On the day of the event, arrive early. Much of the best networking happens at the start of an event. It is perhaps easier to introduce yourself to a few people early on than to try to break into established groups later on (see tip 3). Of course, if you cannot make it to the event after all, contact the event organisers or host as soon as you can to let them know you will no longer be attending. This common courtesy is often missed.
3. Remember, networking is just a conversation. Come prepared with some small talk and a handful of questions to get the conversation rolling. 'Where else do you normally network?' 'What brought you here this evening? How is this topic relevant to your line of work?' 'What do you like about what you do?' Be prepared to describe in a memorable and meaningful way – What do you do and how do you do it better than anyone else? If you would like to break into a group to join the conversation, move over to the group, establish eye contact and smile at the person speaking, then in a break in conversation ask 'Do you mind if I join you?'
4. Be an active listener - meaning that you listen more than you talk with the aim of learning something from each person you meet. Use eye contact and body language to engage with the speaker and show that you understand. When it is your turn to speak, ask follow up questions to reflect on what has been said. Good conversationalists have these skills naturally, but others need to focus more on what is being said and respond clearly.
5. Introduce yourself to the speaker, the host and the registrar. You have limited time to make connections at these events, so seek out time with the key people, ask questions and look for guidance on other relevant connections for you.
6. Even if you know lots of people at the event, challenge yourself to meet 3-5 new people each time. Ask questions, actively listen and take their business cards. If you meet someone who might be in a position to help you and your business, ask if you can call them or meet up after the event to talk.
7. Be generous with advice and recommendations. The old saying "What goes around comes around" can ring true when it comes to referral relationships. If you are in a position to help someone or introduce them to one of your contacts, offer this up and make it happen. Ask 'If I was talking to someone, how would I know if they might be a good referral source for you?'
8. It might be the last thing on your mind, but take the time to complete the event feedback form. Be prepared to share feedback – good and bad – to ensure the quality of the event improves or is maintained in the future.
9. Say goodbye and thank you. A good guest is a polite guest. Great effort and expense goes into these functions. The host will appreciate and remember this increasingly rare gesture.
10. Follow up within three days. If you have offered to send on information or set up a meeting, make sure you do it quickly. Efficient follow up can make or break a business connection in its early stages. Keep your promises and make the calls.

To really boost referral marketing, plan to attend 2-3 events per month and follow these steps. Your time is valuable, so make the most of the opportunity networking events present. Your increased confidence and improving business prospects will make the effort worthwhile.

## 10 tips for being a good host at a networking event

A successful networking event is a combination of many factors. As the host, you are responsible for providing an environment that encourages efficient conversations and effective learning opportunities. Your guests are giving up their time to make useful business connections – with you and other attendees – so make it as easy as possible for all attendees to meet, talk and uncover potential business links.

1. When planning an event, choose a topic or theme that is interesting and valuable to your intended audience. Prepare presentations with the audience's perspective in mind.
2. Carefully consider the logistics of the event. What day of the week is best for such an event? What date is suitable – taking school and public holidays into account? How long should the session run – keeping in mind that people will be anxious to get back to their desks? Other aspects such as location and parking or transport options should also be considered.
3. The invitation process should be managed to give attendee enough time to plan to attend the event. For a local event a minimum of three weeks notice should be OK, however events involving travel should provide much longer lead times to allow for the appropriate arrangements to be made.
4. On the day of the event, ensure guests are welcomed warmly and hosted appropriately. Connect guests with similar or complementary interests (either business or pleasure) and look for stragglers that can be introduced into a group or conversation. Have someone on hand to particularly focus on prospective customers, creating a good impression that will impact future business opportunities.
5. People will remember great catering and excellent facilities. Provide a choice of good food that is easy to eat and that won't spoil if it is out on tables for a time. Ensure you have enough crockery and cutlery to go around. It is also important that you check other facilities such as security times for the building because your guests need to be able to get through the doors on arrival. And remember to check the toilets to ensure they are clean and presentable.
6. Presentations should be engaging and entertaining. How will you capture and hold the attention of the audience? Take cues from participants and be prepared to inject a 'boost' to your delivery if attention is diminishing. Look for glazed or confused expressions or signs of distraction or boredom such as people looking around or out the window. An audience question is a good way to bring the audience back to focus.
7. Make sure key points in the presentation are clear and perhaps presented as a handout for participants to take with them. Explain the concepts presented in a manner that is appropriately pitched for the estimated level of understanding within the audience. Consider illustrating key points through the use of practical case studies or examples.
8. Ensure audience members feel that they have been given something for nothing. Provide extra bits of information that they couldn't necessarily find on competitors' websites or through Wikipedia. Insider tips and pearls of wisdom on traps to avoid based on your experience will help the audience feel that the time and effort in attending the session was worthwhile.
9. Say goodbye and thank you. It is easy to scurry off once your presentation is complete, but this is actually a critical time to stick around to answer questions and to thank your guests for attending. Let attendees know that you are grateful that they took the time to come along. Ask for feedback about the event and be open to comments and criticism if offered.
10. Follow up within three days. Keep the event top of mind for attendees by communicating with them after the event. Perhaps you need to send through a document that further explains your service offering or another invitation for your next event. Maybe it is just a quick thank you email or a relevant introduction to one of your contacts. If you promised to find the answer to a question, make sure you follow through promptly and thank the person for their patience while you explored the information they were after.