

Speaking and/or sponsoring to build business

Business development starts with people getting to know you and what you can do. One strategy to meet people in your target market is speaking at and sponsoring events they attend.

When you sponsor or speak, you get:

- Your name in front of your target audience
- An opportunity to meet with meeting participants, before and after your part of the event
- A chance to present your ideas and approach, in an educational context
- Additional marketing opportunities, e.g., a mailing list of all attendees

Where to talk or sponsor

Go where your clients go. You'll most likely find people like your clients in places your clients already go. Ask your clients where they go and about the quality of the programs at those meetings. If your clients are positive about the idea of you speaking or sponsoring, ask them if you can mention that endorsement to the conference organizer.

It's a good idea to attend an event once before speaking or sponsoring, if you can. You'll see who comes and see if you'll be able to take advantage of being there, e.g., by working the crowd or going to other parts of the event to meet people.

How to get in the door (sponsorship)

This is easy. Sponsorship just costs money. It's a form of advertising. Conferences typically offer sponsorship packages at different levels, with more exposure costing more. You can often exhibit as well, which provides a chance for one-to-one discussions with attendees. Exhibiting may be more useful if you have a book or something tangible to offer in addition to promoting your professional services.

How to get in the door (speaking)

Speaking is virtually always supposed to be "educational" rather than "promotional". You are talking about something you know well that would be valuable for attendees to hear. Professionally managed membership organizations, e.g., the Society for Human Resource Management, organize many

conferences, and tend to be very concerned that their members get value; they care about getting good speakers because that's what brings members back in the future. If you've got something good and relevant you can approach them.

Membership organizations often like having their members on stage. A wonderful and common solution for professionals is to suggest a joint presentation with a happy client; the professional outlines the fundamental approach and the happy client details how it works "in real life" when it is applied. The happy client enhances the professional's credibility and the client individual gets some nice exposure in their industry.

Many other conferences are organized by for-profit companies; some are managed by media companies that serve a niche market and others by firms that just develop and manage events. Many for-profit organizations are "pay to play" or at least very happy to take your sponsorship money in exchange for a spot on the agenda. While paying may get you the opportunity, attendees will realize you've paid for your spot and so they may initially be suspicious about your true expertise.

How to make a very successful conference presentation

To succeed at the speaking events:

1. Understand the audience
2. Understand the benefits you want them to get from interacting with you (what should they think, feel, do, and be differently)
3. Don't try to pack in too much. Figure out what you can cover well in the allotted time and cover it well. Focus on useful actions attendees can take as a result of their new knowledge.
4. Work with the event organizers ahead of time to check your understanding of the audience, and encourage the organizers to preview your presentation and suggest changes.
5. Rehearse beforehand so you are more confident and free to interact with the audience.

Following up on your presentation

Get people to interact with you after the presentation by mentioning during your presentation something you can email them after the event. Your presentation will likely be posted on the conference's website or on your website, but you can still promise something else to attendees who leave their card and put "send me the special item" on the back. This approach captures the contact information of many of the people at your presentation and encourages them to introduce themselves to you at the end of the talk and start a conversation with you.

(Note: Special thanks to Geoff Colgan of [Attadale Partners](#) for his thoughts on this month's topic)

What to do this week

1. Ask a client or two what meetings they attend, and then investigate whether there are any

- sponsorship or speaking opportunities at those conferences.
2. If there are some opportunities, assess how they compare with your current approaches to starting new relationships with potential clients.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips help professionals create more business and enjoy their work more. We focus on how to start relationships, how to build relationships, and how to convert those relationships into sales. Visit our [archives](#) to learn more.