

EMIRATES

Business247

Network your way to business success



By
Aimee Greaves on Saturday, April 26, 2008

With conference season well under way in the UAE it is easy to forget exactly why they are useful and important from both a business and consumer point of view.

Dubai has become a centre for international conferences and exhibitions. In January alone the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre (DICEC) recorded one million visitors and a 50 per cent surge in the events sector.

This week saw The Bridal Show, Marketing 08 and the Global Travel and Tourism Summit among others take place and with many more lined up for the coming months there is no shortage of places to network, whatever your field of expertise.

Roy Sheppard, a former news anchor for the BBC in London and now a conference expert, visited Dubai this week to attend the retail real estate's premier networking event the Middle East Council of Shopping Centers (MECSC).

As a conference moderator, speaker and author he asks the questions the audience wants to know but are too afraid to ask. He believes that to get the most out of conferences you must know why you are there and says going just to see what you can get, sell or show is not the right attitude.

He explains: "People often go to these seminars and exhibitions but they don't really know why. Many think it's just to meet someone who can do something for them, but this is not the case.

"If you're going to take the time and trouble to attend a conference then you want to come away with something positive. Don't go to find business, go to meet interesting people, you never know how valuable it could be."

Last year Sheppard moderated the World Summit for the Shopping Center industry in Cape Town and next month he is attending a convention for 38,000 delegates in Las Vegas.

Here he gives Emirates Business his tips on making the most of a conference.

Twenty tips from the top

- 1 Decide that you are going to meet new people – not just spend time with people you know
- 2 Scan the delegate list to identify contacts you would like to meet. Find them and introduce yourself
- 3 Make a point of volunteering to introduce people to help others. Make sure you get names right
- 4 Bite the bullet and talk to strangers
- 5 Stay until you have met and connected with a pre-determined number of people. Start with just one or two – as your confidence grows build it up to five or six
- 6 Think more about what help you are looking for. So when you're asked you know
- 7 Think about the needs of your best contacts, how you could help them achieve their needs through any new people you meet
- 8 If you can, talk to the speakers before they speak. Most value any insights they can get from audience members ahead of time. It's nice for them to see 'friendly faces' when they are presenting
- 9 Stand up. Sitting down and networking doesn't work

10 Give your name first. It helps put people at ease. Then ask for their name

11 Listen more carefully to others' names. If you did not quite catch their name ask for it to be repeated, rather than 'letting it go'

12 Imagine a close friend will join you and stand there waiting to be introduced. This will force you to pay more attention

13 Starting a conversation can be daunting for some people. Talk about common interests – what they want from the event, how long they've worked for their company, what they like about their role

14 Find ways to be of value to others. Do this by offering opportunities to others like information, referrals and recommendations with little desire for 'a return favour'

15 In order to help others, you need to know what they want. Ask lots of non-threatening questions about them

16 Don't spray your business cards around. When you meet someone interesting collect theirs

17 Don't dismiss staff such as secretaries, assistants, waiters and security guards because they can all be allies, or your biggest enemies. Spouses also have power and influence. Get to know them as people. Look after their interests and they will recognise and reward you by providing access to their 'superiors'

18 Think of relevant questions to ask the speakers after their presentations. Then take the opportunity to do so if invited

19 When you meet new people, find out enough about them to have a valid reason for a follow up meeting

20 And finally, don't forget to enjoy yourself

Extracted from Roy Sheppard's book "Meet Greet & Prosper"

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