

Do we get full value for conference attendance?

 By [Auguste Coetzer](#)

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Getting back to serious work in the New Year means getting the diary for the next 12 months into some sort of order. A key issue here is what conferences to attend, where and why?

As costs remain under intense scrutiny at most organisations, it is important to derive measurable value from any conference commitment.

Executives have been 'sweating the assets' for years. It is only to be expected they will not only look for better returns from streamlined operations, but from indaba attendance as well.

International experience indicates a few simple steps can boost conference ROI without cost-effective corporations becoming a killjoy. Tips include:

Plan: The 'cool' conference at a desirable destination is not always the one with most value-add for your business and/or career. Be objective. Look for meaningful payback. Study topics and lists of speakers. Once a conference has been selected, study the guide book and literature. Highlight sessions, workshops, events and social occasions that deserve attention. Create a checklist.

Work the plan: Participate, contribute, ask questions and connect with speakers, panellists and industry figures. Take advantage of networking opportunities. Some conversations can be more important than sessions.



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Start early: Being aloof and uncommunicative doesn't help. Some attendees take time to get into the swing of things. This is unproductive downtime. Participate and network from the outset.

Be attentive: Make disciplined use of your smartphone and tablet. Allot specific times for emailing and texting. First priority is to acquire insights and build contacts. Listen and contribute.

Stay focused: Connect what you learn to your business situation. Make notes.

Use new media: Use Twitter and Facebook to communicate your attendance and make appraisals. It adds a new networking dimension. Years ago, attendees simply collected business cards. Today, they also collect Facebook friends and Twitter followers.

Be aware: Conferences create business intelligence opportunities. Avoid snap judgments. You might know most of the technology at an indaba's associated trade exhibition, but industry reaction to new advances should be carefully observed.

Be ambassadorial: Be the receptive, insightful face of your company. Ask pertinent and professional questions. Don't pontificate and give long-winded speeches when you should simply be clarifying issues. It irritates other delegates and costs time.

Reach out: Sticking solely with co-workers or industry buddies won't widen perspectives or highlight opportunities. Meet new people. Explore new subjects.

Have fun: Though you have a business agenda, you can still relax and socialise. Unwinding like this helps you build new relationships.

Chill out: To get the most out of the break, many executives extend their stay at the conference destination. This is often a good idea, but be professional when breaking down company and personal expenses.

Deliver value: Critique some sessions and make an overall conference appraisal. The presentation should be shared with senior colleagues and perhaps specific departments.

Follow up: Don't forget conference contacts. Get in touch. Send them information. Integrate them into your network.

Conference attendance is not a holiday on the firm; it is an opportunity to derive personal and business value. Maximising

value is what executives do... in the office and out.

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