

10 ways to get the most out of a virtual conference



As industry and professional development events move to an online experience, follow these tips to maximize your socially distanced education and networking

As the COVID-19 pandemic is still sweeping the nation, many conference host organizations have cancelled their in-person events and opted for a socially distanced online experience instead.

The 2021 AIC Annual Conference will be held virtually next June (details to follow). Instead of booking your flights and hotel reservations, read these 10 tips for getting the most out of your next virtual conference.

1. Be in the moment

Do not be afraid to attend online social events, ask questions in the chat, and reach out to other participants.

Although you will not be in the room with a speaker, try to dedicate your time and attention to the online session. It may be tempting to multitask, since you will be on your computer, but it is best to schedule time specifically for the sessions you want to attend. Put your phone on silent, turn off email notifications, and limit distractions so that you are able to pay attention and get the most out of the conference.

2. Make sure your computer is ready

Be sure to check in early to ensure that you have the applications you need and they are all up to date. This may seem obvious, but you do not want to be late or miss your session because you do not have the latest version of Zoom.

3. Notes or no notes?

Check in with presenters/organizers ahead of time to see if they are recording the sessions or if they will be sending out their notes

after the presentation. If they are, you do not have to worry about scribbling notes down while the speaker is talking and can focus on what is being said. If they are not, then make sure you have a notebook ready. If you can, print out the slides in advance so you can highlight what is most applicable to you.

4. Be social

Although you will not be traveling together in person, you can still discuss and debrief sessions. Schedule a Zoom meeting or phone call at the end of the day to debrief and rehash the presentations with your friends and colleagues. Being able to discuss what you learned makes it more beneficial for you and everyone else, and will help you to recall the information later on. Also, be sure to utilize the chat function during your sessions.

5. Networking is still doable

Unfortunately, there will not be any in-person theme parties, but virtual events still provide opportunities to get to know other participants. Many conferences are hosting virtual social events for participants to get to know each other. These events will give you an opportunity to meet others in your field and discuss the day's meetings. Be sure to check out the conference's social media channels and hashtags as well to connect with other participants.

6. Dress the part

A virtual conference may be less formal than an in-person educational session, but you should still dress appropriately – business casual, or what you would wear to the in-person event if you are attending video group or networking events. You are still making an impression on camera, and you want to make sure it is a good one. That being said, if your camera is not on, feel free to lounge in some sweatpants (one advantage of attending a virtual conference).

7. Visit the exhibit hall

Although vendors will not be setting up their physical booths in the exhibit hall, speakers and company representatives still have the opportunity to host virtual booths to show off their products. A virtual exhibit hall will enable you to check out the information they have and virtually chat with other participants in the exhibit hall as well. You will be able to click through the various booths, watch the vendors' videos and product demonstrations, and ask any questions you may have to inform your purchasing process.

8. Pack your schedule

One advantage of attending a virtual conference is that most sessions will be recorded and available for later viewing. This means you no longer have to choose between two sessions that are at the same time and can instead attend both in your own time.

9. Confirm your contact info

Make sure that your full name and phone number or email (if you want) is associated with your registration to ensure that other participants are able to get in touch with you. Every platform is different, but it is important to ensure that you have the right contact information to leave with a vendor or contact.

10. Embrace the awkward

Everyone is still working out the kinks and getting used to meeting and working online. There may be some awkward moments, but just go with it! Do not be afraid to attend online social events, ask questions in the chat, and reach out to other participants.

We are all in this together and everyone is trying to make the best of our current situation.

