



March 4, 2019

*Lisa A. Waligorski, CLM
2019 Annual Conference Committee Member
Executive Director, Newmeyer & Dillion, LLP*

Breaking Barriers by Harnessing the Strength, Support and Knowledge of Others — and Having Some Fun Along the Way! — #ALAConf19

Whether you have attended many ALA Annual Conferences or this is your first, networking is a very important part of your conference experience. The fact that you are going to gain knowledge from the educational sessions you attend is a given. However, you can gain a ton of knowledge from your colleagues and business partners as well. Here are some tips that will help make your networking easy and enjoyable.

1. **Have clear goals or objectives.** Conferences tend to move quickly. It's easy to get lost in the flow of things. Identify who you hope to meet and what you want to be the takeaway *before* the event.
2. **Go prepared.** The [attendee list](#) is on the ALA website. If there are specific attendees, business partners or speakers you hope to meet and talk to, do your research and prepare well ahead of time. Read their latest articles and social media posts, and search the latest news on their company.
3. **Connect.** Connect with them on Twitter or LinkedIn, where you can follow or engage in conversations before and during the conference. Have your initial questions or a comment prepared ahead of time.
4. **Send an email, message or tweet prior to the conference.** Use the same approach mentioned above. Let them know that you value and have an interest in their work and/or products and that you would like to take a minute or two at the conference to introduce yourself.
5. **Helpful conversation starters.** If at some point the conversation gets “stuck,” always have a few conversation starters to get it going again. Here are a few examples:
 - “What firm are you with and where are you from?”
 - “How long have you been with [firm/company]?”
 - “Where were you before joining [firm/company]?”

- “What interested you in this conference?”
 - “What are you hoping to get out of this conference?”
 - “What sessions/speakers are you looking forward to?”
 - “What have been your favorite sessions/speakers so far?”
 - “Will you be attending other conferences this year?”
 - “I’m trying to improve [X] — what are you doing? Any tips?”
6. **Be approachable.** Don’t spend all your time outside of conference sessions using your phone, laptop or tablet. By circulating and looking open and engaged, you’ll make it more likely that someone else, looking for someone to talk to, will approach you.
 7. **Use social media.** Tweet or post about the conference while you’re there. Tag people you’ve met or hope to meet, and make complimentary, positive comments about their session, session topic, panel or exhibit booth — and the conference itself. Always use the conference hashtag (#ALACConf19).
 8. **Keep in mind that most people at the conference are in the same situation as you.** That is, they go thinking that they will know few, if any, of the other attendees. During the various sessions and events, introduce yourself to the people on either side of you and use the conversation starters mentioned earlier.
 9. **Don’t forget the tangibles.** Conferences can be long, lasting all day and often well into the evening for certain events. Lack of breath mints, gum, eyedrops, a comb or brush, deodorant, cologne or perfume can ultimately be a deal-killer when you’re meeting someone. Plan and pack accordingly.
 10. **Bring business cards.** Business cards are still a valuable asset to have at the ready. It’s one of the quickest, most effective ways to introduce yourself and share your contact information. If you prefer to connect on social, add your Twitter handle and other social details on your card. You may have only a brief moment to make contact with someone, and handing them a business card is always better than a missed opportunity.
 11. **Head to the gym.** If working out is a regular part of your daily routine, go to the hotel gym. It’s a great place to meet other conference-goers in an “outside the conference” environment.
 12. **After the conference, don’t forget to follow up.** You should have a number of business cards from people you’ve met. Send an email or LinkedIn invite summarizing an interesting point from the conversation and suggest whatever follow-up is appropriate (such as a phone call, coffee/lunch, or simply “let’s keep in touch”). Connect the person with others you know personally when it makes sense, like when there are shared interests and a likelihood of a valued connection.
 13. **Connect socially.** In addition to the follow-up mentioned above, be sure to connect socially on LinkedIn, Twitter, etc. to stay in contact. Send a brief message with your friend request reminding the person who you are and thanking them for the time they spent speaking with you.

Now that you are armed with all of the information you need to make networking easy and enjoyable, make sure you attend all of the events that are planned during the conference, including:

- Welcome Reception on Sunday night
- Breakfast and lunch Monday through Wednesday
- Exhibit Hall Networking Reception on Tuesday night
- Awards Gala and VIP Grand Finale on Wednesday night

“We stand today on the edge of a new frontier.” Make this the year that you get the most out of networking at Annual Conference! Don’t forget to have fun along the way!

alanet.org/conf19