

GOT A SPEAKING GIG? TIPS TO MAXIMIZE IT!

By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC

You have just been asked to make a presentation at an upcoming trade or professional association conference. You're not sure if the opportunity will be worth your valuable time. Most presentation opportunities will require a good 20-30 hours of preparation time. Before you say "yes!" evaluate the opportunity by asking yourself the following questions:

BEFORE YOU SAY YES ...

- Will the presentation reach your A-level prospective clients and contacts?
Yes / No
- Will the organizers provide the contact information of session attendees? Yes / No
- How would you rate the overall opportunity to present? (10 is best, 1 worst)
- _____
- What topic best addresses the needs of the audience and also showcases your knowledge and expertise?
- What materials will you develop and submit?

- Date the materials are due: _____ . Can you commit to this deadline?
- Review and consider additional sponsorship opportunities – like sponsoring a cocktail reception or a happy hour event .
- Should you accept the presentation opportunity? Make the Go/No-Go decision.

PRE-EVENT CONSIDERATIONS

I know. It feels like you have a long time to prepare for the presentation. Consider this friendly advice for overachieving (and sometimes procrastinating) lawyers. Calendar time to work on your presentation over time so you don't end up pulling a law school all-nighter to make your materials deadline. As you develop your PowerPoint and materials, consider a few other pre-event ideas:

- Find out if you will be introduced or need to do your own introduction.
- Make sure the conference organizer has your biography along with your photo.
- Secure a list of registrants from the organizer.
- Find out if you can create a separate evaluation for your session.
- If yes, create an evaluation with various calls to action and feedback on future topics of interest. Make sure to ask for attendees' name and email address.
- Develop an e-based communication letting your contacts know you will be presenting or tie into an upcoming firm communication.
- Create targeted social media posts on your LinkedIn profile in the weeks leading up to the event.
- Submit your PowerPoint and materials on or before the deadline.

BEFORE AND DURING THE EVENT

Remember your networking and relationship building skills. Arrive at the event early and preview the nametags of attendees to see who you know. Introduce yourself to the conference organizer personally; thank them for having you present; make a strong personal impression. They might invite you to present again. In addition:

- Bring a lot of business cards.
- If the event is a full day, attend enough of the event to participate in the open vendor sessions; introduce yourself to other vendors doing business with your audience. You might even meet someone with whom you could pursue a joint marketing opportunity.
- While you are presenting, offer a free item of value to the audience (research, a white paper, free consultation) and ask them to leave their business card with you.
- Create a sign-up sheet so attendees can sign up to be on your mailing list where they will receive relevant information on topics of interest to them including blog posts you have written.
- Attend other presentations and network with other attendees.
- Gather business cards and jot details on the back of the card so you actually remember "that great person" you met.

POST-EVENT FOLLOW-UP STRATEGIES

After your presentation is over, you will likely breathe a long sigh of relief. At this point, you are hopeful you made such a positive impression that you will receive phone calls and email inquiries into your services. This scenario is fairly unlikely unless you make a point of staying in front of those to whom you presented. Here are a few ideas to maximize the time you put into the presentation post-event:

- Send the conference organizer a personal thank you note.
- Send personal emails to everyone you encountered where business cards were exchanged, letting them know how much you enjoyed talking with them and letting them know you would love to continue the discussion over coffee or lunch.
- Add those individuals and session attendees to your Outlook contacts or the communications database used at your firm.
- Add the presentation to your website biography. Presentations convey your sought-after expertise and are impressive to prospective clients.
- Post on social media that the event was a success and provide a link to a PDF of your PowerPoint and/or materials. Remember at the core of social media posting is the concept of becoming a thought leader, and you can only do that by sharing content.
- Repurpose the content – consider turning the content of the presentation into an article or a blog post.

In conclusion, speaking opportunities will be as successful as the time and energy you devote to them. Remember to first evaluate if the speaking opportunity will be worth your prep time. Not every opportunity to present is a good one. Commit to taking the extra steps above before, during and after the event to ensure your presentation will help you develop new referral relationships and even attract new clients into your practice.



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