



## Get Ahead of the Trend

Improve your meeting with social media tools

Picture a meeting where a speaker uses instant feedback to change her presentation on the fly to better suit her audience. Or, where a planner can immediately communicate to his attendees that a breakout-meeting venue has changed. Or, where an attendee wandering a convention hall can use a photo gallery on her hand-held to spot someone she's been anxious to meet.

Actually, you don't have to do much imagining. All those things are possible right now, using social media tools. Like many other industries, meeting planning is being changed by social media, providing wonderful opportunities to market and improve events. But social media also brings competitive challenges. After all, platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn allow people to create virtual meetings around their interests, rather than meet in person – complete with networking and learning opportunities.

So, it is important for meeting planners to jump in and get acquainted with the strategies and practicalities of using social media.

Here are some ideas on how you can use social networking to your advantage: before, during, and after your event.

## Before the Meeting

### Promote attendance

- Create a Facebook page to promote your event with enticing graphics and copy. Field questions from prospective attendees, posted for all to see. Create a calendar for your event on Facebook so attendees can sign on that they are attending. This might help others to decided to attend.
- Plan to join Twitter – if you don't already belong – well in advance of your event. It takes some time to build up a following on Twitter. In your marketing communications, invite your members and prospects to “follow you” and learn about even updates.
- Scour social media sources like LinkedIn for groups formed around topics relevant to your meeting. Reach out to the group leader to post a notice of your event or join the group and post it yourself. Sign up “friends” and let them know about the meeting.
- Create blogs to preview key topics of interest to association members, exhibitors, sponsors, and prospective attendees.

### Shape the event based on attendee preferences

- Have your speakers create brief YouTube video snippets about their planned presentations. Attendees can view them and offer suggestions on topics they would like to see covered. (The YouTube videos also can be used to promote attendance.)
- Use your event's Facebook page to collect suggestions in advance.

## During the Meeting

### Add value to presentations

- Designate bloggers to write about presentations on the spot. Allow comments so attendees can share their insights with speakers and each other.
- Designate a special Twitter hashtag for each presentation so participants can tweet with their insight and suggested web links. (Tags allow those interested to filter for those posts.)
- Promote that same channel to allow attendees to post questions and comments to the speaker during the presentation. Display top tweets on a large display screen in the meeting hall to spread the wealth and encourage others to join the conversation.

### Get feedback about the event so improvements can be made

- Provide a Twitter hashtag so participants can instantly tweet their suggestions. Create a blog page for the same purposes.

### Promote networking among attendees

- Ask each participant to provide a short profile that can be posted to a special social media site set up for the event. This helps attendees plan whom they would like to meet.
- Also ask attendees to submit headshots so they can be posted on one of several event-oriented software programs that feature photo galleries like Flickr.
- Orchestrate or encourage Tweetups at your meeting. A Tweetup is an in-person gathering of Twitter users – perfect for networking.

## After the Meeting

### Gather feedback about event

- Use your Facebook page, blog, or Twitter to solicit feedback.
- Aggregate tweets, blog posts, and comments that were made during the event to help plan the next event.

### Promote attendance at the next event

- Use the Twitter addresses you've collected to promote upcoming meetings.
- Solicit recommendations for topical speakers or presentation panel members.

### Enable participants to continue the meeting experience after it is over by networking the other participants

- Establish a LinkedIn group to connect participants and allow them to continue sharing insights on topics addressed at the meeting.

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