

Maximize Speaking and Attendance at Conferences

How do solo attorneys, who do not have a marketing department or a large budget to assist them, decide which conferences to attend to get the biggest bang for their buck? How do they get on a panel at the event? Afterwards, how do they share what they've learned with clients and contacts?

By **Janet Falk** | March 12, 2020 at 12:00 PM

There are multiple reasons to attend conferences. You receive up to date information about your practice area and the profession. You connect in person with colleagues, clients and potential clients. You might even speak or moderate a panel. Plus, you may earn or receive CLE credits.

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Keeping current with issues in a field of practice is a compelling reason for solo attorneys to attend conferences. Peter Brown has a clear mission: "I only attend conferences relating to one of my practice areas. These help me stay updated on new developments and cases," in his practice of information technology litigation at **Brown Tech Legal**.

Members and officers of local bar associations are often involved in planning conference events. Sarah Gold, who advises companies and nonprofits on business contracts, leases and other transactions at **Gold Law Firm** in Albany, says "I decide to

attend a conference based on the necessity of me being there; if I'm an officer of a section or committee chair, I feel obligated to attend."

If other attendees are likely to be lawyers, Barry Heyman suggests, "I think about it as an opportunity to build possible co-counsel or referral opportunities with attorneys in related, but overlapping areas" for his practice in entertainment, music, new media and IP at [Heyman Law](#).

Similarly, Zara Watkins recently attended a niche CLE conference because "I might meet lawyers handling similar cases who might need an appellate attorney at some point." Her practice is writing briefs for appeals and substantive motions in state, federal and immigration cases at [On Point Expertise](#).

In terms of prospecting for new matters to handle, many attorneys, like Nancy Mertz, prefer to attend industry events. "I have had the greatest success generating new clients by attending trade shows, where the attendees are primarily business people." These conference-goers may be interested in her technology, copyright and trademark litigation and counseling practice at [Mertz Law](#).

Conferences of a different order are organized by an affinity group. For Jamel Oeser-Sweat, who practices criminal defense at [Oeser-Sweat](#), two such gatherings are priorities. One is for minority attorneys and the other is an informal legal tech conference on open source software. Both conferences "bring groups of people together who might not have support systems or resources at work or in their social networks. I make contacts that may help in the future, and am re-energized about my efforts through immersion and contact with people who are similarly situated or share my interests."

Whether a legal, business or affinity group event, there are a variety of ways to garner an invitation as a speaker. Some attorneys, like David Cohen, utilize their network to get on a panel. "I reach out to various organizers—who know me through my publications

and prior conference participation.” Cohen practices intellectual property management, licensing and litigation services at [David L. Cohen](#) and [Kidon IP](#).

Likewise, Heyman actively connects directly with the organizer—and panelists—at an event. “I usually let the organizer know I’d be interested in speaking at a future conference on a panel. I’ve also spoken with panelists and told them I’d be interested in speaking on a future panel. Sometimes they let the organizer know and/or make an introduction to that person.”

Taking the conference session one step further, Kyle-Beth Hilfer urges: “When you have a panel that is successful, work with the other panelists to take it to other venues.” Her practice focuses on advertising, marketing, promotions, intellectual property and new media clients at [Hilfer Law](#).

Networking is another priority when attending conferences. Some, like Cohen and Hilfer, try to obtain an attendee list ahead of time. They peruse the list to identify people they wish to meet and seek out those individuals.

Oeser-Sweat occasionally announces on Facebook that he plans to attend an event, in order to facilitate connection with other attendees. Heyman observes that some attorneys post a *roll call* of likely conference-goers on LinkedIn, who then comment to confirm their attendance.

Hilfer prepares to network at the event by contacting other panelists. “If I am a speaker, I reach out to selected other speakers ahead of the conference to share ideas and to introduce myself.”

Some solo attorneys especially value the additional opportunities for networking generated as a benefit of being a panelist. “If you are a speaker, it can be far easier to meet people than for an attendee. If your presentation is good, people will seek you out. That is a goal for me when I speak,” says Gold.

Indeed, Abraham Perlstein uses this very strategy. “I make sure to stay after the conference or workshop. I introduce myself to the speakers, get their business card, and follow up with a thank you email mentioning something very specific that I learned from their talk.” He has a focus on technology and privacy at [Law Office of Abraham J. Perlstein](#).

Hilfer employs a networking approach of *generosity*. “I seek out new faces at breaks and meals, rather than gravitating to people I already know. I also try to be a *matchmaker* and introduce people at the conference who should meet one another.”

Brown gets a head start on networking by arranging a private event. “When attending an association meeting where I know some of the players, I try to organize a dinner with the best business contacts.”

Lawyers may promote a panel presentation, or the conference as a whole, in advance. Hilfer notes: “If I am a speaker, I post a blog ahead of the conference with a preview of my content.” She shares that blog post on social media as well.

Brown advises getting additional mileage from a presentation by subsequently posting a link to the PowerPoint on LinkedIn. Mertzels adds, “If you are speaking, leverage what you learned in preparing your remarks by generating at least one article.”

During the conference itself, some attorneys share what they learn during the sessions via social media. Gold comments: “I will post pictures or tweet about my experience to my firm’s accounts.” Others provide a more extensive summary; Cohen creates “write-ups for my blog or LinkedIn.”

Hilfer says: “I make frequent use of social media during the conference. I tweet my reactions to speakers’ remarks in real-time, and I post links to the conference and a few take-aways to LinkedIn. If I am an attendee, I post a blog after the conference with key

learning points and best practices. I also often do client blasts or individual client emails featuring relevant information.”

Solo attorneys often find it difficult to be out of the office for an extended period, including travel to a conference location. Fortunately, lawyers practicing in New York City have the luxury of attending the many events held in the metropolitan area. According to Watkins and Perlstein, attending local events keeps travel costs down; it also means they are more likely to see other attorneys of their acquaintance.

Finally, Heyman’s experience as an adjunct instructor at a college has an additional perk. “One of my responsibilities is to assist in the organization of an entertainment industry conference. I connect with other professionals and prospective clients; I have an opportunity to invite clients to participate as panelists; and I am able to include myself as a panelist and moderator.” Networking, speaking and client appreciation together add up to a stellar conference experience.

Janet Falk *is the head of Falk Communications and Research in New York. She provides media relations and marketing communications services to law firms and consultants. She may be reached at (212) 677-5770 or Janet@JanetLFalk.com.*

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