

ARTICLES

Tips to Effectively Participate in Your Clients' Trade Association

Few attorneys participate in such organizations. Learn how to take advantage of this opening and establish productive relationships with members.

By Janet Falk – March 3, 2023

Many attorneys overlook the opportunity to get involved with the trade association, professional membership organization, or industry group of their target clients. There are few other attorneys who participate such organizations, which leaves the field wide open for establishing productive relationships with the members.

You may be uneasy attending an event where you do not know others; accordingly, follow the strategy of *pre-event marketing* described in this article to introduce yourself to the officers and leaders of the group.

Once you do become a member, seek out opportunities to volunteer where your background as an attorney will help you contribute to the success of the organization.

Pre-Event Marketing

Begin by registering for the group's next program, perhaps a networking event, and entering it on your calendar. Now move to the website of the host organization and identify the officers and key committee chairs. Look for the president, vice president, other leaders, and board members. Be sure to include the chairs of the program and membership committees, plus any committees that align with your interests and practice.

Figure out the email addresses of these individuals, which may be listed on the organization's website. Alternatively, you may derive each email from the individual company's website or contact these individuals via LinkedIn.

A week or two before the event, email each person you identified and introduce yourself. Your objective is to establish a rapport with the leaders of the group. A sample subject line is *Will we meet at the Networking Event on March 28?* The body of your email will describe your background as an attorney and indicate how your clients are in businesses relevant to the organization. You might even name a client who is a member of the trade association, using this model:

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Intellectual Property Litigation Committee**

Blake,

*Your name came into view as a _____ (title) of the **Host Organization**.*

*I am an attorney who advises _____ (type of client) on _____
(contracts/litigation/transactions, etc.).*

*Last month, my client, **Relevant Company**, concluded (transaction/litigation) regarding
Specific Area of Mutual Interest. [This shows your alignment with the organization's
membership.]*

*I am interested in learning about the **Host Organization** and how, if I become a member,
I might participate in your activities.*

*Perhaps you will tell me more about the association if you will attend the **Networking
Event**, where I'm excited to meet you and the other officers of the group.*

Looking forward to a great event.

*Regards,
Your Name
Company website*

Now step back and imagine the reaction of an officer of the membership association who receives your email. The officer reads a note from someone he or she does not know, and this professional plans to attend the next networking event. The potential contact even expressed interest in becoming a member.

This officer is likely aware there may not be any (or many) other attorneys who are members of the group; consequently, this new lawyer connection could prove helpful to the association's operations. Accordingly, the leader will probably respond to the email and graciously welcome you, because of his or her commitment to expanding the membership and promoting the industry group.

Your introductory email demonstrates that you already know quite a bit about the industry (or profession) because of your client relationships. You've established common ground with the leader. Moreover, as an attorney, you will bring unique value to the group.

When you receive a reply from this association contact, take the initiative to answer and continue the conversation. No doubt the event will be well attended, so you'll want to make it easy for your new connection to find you in the crowded room.

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In your response, mention you plan to wear some item of clothing that stands out in the typical sea of business black and navy. A woman may wear a purple jacket, while a man might wear one that is camel or light gray. However, if you have a court date earlier in the day and have to dress more conservatively, you may add a dash of color with a scarf (if you're a woman) or you might use a pocket square (if you're a man) so that the officer of the organization will spot you. Now that you've received replies from most of the officers of the organization, consider them as members of your welcoming committee. These leaders are ready to meet you and will be on the lookout for you at the event.

Demonstrate that you support the industry organization even before you attend. Post on LinkedIn that you are looking forward to attending the *Networking Event* of the *@Organization Name*. (As you may know, putting the @ symbol before the group's name will highlight it on LinkedIn and notify a portion of the people on the LinkedIn platform who are connected to the group.) You might even name one or two of the officers with whom you've corresponded, again using the @ symbol before their names. They will be notified by LinkedIn of this mention and will appreciate your support.

It's time to attend the networking event. Before you leave the office, review the names of the officers you contacted and visit their LinkedIn profiles. Study their photos so you will be sure to recognize them when you meet. Take note of any aspects of their business that align with your practice. This list is like an old-fashioned dance card and your *plan of attack* for the event.

Attending the Networking Event

At the registration desk, pick up your name tag and ask the host to point out one or two of the people you previously contacted. Say that these folks are expecting to meet you. When you do converse with an officer of the group, ask questions to learn more about the officer and the membership organization. For example, what is his or her role? What does he or she hope to accomplish this year? How did the officer contribute to the success of last year's activities?

Keep the focus on the other person and the trade association; listen as the leader courts you to become a member. As the conversation progresses, you may learn more about the leader's business, while only briefly talking about your own practice. After you have exchanged business cards, take a selfie photo with the leader. Now, ask your new contact if you might meet the president or another officer of the group. Of course, the leader will agree to make the introduction. The leader wants you to become a member and get involved with the organization.

Chat with this second officer and continue to learn more about the officer's agenda for the organization. When this conversation hits a lull, take another selfie photo and ask to be introduced to a third leader.

This is how you *work the room*. Each officer will chat with you and, at your request, introduce you to another leader, until you have met as many of the names on your list as possible.

Following Up

As with any networking event, on the next day, email the people you met to state that you enjoyed speaking with them in person, following your previous correspondence. If you decide to become a member, mention that their enthusiasm for the organization was what prompted you to join the group.

No doubt there were a few people on your list you did not meet, either because they were busy talking to others or did not attend. Email them as well, mentioning that you enjoyed your conversations with the others, and name-drop those people you met. Write to all the officers, saying, as a new member, you'd like to get involved and would appreciate getting together with them for a coffee chat.

Remember how you posted on LinkedIn that you were excited to attend the networking event? It's time to post that you enjoyed the event and share the selfie photos you took with the officers you met. Be sure to name them in the post, using the @ symbol in front of their names. Others will see that you are aligned with the leaders, turning you into a mover and shaker within the organization.

Volunteering

After you've joined the trade association or membership group, focus on your commitment and determine how you can contribute. Perhaps you spoke with the Program Committee chair. Review some recent programs and consider planning a panel discussion that fills a gap of issues that have not been discussed. You might invite a client who is a member and a board member or officer, plus a leader in the field to address a hot topic in a panel presentation. You may be a moderator for this session and later a panelist at a future program.

Does the association have a newsletter or a blog? Perhaps your quarterly column or discussion about the latest legal issues affecting the industry or profession would be a welcome addition. Consider inviting a client who is a member, or an officer, to coauthor an article.

Your area of practice may lend itself to the operations and infrastructure of the organization. If your focus is commercial real estate, offer to review the leases and any relevant contracts. If you are an employment attorney, you may evaluate the handbook for employees. Corporate attorneys might peruse the bylaws.

As you become better acquainted with the scope of the organization and other members, you may find additional ways to participate on an informal basis, such as a Slack channel and email list, not to mention posts on LinkedIn and Instagram, plus LinkedIn and Facebook groups.

Conclusion

This strategy of pre-event marketing to introduce yourself to the president, vice president, and membership and program committee chairs of an industry trade group or membership association turns networking on its head. You have effectively begun to network before you walk into the room.

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Even if you don't know any other attendees, the movers and shakers of the association are poised to recruit you to join the organization.

Plus, because they know most of the members, they will likely introduce you to others in the group who would be of interest as potential clients and referral sources for your practice.

Your pre-event marketing campaign also sets you apart from other first-time visitors to the group and your welcoming committee of insiders acknowledges that you would be a valuable member.

After joining and finding yourself the only attorney (or one of a few), you'll bring to bear your professional knowledge and contribute to the growth and success of the association. The leaders will recognize how your interests are aligned with theirs, and new business opportunities and referrals are likely to follow. Congratulations on a job well done.

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