



Select the Right Conference to Maximize Your ROI



Choosing the Right Conferences

Conferences, trade shows, and seminars are standard events for most every industry. The right conference can offer tremendous growth opportunities – both personally and professionally.

But finding the right event can often feel like finding a needle in the haystack. To make the right choice, you need to step back and assess how different events can benefit your team and your institution, and then choose only those that are the smartest fit.



Why should you attend a conference?

The first question you need to ask is whether conferences should even be on your radar. Yes, they are a great way to make new connections and develop new skills, but they can also require a significant investment of both time and money. That said, there are some things you can gain from a conference that you just can't find elsewhere.

Concentrated learning opportunities

Conferences provide a wonderful opportunity to get away from the day-to-day grind and focus on higher-level goals. There are sessions addressing the latest trends, new tools and tactics, and more. All of these are available over the course of a few days, which means you can gain a lot of knowledge in a very short period of time.

Latest industry innovations

Every business landscape is evolving and has thought leaders who are pushing the boundaries of what is possible. Vendors such as ConServe are looking for new ways to help you be more successful. With a mix of keynote speakers, hands-on workshops, and solution showcases, conferences give you access to the latest innovations in your industry to make your organization better.

Networking on a whole new scale

Most industry professionals agree that one of the most significant benefits of conferences is networking. Where else would you find so many engaged professionals who work in the same field as you do, all in the same place at the same time? These are some of the best sources of ideas and advice, as many of them will have faced the same challenges as you.

For many of us who have specialized roles in our companies, it's reassuring to know we are not alone.



Managing your conference budget

Once you've decided conferences can be of value to you and your organization, you need to start putting numbers to that investment. In other words, how much do you want to spend on these types of events?

It often helps to do a little research at this stage. What are the largest industry conferences you should consider? Are there smaller regional conferences that could be beneficial? How many attendees should you plan for? You can start estimating what an ideal schedule would look like – and cost – and then determine what you actually can budget for.

If you already have a conference budget, your goal is to get the most return on that investment. Once again, this entails researching a mix of conferences and determining which events you can actually consider attending.

A key factor in managing your conference budget is understanding all the expenses involved with these events. Beyond the obvious registration costs, there are expenses for travel, lodging, and meals that need to be accounted for. There are also soft costs, such as lost opportunities or sliding project schedules, due to attendees being out of the office and not completing their regular duties. To assess your options, you may want to create an investment worksheet to help you compare the relative costs of different events.

Once you know the true expenses of each event, you will be better equipped to determine whether a particular conference is worth the investment.



Assessing conference benefits

The other part of the value equation is the benefits you expect to gain from each conference. This starts with a clear understanding of your goals and objectives for these events.

Is there a new skill or topic you need to learn about? Is there a particular business challenge you need to overcome? Are you looking to connect with specific brands or individuals? Do you want to compare vendors and assess new partnership opportunities? All of these factors need to be documented and prioritized. That way, you can ensure you are looking only at events that align with your business and your professional goals.

If your primary objective is **skills development**, you can group events by their content focus. If you're planning to attend more than one, you could start with a national convention or choose a regional conference that will address more local challenges.

If you are looking to improve your **strategic outlook**, you'll want to really research the speakers for each event. Are they industry leaders? Are their topics in line with where your

organization is heading? Are they providing information and insights you can't find elsewhere? All of these factors should come into play when gauging the relative value of higher-level insights and information.

Finally, if **networking** is your priority, you should do your best to find out who is attending. This starts with the target audience for the event. For example, are these people you can engage with and learn from? It also helps to find out if people you already know are going.

In all these cases, you'll want to do your best to objectively quantify these benefits. Once again, it can be extremely useful to build out a benefits worksheet to organize and itemize the expected return from each event you are considering. This can include educational value, best practices, peer contacts, vendor contacts, and knowledge of industry trends.

Compare your options, and choose the best fit

Now it's time to create and review the spreadsheet that summarizes the benefits and expenses for each conference you are considering.

We've included the following key factors:

- **Goals** (for this particular event)
- **Costs** (from your expenses worksheet)
- **Location** (to lend more insight into travel)
- **Dates** (to lend more insight into timelines)
- **Size** (how many attendees, geographic reach)
- **Focus** (the overall mission of the conference)
- **Sessions** (how many, what tracks, format)
- **Speakers** (topics covered)
- **Networking** (including those you know)
- **Vendors** (how many, which are important)
- **Other** (advancing sales relationships, accreditation, etc.)

Once you've got all of these elements in one place, it will be much easier to assess and determine how you want to allocate your budget dollars; aligning the conferences with your specific business goals and objectives.

Conclusion

The right conference can inspire new thinking, take your organization in new directions, and introduce you to business-changing partners and influencers. It's a great way to grow, both professionally and personally.

But remember, while it is fine to gain personally from a conference, the greatest return is achieved when you can share your learnings with others in your company. Consider preparing a presentation for your team to outline key takeaways from the event and share session videos, handouts, and tools.

We look forward to attending and supporting local, regional and national conferences.

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