9 Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Next Dental Conference

An Academy of Laser Dentistry Tip Sheet
The 3 Keys to Success:
Strategy, Strategy, Strategy

The old adage, “you get out of it what you put into it”, most definitely holds true with attending conferences. Fact is, many of the real benefits are only available to those who know where and how to find them.

Strategy and pre-planning separate the winners from all the rest.

Strategy? But I’m just attending a conference – why do I need a strategy?

**Strategy is Your Key to Success**
When was the last time you took a completely defined and written strategy into a conference with you? Did you strategically seek out meeting your own written objectives, check them off as you accomplish them, and keep written notes? Without a written strategy, you don’t have a plan for learning and application; you may have a wish, but you don’t have the best chance of getting everything out of your conference attendance.

That’s why we’re sharing with you 9 techniques and strategies that really work, for you to apply to your next conference.

*Let’s get started!*
Take a piece of advice from the Cub Scouts, and “Be Prepared.”

It’s important that you define your goals before the presentations begin. Identify specific goals you want to achieve once you get back from the conference, and work backwards by defining the specific information you’ll need to gather to put your plan into action.

**Break down each area you’re interested in as follows:**

- Primary goal.
- Steps necessary to achieve the goal.
- Information you need to gather to make your plan actionable.
- Questions you need to ask or have answered to gather the knowledge you need.

If you take the time to define and write these needs down before your conference starts, it’s inevitable you will walk away with the pieces you’ll need.

Fortunately, there’s an easy way to ensure that you gather all of the needed information in a logical and easy to use form.

_TIP_ Take a Written Strategy & Action Plan with You

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Develop a conference strategy notebook.

Your notebook doesn’t have to be anything fancy. Those digitally-inclined attendees can take notes on their computer, while others can use pen and paper.

**The important thing is to include the following:**
- List the major goals you want to achieve (quantify them if possible).
- What are the major things you want to learn – write down all the questions you have (it’s also a great idea to solicit ideas from your staff).
- Take the schedule and mark all the areas of interest to you.
- Develop a list of questions prompted by the scheduled presentations if they’re not already on your first list.
- Buy a notebook and write down your questions while categorizing them by subject area and/or event, whatever works best for you. Leave yourself plenty of room to write down your findings.
- List each session you wish to attend on a separate page of your notebook; list your goals for learning in this session, and the questions you’ve developed. Leave the next 2-3 pages blank for notes. Repeat.

Take a moment while you’re still at the conference, and review your notebook. Go down each item you’ve entered and ask yourself: Can I immediately apply this? If not, what other steps must I take to do so? The objective is to be able to cross off every goal you wrote down with the information you gathered and a plan of action.
Make plans to set up group conversations with fellow attendees to discuss presentations of particular interest. These group discussions can prove as valuable and beneficial as the actual presentations. One professional conference speaker refers to these discussions as “Birds of a Feather” sessions. Here is where the real treasure can lie. But again, you have to be strategic.

Don’t wait until you get to the conference and hope to run into people who will share their time with you. Like you, they’re going to be busy. Be proactive and reach out beforehand to commit to getting together on site.

Tell them what you’re looking to get out of this conference, and ask them the same. This way, both of you will be prepared, and your time together will be more fruitful.

Just winging a few conversations won’t get you anything. Use the formal presentations and workshops as starting points. Conversations can enable you to expand and go deeper into the subject. Others will have insights and experiences that you might not have, and they can also help to uncover opportunities and gaps in understanding that you may miss on your own. Each of us has a unique outlook, and two (or preferably more) heads should always prove better than one.

Contribute something as often as you can. Conferences offer many opportunities to contribute, such as workshops and Q&A sessions. People want to learn, and it will be easier to recruit people when they see you as someone who has something of value to share.

Use invitations to lunch, dinner or drinks – serious learning can still be done in less than serious surroundings. Look around during sessions and notice who seems most interested and engaged. Who’s taking a lot of notes? These are the people to approach for discussions.
How would you like to have your own brain trust at your beck and call to help you improve the quality of the care you provide, grow your practice and take your personal satisfaction to new heights? If you would – a Mastermind Group may just become your new secret weapon.

Many have heard the term, but few understand its meaning or power.

Napoleon Hill formally introduced the concept in his book, “Think and Grow Rich.” Hill explained that Mastermind Groups were the secret engine behind some of the greatest business success stories. He defined a Mastermind Group as: “...a friendly alliance with one or more persons who will encourage one to follow through with both plan and purpose.”

There isn’t enough room here to completely lay out the possible structures and nuances of Mastermind Groups, but here’s a summary of what they are, what they can do for you, and how to get started.

In essence, a Mastermind Group is a group of like-minded individuals who share similar goals and are motivated to make things happen. The best Masterminds gather individuals with skills and knowledge that complement, but are often lacking in the rest of the group.

For instance, a dental Mastermind Group may have a member who is an expert in practice management, one who is a master marketer, and one who has a deep understanding of new technologies (like dental lasers, for instance). Each individual brings a unique expertise to the group, and stands to benefit from the special knowledge of the others.

Begin Recruiting a Mastermind Group to Help You Grow
This mix of unique knowledge enables the group to rely on one another’s support and guidance in order to achieve its goals faster and more effectively.

Now that you’re at a dental conference, where people who share your goals and commitments should be plentiful, you’re in a perfect position to begin recruiting for and building your Mastermind Group.

**Take these steps to begin the process of building your Mastermind Group:**

- Develop your personal set of goals you wish to achieve with your practice.
- Identify the skills you need to bring in from the outside in order to achieve these goals.
- Identify the unique skills that you have to offer to the group.
- Begin approaching fellow attendees with your Mastermind idea and the goals you have set.
- Begin the process of recruiting promising candidates.
- Once you’ve received interest from others, set a time to reconvene on the phone or video conference to establish guidelines, agreed upon goals, and expectations.

Be patient. Finding people who have the needed skills, motivation, and willingness to share won’t be easy, but it will be tremendously worthwhile!

Remember, when you approach individuals with your proposal, do so with a “here’s what’s in it for you” attitude. Your fellow Masterminds will need to work as a team, and each should have a clear picture of how they stand to benefit.

Using the conference environment to identify and engage with other practitioners with whom you can work and grow could well be one of the most beneficial things you ever do for yourself and your practice.
This will probably make some dentists uncomfortable, but here it is: A dental blog and content marketing plan that promotes your practice and educates and informs patients is no longer a luxury – it’s a necessity.

The good news is that there are few more effective ways to acquire new patients, retain your existing patients, and improve the perceived quality of the care you provide than a content plan. When blogging and sharing content is done properly, it informs the reader (your patients and prospective patients) about issues they need to be aware of for the sake of their dental health. In so doing, you demonstrate your credibility, establish empathy, and answer the reader’s question “why should I choose this dentist for my dental care?”

All of this, of course, elevates your ability to be found online. With 60-75% of all new patients researching dentists on the web before making a decision where to go, blogging is now a necessity, not a luxury. There is no better place to develop ideas and gather information for your blog than at your next conference.

Make a commitment to do the following:

• As you attend the sessions, ask yourself, “why would my patients care about this?” Write down your answers, gather information you feel your patients would benefit from, and commit to writing a blog post when you get back. Avoid med-speak – you’ll be talking to patients, not fellow dentists.
• Pick the brain of other attendees. Do they blog? What have they had success with? Are any other attendees interested in teaming up on future blog posts?
• Content curation is a huge time saver. Ask other attendees if they’re willing to allow you to share their content on your website.
• Ask the presenters if they have materials that you can summarize and share on your site.
• Ask your fellow attendees about their favorite sources of information. Finding a new source of material (blogs, videos, podcasts, etc.) you can curate and share can be a goldmine.
An Academy of Laser Dentistry Tip Sheet

“To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart.”
~ Sr. Thomas Watson

All work and no play is enough to drive the smile right off your face – and our practice is all about the smile! You need to stay focused, fresh and committed in order to do your best work. Motivation is key, and everyone who strives to accomplish something is aided by motivation.

You can use both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to motivate yourself and improve your performance. A conference provides ample opportunities for both.

Extrinsic rewards are, as the name implies, external to our personal psychology. They include things like revenue growth and increased number of patients.

Intrinsic rewards are more internal, and more personal; they include things like professional satisfaction, pride in your skill and sense of self-worth.

Both sets of rewards are critically important to motivate us to our greatest efforts and achievements.

Make a list of everything you learned, and the new contacts you’ve made. Now define what reward each item of value will bring you and write them down. Defining and recognizing these achievements and this growth will motivate you towards even greater commitment and rewards.

Lastly, don’t forget the “all work and no play” part. We dentists are people, not machines, and need to recharge our batteries and appreciate the fruits of our dedicated work. Be sure to reward yourself and enjoy the getaway. If the conference is away from your home city, take advantage of local opportunities, local sites, restaurants, golf and tours.
Take advantage of the group events like mixers, meals, and the time just before and after formal events when people are congregating. You should think like a recruiter. The people you meet here will be the people who can help you with group discussions during the event, form the basis of Mastermind Groups for continued year-round learning, and network connections that will be helpful in your online efforts.

Most people socialize and spend time with the people they already know. Set a goal of meeting ‘X’ number of new people, and commit to spending quality time getting to know them and finding shared needs and goals.

Collect names, social media profiles and contact info. Afterwards, thank them for the time that they spent with you, restate your shared goals, and propose that you reach out to one another on a consistent basis.

Remember, the new people you meet are a great source of even more connections. This multiplier effect is the best way to effectively and enjoyably grow your network of new connections.

Ask your new connections these questions:
• What has brought you success this year?
• What has provided you the biggest challenge?
• How do you acquire new patients and ensure you retain existing ones?
• What can I help you with?
• Where else do you learn from or find sources of valuable information?
• What one all-important tip would you share with me based on your personal experience?
Consistent and effective patient communication is vital to your practice. The way that you communicate with your patients influences everything, including the perception of the care that you provide, patient stress and anxiety, and even the number of word-of-mouth referrals you receive.

The good news is that your conference will arm you with new and valuable information to share with your patients to get the dialogue rolling.

As you attend your sessions, keep notes about items and knowledge that would be of value to your patients. **Ask yourself:**

- What in this presentation would my patient benefit by knowing?
- How can I explain it in terms they’ll understand?
- How can I best explain to them how this knowledge will help them?
- Do I need to gather more information about this subject?
- Would this make a good piece of content to provide for my patients on my website and in my social media posts?

Don't let anything you learn at your conference go to waste. Information is only valuable when it’s shared and acted upon, so make a commitment to communicate your new-found knowledge with your patients and staff.

Remember, your patients count on you to be knowledgeable and provide the most up-to-date care available.

Sharing the fact that you make continuing education a priority, demonstrates your commitment to their care. Passing on information that is of value to them will go a long way towards increasing their perception of the level of care you provide.
If it’s information you’re looking for to help you discover new opportunities and identify best practices, then a vendor can be one of your best resources, whether you’re currently in the market to buy or not. Vendors can be just as knowledgeable and helpful as presenters. Sales and manufacturing firms spend countless dollars and effort conducting research, gathering industry information, identifying best practices, and educating their sales reps. A vendor’s main job is to sell, and in order to do that, they amass and share a wealth of information with their prospects (that’s you).

Just because you may not be buying, doesn’t mean they won’t be interested in sharing their information or that you can’t benefit from the knowledge they have to impart. The sales pitch you may have to endure is a small price to pay for knowledge you can put to use in improving your practice.

Here are a few tips for speaking with a vendor:

• Ask them what should you know about current and upcoming changes in the industry.
• Request reports, articles or case studies they have to share.
• Ask where they are on social media and follow them (there will be great tips throughout the year here).
• Ask them to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) for the solutions they sell (you can then apply this formula to other, similar offers).
• Are they willing to keep in touch and be of help throughout the year? Building a relationship now (even if you’re not currently purchasing) will make for a more efficient and effective purchase in the future, whether you buy from this particular vendor or not.
• Can you see a demo? Product demos often raise new questions not previously anticipated.

Make a commitment to meet with as many vendors as possible, and don’t forget to write down beforehand what you want to learn, and what questions you’ll need to ask.
Conferences can be a tremendous source of information and growth, but they can also be costly in terms of time and money invested. It’s important that you satisfy yourself that it will be a profitable investment.

Taking the time, before you commit to identify what you plan to gain from the conference, and how, is essential. By doing this, you will increase your motivation, maximize the value, and identify the steps you need to take to ensure you hit the ground running when you return to your office.

You can be as elaborate and in-depth as you like, building a spreadsheet, and crunching your numbers. But even a simple “back of the envelope” calculation will serve to identify what you can expect in terms of return, and identify the steps you’ll need to take to ensure that this conference attendance will provide a wealth of information for you.

**Calculate with your Costs**

Cost of attendance includes:

- Registration.
- Travel.
- Lodging.
- Food.
- Entertainment.
- Missed office income while attending (if any).

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Identify Your Revenue Opportunities
This is the most important (and admittedly tricky) part – identifying how you will turn the information and knowledge you take away with you from the conference into revenue.

The easiest areas to identify opportunities are:
- The inclusion or augmentation of new procedures.
- Improvements in office efficiencies.
- The addition of new equipment.
- Improvements in patient care that can translate into new patient acquisition and/or improved patient retention.

Since you’ve already identified your goals, and written them down in your conference notebook (you have, right?), you have everything that you need to estimate your anticipated returns.

Simply take your goals and begin applying estimated dollar values to them. These estimates will be reduced by the cost of attendance, leaving you with your return on investment (ROI).

As in any business planning endeavor, the lack of a crystal ball will ensure that these figures will need to be revisited and revised from time to time. Starting now with this exercise, will provide the motivation and direction you’ll need to make your next conference attendance a profitable one.

Get that pencil sharpened and get started!
Get your strategy written down before your conference begins and stick to your plan.

Enjoy yourself. Meet as many valuable people as you can, then stay in touch.

Use your notebook and put to use everything you took away in order to improve your skills, your patients' level of care, your practice's success and the satisfaction you receive from your profession.

Conferences provide you with the opportunity for continued education, and continued education means continued growth – growth in the profitability of your practice and growth in the level of care and satisfaction you and your patients will experience.

Congratulations on your decision to download this resource and your commitment to get the most value out of your next dental conference.

We would love to hear how these insights work for you, along with any ideas of your own on how to get the most out of a dental conference. You can reach us at AcademyofLaserDentistry@gmail.com – we promise to read and consider all ideas.
Providing the tools to help your practice grow!

The Academy of Laser Dentistry offers a comprehensive and informative annual conference on the effective uses of lasers in dentistry.

Whether you're interested in starting to add dental lasers to your practice, or you want to improve and expand your existing laser care, the ALD offers actionable insights you can effectively and profitably begin putting to use the first day back in your office.

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