

How to Turn 8 hours into 8,760 Hours

How to get the most value from an event

By: *Nancy A. Shenker*

January 18, 2011

“That event was a waste of time and money,” is a common complaint among business owners.

“No event is EVER a waste of time and money,” this blogger contends.

Last week, I attended my third REBar Camp, an alternative to a “traditional” conference. Because shelter (real estate, construction, home décor) are target categories for my company, I decided to invest in a sponsorship too. And, because of the blizzard forecast and the post-event dinner, I decided to stay over in the city. So, at the end of the day, I had invested a few hundred dollars in the event.

Will I get immediate payback from my attendance? I probably will not. The true value of face-to-face connections come weeks, months, and maybe even years after the date of the event itself. How does one optimize event value - and stretch those 8 hours into many more?

- Be selective. Pick one or two events each month and don't overdo. Experiment.
- Consider a sponsorship. They often give you a range of opportunities you might not get just by attending. (I even got my company's name on a t-shirt, which will live on for years to come on attendees' backs!)
- Look for PR opportunities associated with the event and take full advantage of them. I invited a journalist to attend to cover the event and my company (along with those of some of my colleagues) ended up in a front-page story in our local business media.
- Talk to strangers throughout the event...you never know what you'll learn or who you will meet. I even met a great business connection sitting in the lobby.
- Use the event as an opportunity to expand your emarketing database (but be sure to get permission before simply adding people to your list!)
- Spend as much time as you can in educational sessions and resist the urge to be on the phone with the office or hide in a corner. Listen and learn and engage. Tweet valuable content to those folks who may not have had the good fortune to attend.
- Send followup notes to the people you meet, connect on LinkedIn, friend on Facebook, and follow on Twitter. Remember to do this right away - otherwise those cards might wind up in that big pile in your desk drawer.

Some of our biggest clients today are people I met directly or indirectly through people I connected with at “live” events. It takes time, but those 8 hours of bonding can lead to much more...just be strategic, mindful and committed. And strike the words “waste of time” from your vocabulary. You can always find at least ONE good connection, piece of learning, or new perspective from every experience.

This article was originally published in the New York Enterprise Report.