

Making the best of online meetings



Annette Brown, IT Manger - Milbank

Online meetings provide one important way to network virtually. How do we make the most of them? We've all been on courses about networking in the physical world. So, we know to:

- Plan ahead – find out who's attending – make a LinkedIn connection if possible
- Listen and understand, let the conversation flow freely
- Go with a friend or colleague if possible but don't limit your time just to them
- Don't make a circle – it excludes people from joining a small group.
- Don't make direct eye contact (it can make people feel slightly uncomfortable) but look slightly above the eyes.
- Don't wave your hands about (apart from knocking a drink out of someone's hand) keep them together in an almost "prince-like" pose!

But the rules of engagement have well and truly changed and virtual networking takes time and dedication for it to be successful. Planning ahead is still a critical point to networking.

- Think about what you want out of the meeting to help engagement and gain more from the session.
- Connect with other participants on LinkedIn if possible so you'll know the names and faces.
- When you introduce yourself be informative but brief and to the point.
- You can't control where you sit in the line-up and won't be able to make eye contact so take a moment to get adjusted to who is actually on the call and where they are on screen, etc.
- If participation is limited to questions or comments on chat, remember the speaker will find it difficult to gauge audience reaction. Asking questions indicates to them you are engaged.
- There's no such thing as a stupid question so do contribute.
- Send a thank you note and follow up after the session with observations or questions that you may not have asked during the session.
- Don't worry too much about your background if you're on camera even if the kids are running in and out and the dog's barking at the postman.
- Make sure you are familiar with the controls of the conferencing software.
- Stay on mute whilst you are not talking but make sure you can easily unmute yourself when you either want or need to talk – it's important you can do this without hesitation as delay can kill the moment and can throw people from their train of thought!

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More generally when virtually networking:

- Join LinkedIn Groups such as those we have for the Document Excellence Group and the plethora of ILTA Local Communities.
- Write an article – chose a topic that is of interest to you and more importantly that you feel will be important to the group. Publish it online either via the group discussion or your own LinkedIn profile.
- Stay connected! If you found conversations, topics, people or, groups interesting then keep the momentum going by connecting via email, phone or set up a virtual coffee date with interested parties. Remember one day you may even meet in person.

Anyway – I hope it won't be long before we are back in a conference room, with the air conditioning too cold, the fizzy water flat and a branded pen to take home!

Keep safe out there

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