EDUCATION

Follow Up, Follow Up, Follow Up

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It's the old sales adage that still holds true decade after decade: Following up on opportunities in a timely manner is critical. So, what's the best way to follow up after a major networking opportunity like last month's SSA Fall Conference & Trade Show? Here are five tips that apply whether you're an owner, operator, manager or vendor.

1. Prioritize

My first suggestion is to take all of the business cards and marketing materials you collected, whether you have notes on them or not, and prioritize them. Use your Outlook calendar or another organizational method that works for you and assign the dates on which you will follow up with a contact/business. This is also known as a pipeline, which organizes your leads on a priority basis. If you're an owner/operator or manager, you still need to prioritize what you will accomplish and/or implement once the conference is done. You may have sat in on a roundtable or purchased a publication. By creating a list (pipeline) and prioritizing your follow up, you will maximize your takeaways from the conference.

2. Do your homework

Research your contacts. Find out more about the people/companies you just networked with. Are they blogging? Do they publish? Have they been in the industry for an adequate amount of time? What do others have to say about them, such as the BBB? Before you take the next step in reaching out to someone, take the time to *know* to whom you are speaking. You can use this information as part of the conversation you're going to have with them. I guarantee they will, at the very least, be impressed with you for taking the time to learn a little more about them.

3. Pick up the phone

Sure, technology has made our lives easier and more productive. However, I still believe in an old-fashioned phone call, especially if you have already spoken with someone face-to-face at the conference. If the contact did not request a specific way to follow up, your first contact should be a phone call. From here, you can determine the best way to follow up and what your plan of action will be.

4. Be patient and be kind

After a major conference, we have a tendency to want to follow up right away. Ambition and persistence are noble qualities. So, why are you feeling radio silence on the other end? Just like you put together your priority list, so did others. Be patient if folks do not follow up right away. Set a reasonable follow-up date if you do not hear back. Chances are they are not ignoring you, they may just have other matters to tend to—especially if they were out of their office or business for almost a week. Likewise, be kind to those who make following up with *you* a priority. A courtesy email reply or returned call to acknowledge their efforts is always appreciated. From there, you can set the follow-up pace.

5. Provide feedback

As a representative of your national trade association, it is extremely beneficial to everyone, SSA staff included, to receive productive feedback regarding your recent experience with the conference. This helps us assess overall quality and areas to enhance for future educational and networking opportunities. It is our hope that you find exceptional value in attending, and that you leave the conference excited about all the things you need to follow up on.

For those of you who were not able to celebrate our 40th anniversary and attend the SSA Fall Conference & Trade Show, please visit www.selfstorage.org, or call us at (703) 575-8000, to see what resources are available to you. It is our hope that you can always attend; however, we do have valuable post-conference resources readily available. ❖