

How to Get the Most Out of SSA's Fall Conference & Trade Show

By Ginny Stengel, SSA Vice President, Education and State Programs

Attending a conference can be a bit overwhelming with the combination of new information, making new connections and learning about the latest industry trends and business tools. Preparing before you attend can make a real difference in what you get out of the meeting.

Luckily for conference-goers in 2015, pre-conference preparation is considerably easier than it used to be. Doing your homework and preparing before you attend has always been important, but with the information readily available at selfstorage.org, there's no excuse for attending a conference unprepared. One of the most common mistakes attendees make is waiting until they are on the plane ride to Vegas to read the conference materials. Reading the materials ahead of time provides opportunities to attend unique events, such as the Social Media Boot Camp, presented by Holly Ritchie, director of marketing of The Storage Group; or the Managers Summit, taught by Carol Mixon-Krendl and Sue Haviland. There is limited space in both of these sessions, so you'll want to sign up early if you want to attend.

Make sure you've selected the Hot Coffee/Hot Topics sessions you'll want to attend, along with the concurrent sessions each day. If you're attending with a co-worker, it's a good idea to split up and attend different sessions, when more than one is offered at the same time. While attendees will receive a link to an audio version of each of the concurrent and general sessions recorded during the conference, it's still a good idea to make the most of your time while attending in-person.

Preparation for walking the trade show floor is the key to getting the most out of your time with the vendors. You should definitely have a strategy. Knowing what you would

like to accomplish before, during and after the show will help maximize your time with the exhibitors. Here are just a few tips:

- Know what types of vendors you'd like to visit (i.e. companies that specialize in software, insurance, locks, kiosks, etc.). You'll be given an on-site program that will include the latest company listing, so take time to map out your route on the floor.
- Bring plenty of business cards.
- Don't be afraid to introduce yourself to exhibitors and let them know your needs.
- Set appointments with any vendor you'd like to meet with during the show.
- Plan to bring any employees who would benefit from attending the trade show.

The same thought holds true for the roundtable sessions offered at the fall conference. Be prepared by coming up with the top five to ten issues or topics you want to learn about at the conference. Then, when you get your on-site program, find the list of the roundtables that will be offered. Highlight the ones that best suit your needs and you're all set! When it's time for the roundtables, you'll already know which ones you want to participate in. You can visit up to six tables for 20 minutes each if you attend both roundtable sessions.

These are just some ideas to help you get the biggest bang for your registration buck. The key is in preparing yourself for your time at the conference. We look forward to seeing you there and hope to create an exceptional educational experience for all attendees. ❖

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