

How to Maximize the FODC Virtual Event

The benchmark of a great conference is, of course, great content, but the overall experience is also judged on the quality of the networking. So naturally, that's the concern with a virtual conference, but before you assume—and you know what that does to you and me—we've compiled a list of helpful tips on how to network virtually so you get the total experience from this year's Food On Demand Conference.

Have a strategy going in

1. Work on your “elevator speech” so you can describe your brand—both your own and your company's—in a succinct and memorable way both verbally and in writing.
2. Set a goal of what you want to accomplish, for example: “I will meet five (or 10) new people; I will take advantage of the Q&A portion of the presentations to get my questions answered; I will find a vendor to help me with....”
3. Post on your social media platforms that you are attending the conference, and check out the hashtag #FODC2020 to see who's attending that you may want to follow up with.
4. Take advantage of receiving the list of sponsors before the first day of the conference, so you can do some research on who's who before the conference starts. Use LinkedIn to check out profiles, along with checking their social media and company websites. Operators and sponsors will be able to connect via the conference app.
5. If there's a particular speaker you're interested in meeting, send an email to let them know you're looking forward to their session—or wait until after the session to reach out and let them know you enjoyed their presentation, mentioning a particular point they made in order to make it personal. Check out LinkedIn, as well as the speakers' websites, for their contact information.
6. Plan which sessions you want to see live (so you can ask questions and be privy to the questions others ask) and those you can listen to later. All the sessions will be recorded and you'll have access to the archived sessions.

Check out the sponsors

1. Industry sponsors all have virtual booths, with both written and digital information on their services and/or products. If you'd like to talk to someone from the company live, there's a button for that. In addition, from noon to 1 p.m., all sponsors will be live “in their booths.”
2. Familiarize yourself with the FODC app, which also has sponsor contact info and a direct messaging function that will allow operators to connect with exhibitors.
3. Check out the specials being offered by many of the exhibitors of Food On Demand.

During the sessions

1. Remember this is your time to ask thoughtful questions (not to hijack the conversation or prove you're smarter than the presenter).
2. If you want to make a comment, be brief and don't use the platform for a sales pitch. Questions will be screened by FOD staff, but you don't want to be that guy who makes them hit delete.
3. Use your social media platforms to send out sound bites from the conference, much in the same way you'd share information during a conference at coffee breaks.
4. Since the sessions are being taped, you can take a break to get some pressing work done without fear of missing out. Unlike an in-person event, here you can take that important phone call without getting dirty looks when your phone rings during the general session.
5. Stand up and stretch to stay more alert when you're watching back-to-back sessions. No one's judging your chair yoga moves at a virtual conference.
6. Participate in the live-polling during the sessions to help collect data that will benefit the industry.

After the event

1. Follow up with any contacts you've made. First with a phone call, and then an email. Don't worry if you get voicemail, hearing your voice will make a stronger connection than just a written correspondence. Once you've established a relationship, it's OK to text.
2. Follow up right away with any information you've promised to get to people you met, and send thank yous to people who supplied you with contacts or leads. Messages can be emails, but if you have their physical address, a mailed thank you card stands out.
3. Go online to listen to any sessions you missed. In addition, check out the FOD website at www.foodondemandnews.com for follow-up articles covering the event by staff writers.
4. Start making plans for the 4th annual event.