

Maximising Effectiveness of Networking Event Sessions

THE OPPORTUNITY/ THE GOAL

This is often a more relaxed social occasion, with entertainment food and drink involved and often considered 'down time' by buyers. However, for Irish trade and Agency representatives it provides an additional opportunity to generate new contacts and potentially do more business.

BE PREPARED/ STRUCTURE YOUR APPROACH

- Best to open with a soft introduction.....remember this is an often an opportunity for buyers to wind down after a week or two of buyer shows/events so a structured hard sell approach will not necessarily be right here.
- If you are with a colleague(s), each agree to take a section in the room so you can optimise your contacts and don't duplicate your efforts.
- Make sure you have your name badge on, clearly visible and ideally positioned at eye level to your LHS lapel. Carry your business cards handy and jot a note on the back of any business cards you receive or make a note to your smart phone as you move from group to group.

MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

- **Set yourself and your colleague(s) a target no. of contacts to make** in the time period. We suggest a guideline of 10 minute contact with 1-2 persons and about 15 minutes intervention with a larger group (of 3+). *Be mindful of the body language, if the person or persons you are speaking to are distracted or appear to be seeking out others over your shoulder politely excuse yourself and move on.*

BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR OBJECTIVES

- Work the room and between you **meet as many Operator contacts as possible** particularly targeting those NEW to you.
- **Gain insights and understanding about their business/client needs and travel trends**
- **Find out** what they found **most enjoyable**, **what they have learned NEW**, what **surprised them most** and what they have found **most useful** for future programme planning and itinerary development.
- **Add value to the conversation - offer NEW information or something of interest to the buyer/group**
- Where appropriate - **gain permission or identify a reason for follow up contact** with the buyer.

THE PROCESS

Introduce yourself and your business/role and seek introductions to those in the group.

Seek knowledge and insights to find out:

- where they are from?
- **how business demand is** for them **for Ireland** (particularly future trends)?
- **who and what are the needs/preferences of their client base?**
- **any changes in their client holiday preferences/behaviours?**
- **how long their Groups/FIT parties travel for...** i.e. are they seeking city breaks or all Ireland or doing Ireland as part of a UK or European trip?
- do they target **specific groups/niche travel/lifestyle interests?**

Enquire how beneficial (and enjoyable) the event has been for them..... seek out **any highlights**, such as:

- what they **most enjoyed** (if they were on a fam. trip)?
- **anything NEW or surprising they have learned which will be useful** to their programme planning for the future?

HOW YOU CAN HELP/ADD VALUE AND DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP BEYOND THIS POINT

Within the conversation you may have identified areas of interest the members of the group have...

Think: "How can I add value to this conversation now from the Tour Operator/Buyer's perspective?"

- Maybe it is **offering some subtle but renowned clean Irish wit to energise the conversation or some useless but interesting facts about Ireland that may capture their interest**, for example...
 - *Did you know the city is only 15 minutes public transport from some of the beautiful Dublin coastal villages and activity experiences? (Mention a few)*
 - *Are they familiar with or have they heard about some of the latest new and exciting emerging Irish Music Artists who are getting huge reaction from international audiences e.g. James Vincent Mc Morrow, Irish singer songwriter whose debut album was released internationally in 2011 (second album released in Jan this year) and whom is currently on Canadian and US tour .*
- In the case of a business/trade member **this may be an opportunity to share insights about the Destination/area you are located** for example.....
You may wish to offer a complimentary visit, send on information about the experiences in your area including your own. Remember, if you are an accommodation or food/beverage provider, day time & evening entertainment experiences are the most successful way to generate interest in your property.
- If there is a specific ask of you, **this is often the time to seek a business card and make a note of what the ask/action is** for timely follow up, ideally before the end of the week.
- Alternatively **they may ask your assistance in regard to some practical aspect of their visit...** e.g. How long should they leave to get back to the airport at X time...? Where would you recommend as a good entertainment venue to head on to party after this networking event.....?
It may even provide the ideal opening line for you in your follow up communication with the person(s) afterwards assuming you shared contact details and have a reason to follow up. Even if there is no business reason, you could just choose to contact and express your pleasure in meeting them and share your contact information in case you can be of assistance to them in the future.

CLOSING AND POLITE DISENGAGEMENT

- Once you have been through the steps above, it is **time to consider your exit**. Usually this can be done by making eye contact (real or fictitious) with someone in another group you may know and politely excusing yourself.

MOVE ON TO NEXT GROUP

- On route to your next group/contact, scribble a note or a keyword on the business cards/contact information received as a reminder and prompt for later in the week with follow up action required.
- File your contracts and jotted notes safely on your person and move on to the next group!