



How To: Network at Virtual Conferences



- August 09, 2021



With Covid-19 came the widespread introduction of virtual conferences. While there are obvious advantages to virtual conferences including saving time and money on travel and increasing content accessibility to a larger and more diverse science community, this has come at a cost of decreased networking and less face-to-face interactions. are necessarily limited. This is particularly relevant for Poster presentation sessions, which are usually a hub for networking but now mostly occur through short, pre-recorded summaries with no actual discussion taking place. While solutions to the problem of networking vary from conference to conference, below are some general tips on how to still get the networking you enjoy out of virtual events.

Come prepared

As always, preparation is key. Scan the programme, abstracts and participant list for people you might want to connect with. Read up on their research to assess which sessions of the conference they will likely attend.

It is also useful to prepare a short pitch “about yourself, stating who you are, what you do and, maybe what you need (for example help to set up a technique, a follow up job etc). You will be surprised to find that most people really want to help!

Additionally, if there are live sessions/ networking opportunities you are planning on attending, make sure your set up is adequate. Ask yourself: Is there enough light to see my face and is the camera at eye level? Can people hear me ok? What does my background look like?

Use your existing network

Once you have identified people you would like to meet virtually, it might be a good idea to ask around if any of your colleagues and friends already know this person and assist with an introduction for you, before, during or after the conference. An alternative method would be to connect with people via the meeting app, where in some cases, you can even invite people to attend your poster.

Connect via social media

One good way to connect with specific people or labs you are interested, is via their social media outlets such as Twitter. Follow people that will be present at the conference and engage with their tweets so that these people will have you on their radar. Most conferences will use social media to promote the conference before and during the meeting. Engage with those channels as well, and maybe start highlighting especially interesting talks or posters.

Attend, attend, attend

You should obviously take any opportunity to attend live sessions, whether they are the talks, question-and-answer sessions, or workshops. Try to contribute to those sessions by asking questions and providing comments. If in a social setting such as a virtual bar, engage as much as possible with your breakout roommates. Ensure you have some conversation starters with open ended questions prepared that avoid the standard “:what do you do?” question. These might include a question of which sessions or speaker they most enjoyed?

Follow up after the meeting

If you met any interesting people, follow up with them via e-mail or social media. A short message to say it was nice meeting them or you would like to continue a certain discussion in person, sometime goes a long way. What you are aiming for is to build a new relationship that is meaningful, genuine and productive. After all, everyone likes to make new friends! The wider your network the better- as you might want to collaborate in the future.

Obviously, one great opportunity for scientist to practice their virtual networking skills is just around the corner with the ISEH 50th annual scientific meeting taking place between 25th to 28th of August. Here, there will even be a virtual disco to impress everyone with your dance moves. Since ISEH traditionally

focuses on the younger generation of researchers, the virtual programme this year is packed with networking opportunities.

Enjoy!

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