

# How to facilitate meaningful connections at in-person events?

## Transcript





**00:17**

**Speaker 1**

All right, before we get into the session, let's do a little bit of an introduction. Today we are organizing Fireside sessions on creating meaningful connections. And these are sessions that all follow up on each other. And in the first session, we kind of defined what are meaningful connections people. We all have a different interpretation of a meaningful connection. And in this next session, we will dive a bit deeper into Meaningful Connections person events. And Adam is obviously a big fan of doing these meetings in person. Here he is, the man, the myth. Here you have your microphone.

**02:01**

**Speaker 1**

Just let me make sure it's on.

**02:06**

**Speaker 2**

I thought I'd eat my own dog food here and go and speak to people. That said, I'll be there for you, Adam. We're always communicating and this is the moment where we get to celebrate your existence for 20 minutes. So we wanted these sessions to be about Meaningful Connections means and how we think of forming relationships, what these shows do to us, where we're in a very combustible environment. We get a couple of days, sometimes only one, to try and build something, a little bit of knowledge, a bit of understanding about what these stands are offering. But also when we meet people to try and work out how to make a relationship happen or form some form of business relationship. And there's a couple of things I think are very poignant. One is intentionality. So the intent when we come here for most people is to meet.



**02:54**

**Speaker 2**

When we think of ourselves doing that, we know ourselves well enough to know whether that's an easy experience or an awkward experience. We know our own abilities when we communicate. What we don't know when we meet people is their ability to communicate. We sometimes make assumptions about what people know. And one of those assumptions might just being at a show like this and assuming people know how to conduct themselves, how to break into conversation, how much knowledge they have and what they are willing to part with. Whether they're selling or committing to a longer term future where the sale isn't quite as important. Which I hope we reflect that because we're actually building community. We don't think that's an overnight job. We don't come to these shows to think, by tomorrow we'll have a much bigger, much better consolidated community. So that means there's a bit more investment needed to think of a relationship going forward.

**03:42**

**Speaker 2**

And again, at these shows, we start off with loads of material. We've got flyers, we've all got business cards, badges, phones. And we commit these things as if they're going to be successful because we think people will remember us. And I don't know about you, but I've got a filtering process and it looks something like this. Yeah, didn't understand what he was talking about. Can't remember them. Brilliant. Maybe another time. Not interested. And thanks very much for no, and I'll keep that one. And that's how business cards tend to end up, is a group that we take. And the same with an event app. It's a number of people that we either scan or we take information from. Becomes very hard to filter that back. Why? Because it's hard to remember. Now, I want to open this up to the floor. Mary's got a microphone.



**04:28**

**Speaker 2**

So in terms of experiences, and you can either do this by show of hands or reach out for a microphone. How many of you come away from these shows not busy the next day? Do you plan to do nothing the day after a show like this? Does anybody have that as a strategy? Okay, so we're all capable of failing because we know tomorrow, the next day, the day after the show. We've been out the office for a couple of days, and then we've got family and the dog to sort out, and we got a meal to cook and holiday are packed for. There's always something coming next. So sometimes these intentionalities, these ways that we think we're going to do something, we haven't prepped ourselves very well. Because unless you've got at least the next day to consolidate what you've learned, what you've understood, and who you've spoken to, the chances are two days later, even more people have forgotten.

**05:19**

**Speaker 2**

More reasons to connect have been forgotten. And sometimes your pathway might be a CRM or a list that you created is parked somewhere. And the same as my business card solution, it's often in a rubber band within two days and left on a table ready for me to pick up one month in the future. So that's one thing, trying to remember, to give ourselves time, because that helps us then build a relationship. And the other way is to think of methods. So what do you guys do? Please, somebody grab the mic. What do you guys do after a show to start that relationship trail? Any thoughts?

05:57

Speaker 3

Hello? Can you hear me?

**05:58**

**Speaker 2**

Yes, Terry.



**05:59**

**Speaker 3**

The first thing is to do I work Christianly very hard here to make a list, do an Excel spreadsheet with the contact names on. Can you hear me again?

**06:07**

**Speaker 2**

A little bit. Maybe come a slightly closer?

**06:09**

**Speaker 3**

Yeah, I got it. Get Christian to do a spreadsheet with me with the names of all the contacts and what have you, and we do a general letter thanking everybody, and she usually does it on my behalf. And so Terry will be in contact again shortly. Mont terry sometimes more successful than other times.

**06:26**

**Speaker 2**

Of course, I guess that depends on the quality of who's written it and maybe even the context as well, because.

**06:33**

**Speaker 3**

I'm a bit of an old hand of this now. I suppose I feel as though I've got quite a good plan when I leave a show. But then again, something else happens. I haven't got a dog to mess me about, but I have other distractions home in my life and you just have to try to prioritize things as well.

**06:51**

**Speaker 2**

I was going to say, we were talking about methods, so yes, of course, a spreadsheet and having some sort of idea of a process.



**07:46**

**Speaker 3**

Send you a general letter to people, thank you for attending the stand, blah, blah. Christian might do that and say, Terry will be in contact again shortly. And sometimes I am dead on. Sometimes it gets missed, honestly, because of all the other pressures coming at you.

**08:01**

**Speaker 2**

And we're all going to fail like that sometimes because there's going to be, like you say, things get in the way, life happens. So one of the things I find unusual as an approach that we do certain things leading up to these types of shows, and then we completely ditch the things we do naturally to come along with a script and to hold, like, an accountability to this process of meeting people and then hoping that they become a relationship or a business lead. And for me, what would be nice is if we actually were more natural, more authentic. And I think when we look at what's happened with social media, you've got a moment here when you speak to people to be yourself, you've got a chance of actually constituting the thing that you believe in, like the me in this, the reason I'm in this business, the reason I sell this product.

**08:45**

**Speaker 2**

And yet we come with almost of a blanket approach. And then even if we spend time at these shows working out how to build a relationship and actually have a good connection, then we go back to a formula for how to take that relationship forward, which is actually less than the time that you spent with someone, making it personal and interesting. We send out a blanket or a template that sounds like, hey, you are one of the 65 people that scanned you and we are a thing that you may wish for and yet we all receive, I know, hundreds of emails a day where that template approach means nothing. We ditch the emails. So to me, there has to be something in the middle. What I'd like to think is that because we're hosting these sessions, we've got the ears of you, which I guess with these things, it makes it a lot easier.



**09:27**

**Speaker 2**

What we don't get is an understanding of where things go wrong because we're trying to project something that should go right. We're meant to have all the answers and each of us, as individuals, think differently, behave differently and have different processes. It's very hard to then create commonality when we've all got different levels of business, different types of business, I should say different levels of attention, because some things are going to be pinnacle in this event. There'll be a session you went to, there'll be a person you met, and that pushes other people almost down the list. It's hard then, to remember everybody as an equal. So why do we send out an email that treats everyone like an equal? Putting priorities in place would help. Thinking about why I can connect with somebody, what were those commonalities or those easier touch points that weren't businessy?

**10:09**

**Speaker 2**

And then feeding that into the email and actually writing something that sounds more personable, more approachable, and then give somebody the opportunity to come back to you without it being a what are we doing next? Just let's do something whenever it might be, and then take it on as maybe a process. What's your experiences of trade shows? I'm interested in do we communicate via the app? Has anybody experienced the app? Are you finding it a good portal? Yeah. Christie, have you got an experience there? You want to tell us what's worked?

**10:37**

**Speaker 4**

It's quite easy to talk to people and have conversations and book meetings and that side of the aspect of it. But to actually bring people in, I think you have to be there in person to actually drag people in and have a real conversation and tell them what you do. But you can have the initial start conversation on the app and then expand.



**10:58**

**Speaker 2**

And in terms of conversation, you mean actually type something to start with, actually initiate?

**11:02**

**Speaker 4**

Yes.

**11:02**

**Speaker 2**

Or wait for something to come to you and then carry on the conversation.

**11:05**

**Speaker 4**

I would go out of my way and message someone just to say that we're attending TMS this year, if you'd like to come, we're on this show, we're on this stand, and then go from there. If they're interested, we'll have more conversations and then meet in person at the show.

**11:20**

**Speaker 2**

Yeah. Fantastic. And has anyone else done the same? Have you reached out to people in advance and has that got you the meetings you want? Or have you found that more people are not responding? Because I'm interested here in what communication looks like and if we're trying to be personable, we invest a bit of time into a platform, but maybe the platform isn't where people are. Maybe the platform is a group that already exists. So coming here in isolation and thinking we have this show and we try and use a platform, is that where people hanging out there for a week in advance or two weeks in advance?





**11:47**

**Speaker 4**

I'm not so sure they do and they don't. It depends on the person, really. It depends on how averse you are with technology. So if you can work with technology, then these apps can be helpful. If you're not that good with technology, then they can be very confusing.

**12:04**

**Speaker 2**

Just a show of hands, if I can, who's enjoyed using I know it's quite a wide, varied amount of solutions within the app, but who's enjoyed using the app so far? One, two, three. That's not bad. That's about half. Is anyone really disgruntled in terms of the use of the app? Anybody not particularly happy with it? Okay, so it's not too bad then. We've got a reasonably positive balance there. I compare it to the situation I look at. Is this app relating to other apps or other shows? We're actually giving almost a different app and a different experience every show we go to, and sometimes that then becomes hard to master because they're expecting you to it's intuitive and we've told you how to use it and there's a big guide behind it. Whereas sometimes there's methods that work better in one platform that don't work in another.

**12:47**

**Speaker 2**

Some tools are available in some are then pushed away to VIPs only and you're not sure where you sit. And I find that a bit clumsy because we're not guided handheld and so on. Yet again, when we come down to doing things personally, we tend to want to help people personally. All I've done so far is had more intimate conversations about what someone is doing in their life and how that might then how I could help their business. But again, we come here with a mindset of to get leads and to try and generate business and so on. But those aren't the leads that work for me personally, they're the ones that I tend to say, I think it's a bit clinical, I'd like to know more about someone and then develop that. Has anyone got an experience from either this show or a recent show where something off topic has been the most important thing that's happened to you at a show?



**13:29**

**Speaker 2**

Anybody got any instances of like a quality communication that wasn't about sales? Thank you.

**13:42**

**Speaker 5**

Well, this is my first time at Meeting show and I had a hiatus from the event industry for ten years, so I came back in December. So yeah, I've not done a show like this before. Anyway, I was just in the hosted buyer lounge just on my own, eating my salad, and someone came and sat next to me and just struck up a conversation and it was literally it was just a lovely conversation. It wasn't, you know, we just connected and were talking about meditation and yoga and like, purpose and meaning in life and those kind of connections are where it's at. Just like that genuine integrity and really sort of getting under the skin of human connection, really.

**14:22**

**Speaker 2**

Yeah.

**14:22**

**Speaker 5**

So I think, like you were just saying about the clinical hard sell thing, it just doesn't work, does it? It's about relationships and essentially that's what human beings are here for, connecting on a personal level.



**14:36**

**Speaker 2**

Yeah, I think some people are subjected to sales and they're quite nice people, and they just sit there politely nodding and going, yeah, I've got no clue what you're talking about, but let's carry on. And yeah, you're right. This more serendipitous nature of coming to a place where the commonality is we're in the events world, I guess that's pretty much the commonality. And then it's, what do you do? What do I do? There's that sort of civil approach to getting to know somebody. Why are you sitting next to me? Might be another question with a frown. Why are you taking up my personal space? But again, you mentioned that personal and sort of human side of I wonder, by sitting next to someone, what they might be going through, or what I might be able to help them with, or are their life instances anything like mine?

**15:13**

**Speaker 2**

Or are we challenging something? Are we both interested in sustainability? So finding out something that's kind off topic from the sale, I think is really important. I don't know that these shows are very good at that. I don't think there's great facilitation in terms of building networking and community at these shows because they're quite isolated by their own dates. There's very few shows where there's a tapestry of community running between. There are organizations. MPI might be an organization where some of the members will congregate. They'll know that each are coming. But I think the shows could do more to actually make that human experience slightly better. Almost like a buddy system. I think we've mentioned a few times, like, who's new? Okay, you're in comeback zone at the moment. Does it feel good?



**15:57**

**Speaker 5**

Yeah, well, at first, well, I didn't know what to expect, really, because I was like, oh, my God, this might be really overwhelming and this might be huge. And I walked in, I was like, oh, it's not as big as I thought it was going to be. And then there's this pressure, like, oh, I've got all these appointments and what do I do? And I feel really out of it. And ultimately you're having a conversation and you're just trying to glean information and just stuff that's going to help you, but also at the same time, you're helping the people that you're connecting with, too.

**16:32**

**Speaker 2**

Yeah, absolutely. To try and then build that together. The app essentially is trying to help you by I don't know if you can scan outbound, but we're looking at the different touch points. So in your conversation so far, did you take any information away from somebody? Did you ask for a business card or a LinkedIn?

**16:48**

**Speaker 5**

Well, funny, because the person that I met at the host biolunge said, oh yeah, let me just scan, like, open up the LinkedIn thing and I'm just going to scan the QR code, scan my QR code and you'll find me. And I was like, oh my God, I didn't realize that was a thing. And she said, I only learnt about it three weeks ago. And I was like, brilliant. I now know about that. So it's just those little things, those little AHA moments as well.



**17:12**

**Speaker 2**

I might sold them. I actually dream of showing people the QR code, wake up in cold sweats when I haven't had a dream about telling people about the QR code and how to make it happen. It wasn't a thing a few years ago, but of course the danger is that we use that as a touch point, which actually the brain doesn't remember. It doesn't remember that the moment of scanning. Hopefully it will remember that you sat next to someone, had a nice conversation station. Sometimes it's a pitiful conversation, sometimes it's only about business. And our time is about cricket. Anyone at the score? Terry, I'm looking at you. No? Okay. I thought it was important game for people like me, but anyway, I don't know how long we got. I'm on a time check here. I probably could look at a digital device, couldn't I?

**17:47**

**Speaker 1**

You have at least three minutes, but obviously if people want to stay around, hang around, feel free to we can.

**17:54**

**Speaker 2**

Peer pressure into hanging around. Brilliant, yes, as long as that's all right.

**17:58**

**Speaker 1**

But if you want to leave and you don't want to leave all these insights that we are discussing behind, we are actually making a summary of all the sessions we're doing during the show. So just ask us to scan your badge, then we will follow up with you with the insights of this session. So make sure to ask either one of us to scan your badge and we will make sure to catch up.



**18:23**

**Speaker 2**

Thank you. Merijn.. I'm going to finish on thinking about other people first. So, other people first or people first approach as we talk about MESA is again, repositioning yourself. Now, I use a technique called shoshin. It's a Buddhist mantra for resetting and cleansing yourself of everything you know and actually pretend you know nothing. What does it feel like to be vulnerable in knowing nothing? It's a very hard place to because you've become knowledgeable, you've become comfortable, you've learned how to speak, you've communicated in a past instance. What I think is important though, is you don't know what somebody else is going through. Okay, everybody's, as John would say on Short Lodge, everyone's fighting their own battles. And it can be that someone is walking in for the very first time. I'm not looking at anyone. Alina's actually just joined us as an intern. I want to say brand advocate.

**19:11**

**Speaker 2**

And were talking earlier about getting on the show floor for the first time. Maybe even people are on these stands. They look professional, they dress well, they've got a lovely position in the show floor. But you've got people that are here for the very first time trying to sell, and they've got no clue what to say to you guys. For the first time, they're like, oh, my God, they haven't got a microphone. But they're thinking to themselves, I've been trained to do this and it's my moment and I've got to deliver. And you can make it easier on them because the conversation is not about what they're trying to give you. It's understanding what position they're in to give it to you. Are you the decision maker? Is this your first time trying to sell? What is it that I can do to make your job more comfortable?



**19:49**

**Speaker 2**

We don't think that way. As delegates switch it around, we should be thinking, anybody here? Apart from Melina here for the first time, apart from the comeback mission? Anybody here? Fantastic. This is perfect. So would you have known? Does this feel like the thing you thought it might be? More or less. Is that because you've been to other types of shows that are similar to this? Or is this the first time at this particular show? Is that what you mean? Alright so it's the first time at this particular show. If you gave it marks out of ten right now, what does it feel like?

**20:17**

**Speaker 6**

Probably a nine or ten.

**20:18**

**Speaker 2**

Oh, fantastic going on. That's good to know. I mean, we're here because we think it's a good show. There's lots of shows we're not at. Maybe you can read into that. So, again, that's about relationships. So actually forming a relationship with the people that run the show and saying, what's your mission? What do you think you can achieve? And do we think we can play into that and how can we help you? And by the way, we're a poor little association trying to establish ourselves. Maybe you can do something in return. And that's a nice brokerage. We're not demanding, we're not expectant. We're just saying, where can we go? But if we treat human relationships the same, then we start from a place of empathy. How's it going for you as a first time? I'm doing this in the roof. I'm not expecting to reply, but if we know that this is not a nine out of ten, then I'd try and make it one notch up.



**21:00**

**Speaker 2**

So what can we do as individuals, just to say to somebody, is there anything I can do right now? Just to bring it up a percentage? If it's 99 to 191% to 92%, what is it this conversation is going to give. Maybe someone's just having a difficult day. Maybe we can ascertain that. Maybe when someone's having a great day and you want to know how, because maybe you're not. So that exchange is important before we talk about the business side. So meaningful connections to me is a start point of empathy. People first think about the position they're in. Have they had a horrific hot journey on an underground train, standing next to someone singing about cricket, which I can't imagine anything worse, but it might just be something they just want to get that out of their head. And you can be that first moment where things get better in that day and other times people are having a great day and you can find out what they've even taken, drank, eaten, whatever it might be, or who they last spoke to.

**21:52**

**Speaker 2**

How about that? If they've had a great conversation with someone, go find that person and say, I want one of those conversations you were delivering earlier. Anybody got any thoughts on empathy before we challenge the battery life on these things?

**22:06**

**Speaker 1**

14 hours

**22:06**

**Speaker 2**

All right, guys, you want to take a seat?

**22:08**

**Speaker 1**

Anyone who would like to give their input?





**22:12**

**Speaker 2**

Has anyone got any thoughts on conversational, empathy, or as we put it earlier, the people first approach?

**22:18**

**Speaker 6**

Hi, Adam.

**22:19**

**Speaker 2**

Hey, Chatra.

**22:21**

**Speaker 6**

I think for me, because I've been in this industry, I kind of grew up in the industry, so I studied events management. But then when you come out of it and you're a student, you've graduated, so you're no longer a student, it's really hard to find your feet. So you really count on those encounters with people where either someone take a chance on you or you are actually welcomed warmly and then you suddenly start to grow that confidence, because, like you said, many people here, for the first time, they don't know what on earth they're doing. And without someone or without a friendly face, it becomes a rather harder experience. So I think it's really important to try and create those experiences. Like you said, if you have an event buddy or just a program where people can meet at a certain space, mingle first, get told what to do at the event and then direction.



**23:22**

**Speaker 2**

Yeah, and these micro experiences actually make up the hole, don't they? If you challenge yourself to think back at what you've done already today at a restaurant, fell over it in the toilet bars my way through the queue, whatever it might have been, these are all micro elements of your day. And I guess if you were a scientist, you'd be looking for the patterns and what made me feel better and what didn't. Then you try and do more of the things that make you feel better. Finally, in relation to empathy, if you're in a position where you are a first timer, you've still got a challenge haven't you? We were talking about earlier on, how do you start by almost thinking I'm probably going to fail. My advice to anyone that's either asking someone to understand either yourself, understand somebody else's first time, give yourself the chance to fail.

**24:07**

**Speaker 2**

Don't think of failing as not starting a conversation. You're not going to be successful in any conversation if you don't have one. So I hope that was good advice earlier. Challenge yourself to start conversations even if you know they're awkward or awkward for the other person, because if you don't have them, I'm pretty sure you'll walk away from this with less contacts, less of a feel good factor, or the knowledge of how to challenge the way you approach a conversation. So, hopefully some useful tidbits in there and I'm going to go and find out what the cricket score is.



**24:37**

**Speaker 1**

Love it. Thank you all for joining us in this session. Before you take off your headphone, just make sure that yes, applause for Adam. Obviously great insights there. As I mentioned, we are making a summary of all the sessions we're doing and we would love to share those insights with you so you can take them with you. But in order to do that, we need to have some sort of contact information. So please come to me or to Adam to have us scan your badge so we can send you the insights of these sessions tomorrow. There are two other sessions, both one at eleven and one at three. They're around 20 minutes, depending if Adam is speaking or not and would love to have you there. As we continue the conversation tomorrow morning, it will be on. How do we facilitate is it even possible to facilitate meaningful connections behind the screen, aka in the online event world?

**25:36**

**Speaker 1**

And at the end of the day, we're diving in the future of meaningful connections. If we let our imagination run loose, what can we achieve as event professionals in bringing people together? We're looking forward to seeing you there.

**25:50**

**Speaker 2**

Thank you, everybody. Make sure we scan you so we can send you some details. And thanks for coming along.