

How to Host a Successful Networking Event



LCN's Nicole Cox demos a gel nail on Lisa Lawson of Wise, Va.

Living far from any major beauty show makes it quite expensive to attend one, hence my idea to host a networking event closer to home. If I couldn't go to the education, perhaps I could bring the education to me. With the exception of 10 or so days, organizing this networking event took five months of my life. Every morning I'd work online for an hour, do nails all day, then work online until late at night. Weekends revolved around the computer. For anyone thinking of hosting a networking event, be prepared to spend time away from your family, your friends, TV shows, hobbies, and life in general.

The odds were stacked against us with the economy being down and gas being up, but the demand for affordable education was there. So the 1st Annual Nail Tech Networking Event of the Smokies was sold out with 50 attendees, six educators, and one guest speaker.

Here are the steps involved, along with some of the valuable lessons I learned along the way:

STEP 1. Select a location that reaches a wide geographic audience. I chose the Smoky Mountains, since it is the most visited national park and is within a

day's drive of half the U.S. The heart of the Smokies is Gatlinburg, Tenn., a resort area I was familiar with. Sure, it would've been easier for me to host it in my hometown, but Gatlinburg is a well-known destination for surrounding states such as Kentucky, North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, West Virginia, and Alabama. It's an untapped area of the country as far as nail education goes, so I put out several inquiries on the Internet to see if techs were interested. *Tip: If there's not much interest, reconsider your location.*

STEP 2. Choose a meeting room. The Chamber of Commerce has listings of meeting room facilities and will be glad to work with you in choosing one. Decide how many techs you'd like to host, then research your meeting room options. Use websites for photos, room capacity, etc. If serving lunch, some require the use of their catering firm, which is costly. Others will allow you to serve your own food, especially if the meeting room has its own kitchen. Let them know you'll be using stinky acrylic products, as some places forbid any potent odors that could offend other guests. Be sure there is ample parking on site. Some facilities

Connecting with other techs can help you continue your education, find support, and stay motivated. But what do you do if there's not a networking event in your area? Jill Wright, a salon owner and host of the annual Nail Tech Networking Event of the Smokies, gives you step-by-step advice on hosting your own.

GET IN TOUCH ONLINE

The World Wide Web is an invaluable networking tool for techs, and even the most geographically isolated tech can find multiple ways to connect with others. These websites are a great start. *Tip: Use these same websites, as well as NAILS Magazine (look in the Nails File section) to get the word on existing networking events.*

- > www.nailsmag.com/forums
- > www.beautytech.com/forums
- > www.salongeek.com
- > www.nail-talk101.forumotion.com
- > www.nailnetworking.niceboard.net
- > www.nailtechlist.com
- > www.behindthechair.com

may have paid parking a block away. Often you have the option of booking a block of hotel rooms for a reduced price, too. Not knowing how many attendees there'd be, I opted not to do this. Be prepared to pay a deposit on the meeting room since you are responsible for all expenses. *Tip: Physically stand in the meeting room to make sure the size and decor is appropriate before renting it.*

STEP 3. Create a press release (basically a one-page flyer) listing the name of your event, date, time, cost, location, meeting room facility, maximum number of attendees, your phone number, your mailing and e-mail addresses, deadline to register, agenda, and a short summary of events. This will be sent out

to all potential attendees, educators, and nail companies. As educators sign on, announce their participation by adding a little bio for each. Do the same for nail companies that donate products. *Tip: Keep it short and sweet. Limit it to one page.*

STEP 4 AND 5. Simultaneously find educators and solicit donations from nail companies for products for goodie bags and door prizes. I found several educators on Beautytech.com's Sunday night nail tech chat room. Webmistress Debbie Doerrlamm kindly passed on her list of nail companies to contact and NAILS Big Book lists contact information for dozens of companies, too. When e-mailing requests to the companies (spell people's names correctly), don't expect a prompt reply. Just because it's important to you, does not make it important to them. Once I learned to phrase my requests showing how the event would benefit their company, I finally got positive responses. Be prepared for rejection and don't take it personally. Request enough donations so the educators get a goodie bag, too. *Tip: Keep detailed notes of who you talked to, the company, the date, and what was said. Save your e-mails in separate files labeled "companies," "educators," "attendees," etc. Carry the notepad with you everywhere.*

STEP 6. As donations arrive, unpack and catalogue them. Keep paper records and back up all records stored on your PC. Mine crashed and was down for five days, causing me unimaginable mental pain and anguish. Thank heavens for my detailed notepad! Send a confirmation e-mail to the company letting them know their donation arrived and be sure to follow up with a hand-written thank-you note. *Tip: Write out your thank-you cards as each package arrives and mail them out immediately. To skip this part shows extreme lack of gratitude and your mother would be mortified.*

STEP 7. Promote your event in NAILS (e-mail judy.lessin@bobit.com), Beautytech.com, and other professional websites. Send in your press release early, since magazines work several months ahead. Use your professional contacts to spread the word. Use the virtual yellow pages to e-mail salons and be prepared to snail mail a few, too. Use Beautytech's salon locator to target salons in nearby large cities. Have attendees make their checks or money orders payable to you and keep detailed records. Create a receipt to e-mail them upon payment, along with a copy of the dress code (should you choose to have one). Mine was "business casual," with examples of appropriate and inappropriate attire. *Tip: Promote your event constantly and do not lose momentum.*

STEP 8. Make sure you have someone to help you stuff the goodie bags, plus on the day of the event you'll need help setting up, checking attendees in, giving away door prizes, serving the lunch (if you provide one), checking attendees out, and passing out the goodie bags. You can't do this alone. *Tip: Choose dependable helpers.*

STEP 9. Arrive early the day of the event to set up the room. Bring extra pens, paper, tape, sign-in sheets (with names of all the paid attendees), fish bowl for door prize drawings, camera, evaluation forms (which you created for attendees' feedback), clipboard, extension cords, disposable

tablecloths, extra nail lamps (if you have them), list of educators and their companies, list of nail companies that donated products, and don't forget the goodie bags. You will have to emcee the event and direct the flow of activities, so be prepared to do some public speaking. *Tip: Make sure your outfit has pockets or wear an apron (trust me on this). A client who's a professional events planner gave me this tip (among others) and Lucinda was so right!* **N**



1. New England Networking Event organizer Darlene Donovan says she felt an instant connection to all the women in attendance. 2. Acrylic and gel techniques were the main topics at the New England Networking Event in Londonderry, N.H. 3. BeautyTech.com sponsors a networking event on the eve of the Premiere trade show in Orlando, Fla.