

# 5 Steps to Networking Brilliantly

By Renee Hagar

You're attending your first writers' conference, or maybe it's your tenth. You have a blazing hot manuscript, a brand new business suit, and heels that hopefully won't pinch your toes too much. But do you have a strategy? Do you know how to use your body language to your advantage? Have you thought about your brand? If you haven't, don't worry—there's still time!

Networking is about *connecting*--connecting with people who have similar interests or common goals. It's about sharing information and making useful contacts. Are you ready to take your networking skills to the next level? Here are five ways to make a great impression.

**1. Develop your strategy.** It's important to define your goals before you get to the conference. What do you hope to gain? Do you want to make contact with your dream agent? Or do you hope to find a critique partner who writes the same futuristic romance that you do? Make a list of your objectives. It helps to see them in writing, and it makes your intentions more concrete. I recently did this for a conference I attended and when I revisited the list after the event, I was surprised to discover I'd achieved every one of my goals.

**2. Visualize success.** Picture yourself having a great conversation with an editor you admire, or meeting new colleagues who also love writing about vampires. Some people find it hard to visualize, but it can make a difference. Take a few quiet moments and get in the zone. Get mentally ready for your conference. It will boost your confidence, prepare your mind, and help you focus.

**3. Remember your brand.** When you're networking, you are selling yourself. You're selling yourself as a professional, as someone who knows how to market yourself, and as a writer who takes yourself seriously. Think about the image you're creating. From your clothes down to your business cards, you want your brand to reflect your writing and professionalism. That doesn't necessarily mean you need a suit and pointy-toed shoes. But if you're writing

chick lit, stilettos wouldn't be out of place, or if you're writing a western romance, cowboy boots might work. Make conscious choices and make sure it all works together.

**4. Always be armed.** There are three must-haves for any conference: a snappy elevator pitch, some great conversation starters, and good ears for listening. Make sure your one-line elevator pitch gives a quick, attention-getting synopsis of your book. Leave them wanting to know more. Also, do your research. If you've read on an agent's blog that she visited the same Italian town on vacation last month that you stayed at a year ago, use it. That's a fabulous conversation starter. And when that conversation is in full gear, be a good listener. People like to talk about themselves, and you can learn a great deal about them by asking questions. Who knows, you might just learn something in the process.

**5. Use your body language.** Finally, don't let your body language say you're unapproachable or defensive. If your shoulders are down, your arms are crossed, or you're wearing a tense facial expression, others might not approach you. Keep your head up, a smile on your face, and your posture straight. You're here to have fun!

Conferences can be enlightening, instructive, overwhelming, and tiring all at the same time. But with a little planning, you can make this one the best one yet.

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Bio: Renee Hagar writes sexy women's fiction. She is also a freelance writer and professional speaker. With over 13 years as a business manager and entrepreneur, she teaches career-building workshops. Want to get ready for Dallas? Check out Renee's June online class, *Editors Wear Underwear Too: How to Overcome the Butterflies and Network Brilliantly at a Writers' Conference and Beyond*. Visit [www.authormba.com](http://www.authormba.com) for more details.