

# How to Get Great ROI

from the Distribution Solutions Conference



Getting approval to attend meetings can be challenging. Convincing yourself that you have the time to be away from the office can also be tough. The opportunity to hear from knowledgeable peers is invaluable, whether it's about how to achieve an efficiency or about pitfalls to avoid in adopting a new practice or technology. Experienced attendees use this conference to gain insights that will improve their bottom line. This overview shares feedback from attendees on how to get the most out of the Distribution Solutions Conference.

## To Get Excellent ROI, Make a Plan!

By making a plan before attending the Distribution Solutions Conference, you develop a roadmap for success to leverage every opportunity while at the conference. You can also share that roadmap with superiors and other team members attending. Here are four steps to take before the conference to provide excellent ROI for your company.

1. Write down three to five strategies, practices, technologies, or issues important to the future of your company. Identify your role in meeting goals related to these issues.
2. Review the agenda for the conference and mark the sessions you want to attend that relate to the subjects identified.
3. Identify vendors at the Exposition related to these strategies, practices, technologies, or issues. Prioritize them for visiting during Expo hours.
4. Make a list of speakers or other attendees at the meeting you would like to meet. If you know a company is a leader in a certain area, you may wish to meet counterparts of that company that are attending. A list of attendees by company is provided to each registrant prior to the conference.

## Share the Plan with Your Superiors

If you need to get permission to attend, write a short business case on how attending will help you contribute knowledge and insights to the organization's strategy. Use this business case to make your request for attending the meeting. A sample is provided on the following page.

Good things also happen in a spontaneous fashion. "I just saw a technology that I didn't know existed," said an attendee interviewed on the Expo floor during the 2009 conference. An unexpected contact, a new technology you knew nothing about, or a surprising insight are a consistent part of the attendee experience at the Distribution Solutions Conference.

## Executing Your Plan

A few other pointers can help you prepare for the conference, demonstrate the benefits of attending, and deliver good ROI to your company. When selecting sessions to attend, make sure to note the time and date for each session. Blocks of concurrent sessions are provided at the conference and you want to make sure there are no conflicts.

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*"The distributors who garner the highest return from the Distribution Solutions Conference tend to always be the most involved in planning for and executing against their plan. Sending multiple members of your distribution team allows you to attend multiple business sessions at the same time. This insures that you will be able to access all of the sessions that are relevant to your business needs. This is even more the case when you are talking about the Supplier Expo. The Expo covers potential providers in all areas of your operations and technology business requirements."*

**Roger Toomey, President & CEO, UniPro Foodservice, Inc.,  
2010 Distribution Solutions Conference Chairman**

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When you arrive at the conference, you receive a detailed pocket directory with full conference and exposition information. A hard copy final attendee list will also be provided.

### Quick Tips:

- It seems obvious, but take notes during sessions. Those notes trigger excellent recall on important take-away items. If there are points you want to flesh out, you can expand your thoughts on your flight home or soon after the conference.
- Ask questions when attending sessions or one on one after sessions. The Distribution Solutions Conference is highly interactive. Don't be shy about approaching presenters and other "luminaries." They are accessible. They are your peers.
- Speaker presentations will be made available after the conference. As an attendee, you will be provided a link to access these presentations and can wed them up with your notes.
- If you have a team attending, plan to meet to share out your major take-aways. Depending on your structure, prepare appropriate information to share with other key individuals at your company. Discuss how you will use the information you received and contacts you made to further the strategies of your organization.

*Thanks to Mary Boone, president of Boone Associates, Essex, CT, for ideas on making a business case for attending industry conferences.*



This worksheet provides one way to approach the Distribution Solutions Conference. In this case, we picked a subject of interest to operations professionals. Subjects of interest to a variety of responsibilities are available including distribution, transportation, human resources, information technology, and supply chain. A special track for executives with strategic responsibilities is also available (see sidebar).

## “My company is looking at energy control.”

### Workshop Sessions

Energy Management KPIs

New Technology in Building Expansion

Lighting Incentives

What's Your Supply Chain Energy Management Strategy

Natural Gas for Fueling Foodservice Distribution

### Related Vendors at the Expo

Rytec Corporation - air curtains

American Capital Energy - solar system integrators

Orian Energy Systems - lighting specialist

Digital Lumens - LED based intelligent lighting systems

Resource Efficiency Solutions - lighting products

Breakthrough Fuel - fuel use

Mansfield Oil Company - fuel procurement & use

Silver Eagle Manufacturing - fuel use

Clean Energy - natural gas fueling

### Networking

**X Company** - Relamping DCs - ask them about vendors and what choices they made / had to consider

**Y Company** - new facility includes penthouse refrigeration system. Ask about decision making / vendor.

**Z Company** - on agenda with KPI resource

### Report Out

**Workshop findings** - What are three issues with greatest promise? What is potential ROI? What actuals were shared?

**Expo findings** - New technologies with greatest promise.

Findings on key issue we are looking at for immediate action.

**Networking** - Contacts and their experience with vendors.

Key decision-making factors they found most useful.

## Your Business Case for Attending:

“Our organization is highly focused on finding energy cost savings. Five sessions directly related to controlling or improving energy costs are available at the conference, ranging from energy management KPIs to the use of natural gas as a potential fuel for our fleet.

“In addition, there are at least nine vendors with products or services related to energy control including intelligent lighting systems, solar system integrators, air curtains, fuel procurement, and fuel use.

“I also want to meet my counterpart at X Company who is attending and is speaking at a session. They are known for being on the leading edge on energy issues. I want to find out more about vendors they used and how they made choices.”

## Executive Track

The following sessions are of interest to company leadership members with responsibility for strategy. The first four sessions were specifically designed for the executive track, but other sessions of interest to company leadership are listed. Also of note is the Tuesday General Session featuring a panel of industry leaders who will provide insights and share actions their companies are taking to achieve operational efficiencies and to position their businesses for long-term success. Panelists include Jim Gordon of Gordon Food Service, Bill Mathis of Glazier Foods Company, and Tom Henning of Cash-Wa Distributing Co. of Kearney, Inc.

- Customer Profitability
- Developing Your Leaders for Today and Preparing Your Future Leaders for Tomorrow
- Washington Insight: A Legislative and Regulatory Update
- What's Happening in the US Economy and How It Is Affecting the Foodservice Industry
- How GS1 Standards Will Impact Your Business: A Distributor's and Operator's View
- What Brings a Company To Its Knees? Compliance! How to Prepare for a Compliance Visit
- Developing a Game Plan for Prevailing in Organizing Campaigns
- Succession Planning: "A" Position vs. "A" Player