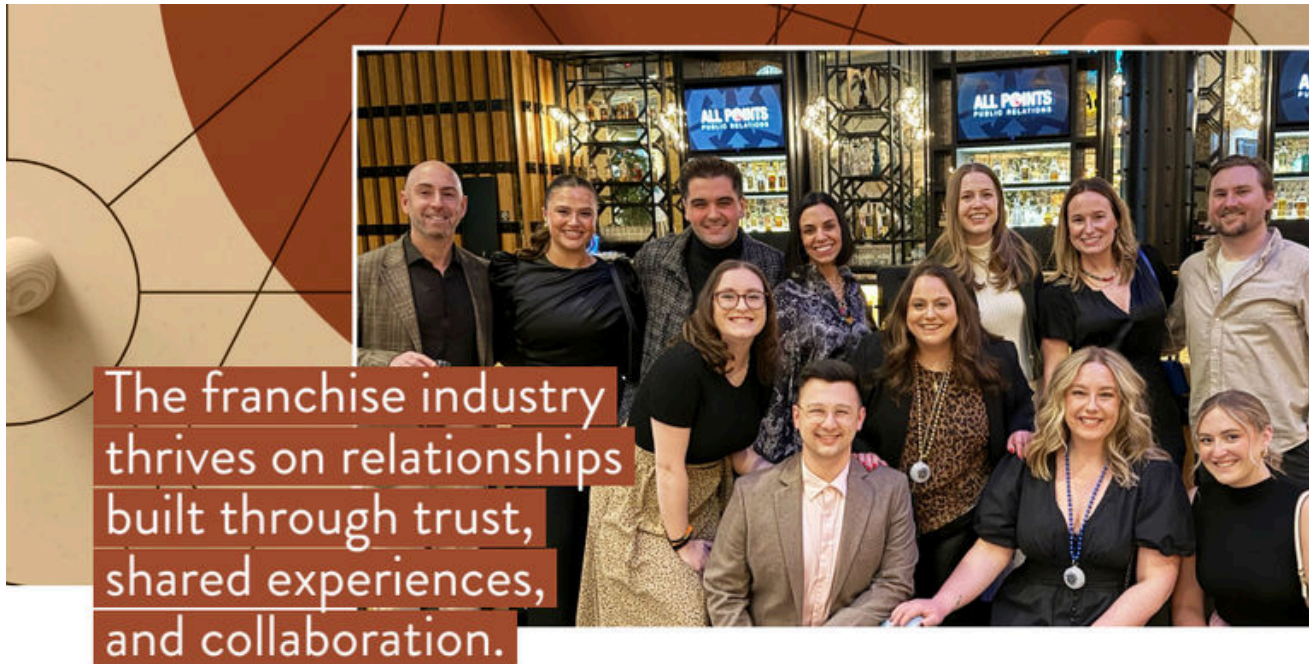




How to Plan Networking Events That Actually Deliver Value

By Jamie Izaks | January/February 2026 Issue



The franchise industry thrives on relationships built through trust, shared experiences, and collaboration.

With so many stakeholders — from franchisors and franchisees to suppliers and media — there's a tremendous opportunity to build meaningful connections. The question isn't whether networking matters; it's how to create events that people are drawn to and leave feeling their time was well spent.

Too often, networking events default to generic formats that feel transactional or forgettable. Over the years, I've seen that the most successful events aren't the ones with the biggest guest lists, but the ones designed with intention at every step. Below are proven strategies franchise leaders can use to plan and execute networking events that foster meaningful connections and measurable outcomes.

Build the Right Room

It's natural to think about networking in terms of who you want to reach, whether that's potential clients, partners, or prospects. But the most effective events are built around a broader view of relationships, including who you can learn from, collaborate with, and stay connected to over time.

Before planning the format or topic, consider who needs to be in the room for the gathering to deliver real value to everyone attending. When your guests leave having made a meaningful connection with someone else in the room, the event is more successful, and your credibility as a connector grows. Focused audiences with shared interests,

often driven by a topic, theme or format that provides a framework, create the best environment for meaningful connections — allowing participants to move beyond surface-level introductions and toward conversations and relationships that extend well beyond the gathering.

Networking Needs Direction

Successful networking rarely happens by accident. Simply bringing people together in a room and hoping conversations take off will lead to surface-level exchanges and missed opportunities.

The most effective networking events provide attendees with a clear starting point. This might be a shared challenge, a guiding question, or even a simple intention, such as giving people time and space to get to know one another. When attendees know *why* they're there and *what* they're meant to engage around, interactions feel more natural and productive.

Providing direction doesn't mean over-structuring the experience. It means creating enough context to replace awkward small talk with relevant, purposeful dialogue while still leaving room for relationships to develop organically.

“

Once the audience and direction are clear, the format you choose can be the difference between a room full of names on badges and a room full of meaningful relationships.”

Create Formats That Drive Connection

Once the audience and direction are clear, the format you choose can be the difference between a room full of names on badges and a room full of meaningful relationships.

In our work hosting events for the Northern Illinois Franchise Association and the International Franchise Association's (IFA) Chicagoland Franchise Business Network (FBN), we've found that fireside chats and moderated panels paired with audience Q&A work especially well for mixed rooms of franchisors, franchisees and suppliers. These formats provide enough structure to spark meaningful discussion, while still leaving space

for attendees to engage with one another around shared challenges. Just as important is building in dedicated time for networking, both before and after programming. The content may draw people in, but it's the conversations that follow where lasting connections are formed.

Meals and happy hours play a similarly strategic role, particularly in conference settings. When attending larger industry events, we often choose smaller dinners or casual drinks as a way to intentionally connect with current clients, prospective partners, colleagues, and longtime friends in the industry.

“

Follow-up is critical.”

These settings encourage organic conversation and create space for relationships to develop naturally. Small touches — like hosting at the local hot spot or creating a shared experience such as an entertainment venue — can elevate the moment and give people a reason to linger. In many cases, these informal gatherings create stronger, more lasting connections than any formal session ever could.

Designing for What Happens After

The real payoff often comes after the event, when attendees have the chance to turn introductions into partnerships or actionable strategies. Follow-up is critical. I've found that personalized messages referencing specific conversations or even simply sharing a photo from the moment reinforce trust and show that the interaction was meaningful.

Events are most successful when they are part of a broader engagement plan. Sharing recap emails, key takeaways, or relevant resources keeps the conversation alive and provides a bridge from the event to ongoing collaboration.

Offering opportunities for continued engagement ensures momentum is maintained and relationships continue to grow, reinforcing the main goal of networking in franchising: every event should feel like the beginning of a network, not just a single moment of connection. ☺



Jamie Izaks is the president of All Points Public Relations. For more information about IFA supplier member All Points Public Relations, please visit franchise.org/suppliers/all-points-public-relations-llc/.