



# Your Guide To A Successful IBA Annual Conference



# Contents

Introduction	3	Meeting Your Peers	7
Preparation Is Key	4	Communication	7
Goals And Objectives	4	Follow-Ups Are Key To Success	8
Your Delegation	5	How To Measure Success	8
Who Should You Meet With?	5	Tips For First-Timers	9
Coordinating Meetings Before And During The Conference	6	The Check-List	11
Hosting Your Own Event	6	Conclusion	14

# Introduction

**The IBA Annual Conference is unlike any other event in the legal calendar.**

For one week each year, thousands of lawyers, business development, and marketing professionals gather in one city to share knowledge, build connections, and strengthen their international networks. It is an extraordinary opportunity, but it can also feel overwhelming if you are not prepared.

Over the past few years, the conference has taken us to Miami, Paris, Mexico City and now, Toronto. Each location has had its own flavour: the glamour and scale of Miami, the intensity and high costs of Paris, and the vibrant energy of Mexico. Yet across all three, one thing has remained consistent: the firms who came well prepared left with stronger relationships and tangible results. Those who did not often felt they had lost valuable time and money.

With the IBA Toronto just around the corner, this guide is designed for BD and marketing professionals, as a helpful tool to prepare for this busy time. It draws on insights shared in Nexl's recent webinar with seasoned IBA experts, as well as years of conversations with clients who attend the event religiously as well as our experience attending the IBA Annual Conference in recent years. It is here to help you and your firm turn what can feel like a whirlwind into a genuine driver of growth.

# The Authors

Our thought leadership is brought to you by our industry experts. With years of experience in legal BD and marketing functions across law firms globally, our team is committed to share their experience and insights with you on a regular basis. Our team has played significant roles in organising IBA conferences on behalf of the firms they worked with in the past, as well as attending the most recent conferences in Paris and Mexico.



**Barbara Koenan**  
Professional Services  
Consultant



**Steven Ongenaet**  
Head of  
Client Services



**Lynn Tellefsen Stehle**  
Head of  
Client Collaborations



**Andrew Hutchinson**  
Chief Revenue  
Officer

# Preparation Is Key

The IBA is not something you can wing. It is a huge undertaking that rewards early planning. The most successful firms start organising their approach almost as soon as the previous conference finishes. At the Paris IBA, for example, hotels near the main venues were sold out nearly a year in advance. Those who left booking too late ended up with long commutes and missed out on early morning and late-night networking opportunities.

***In Paris, one mid-tier firm discovered too late that all central hotels were booked. They ended up commuting an hour each way – missing out on both breakfast briefings and evening receptions.***

Preparation is about more than logistics. It sets the tone for how the entire week will run. If your team arrives with clarity on where they are staying, who they are meeting, and what the goals are, then they can focus fully on the relationships. If you arrive disorganised, the week will quickly descend into chaos.

## Tips

- Begin planning at least 9–12 months ahead. Secure hotels, flights, and venues early.
- Get local intelligence. Host firms often publish helpful city guides. Use them. This latest guide prepared by Bennett Jones, a leading Canadian law firm, is a helpful tool for firms going to Toronto.
- Build a clear timeline with responsibilities assigned, from logistics through to follow-up.
- Align with finance early, getting budgets approved usually takes time.

# Goals And Objectives

One of the biggest mistakes firms make is treating IBA as a social trip. Of course it is fun and energising, but without defined objectives it can also become a blur. At the Miami conference, several firms admitted they had packed diaries but returned unsure what they had achieved.

***“We had more than 80 meetings in Miami,” one partner confessed, “but without clear goals we couldn’t say what we’d achieved. It was exhausting rather than productive.”***

Having goals is not about being rigid, it is about giving direction. Do you want to strengthen ties with your best-friend firms? Do you want to explore opportunities in new geographies? Or is it more about profile raising and brand visibility? Once you know this, it becomes much easier to decide which meetings to prioritise and how to measure success afterwards.

## Tips

- Define what success means for your firm this year.
- Translate that into measurable outcomes such as referrals, new contacts, or visibility.
- Share objectives with your delegation so everyone is working towards the same outcome.

# Your Delegation

Deciding who to send is one of the most important parts of IBA planning. Not everyone who wants to attend should go, and bigger does not always mean better. Delegations should be carefully balanced to reflect your firm's strategy and personality.

At Mexico, one mid-sized firm sent ten partners but no BD professional. Meetings were missed, follow-ups were forgotten, and the week felt disorganised. By contrast, another firm sent only four partners plus a senior BD manager, and they left with clear next steps, contacts logged, and measurable outcomes. The difference was not the number of people, but the planning and support behind them.

***In Mexico City, one firm admitted their lack of BD support led to lost notes and missed follow-ups – while a competitor with fewer lawyers but one strong BD lead left with a clear ROI story.***

## Tips

- Choose partners with cross-border practices and an appetite for networking.
- Include senior leadership for visibility where appropriate.
- Always include BD or marketing professionals – they are the glue that holds it together.
- Brief everyone on firm-wide updates so they can represent the firm, not just their practice.

# Who Should You Meet With?

With thousands of delegates, no one can meet everyone. The challenge is deciding who matters most for your firm. The temptation is to say yes to every invitation, but without prioritisation you risk exhausting yourself and achieving little.

The best approach is to work in concentric circles. At the centre are your best-friend firms and existing referral partners – those relationships you want to strengthen further. Next are target firms in priority geographies or practice areas. Beyond that, you can explore opportunities with new firms, particularly those with niche capabilities or interesting client bases. At Paris, for instance, several firms discovered unexpected referral sources by meeting boutique practices in less obvious markets.

***In Paris, a boutique firm from Eastern Europe turned out to be a hidden gem for a UK firm – opening doors to clients in an industry none of their bigger “friend” firms touched.***

## Tips

- Prioritise existing referral partners and “best friend” firms.
- Consider geographies where your firm wants more inbound/outbound work.
- Use rankings and intelligence tools like Chambers, Legal 500, and Nexl data.
- Stay open to “hidden gems” – not every opportunity is obvious.

# Coordinating Meetings Before And During The Conference

Once the delegate list is released, the race is on. The most organised firms have already booked many of their key meetings by then. At Mexico, some firms were fully scheduled weeks before others even began outreach.

Coordination is as much about managing expectations as it is about logistics. Personalised emails to priority contacts usually work better than mass invites. Once on the ground, things will inevitably change — people cancel, venues move, schedules shift. A strong coordination plan ensures you can adapt without panic.

## Tips

- Send personalised invitations explaining why you want to meet.
- Share your delegation list early with priority firms.
- Prepare briefing packs with key talking points for each meeting.
- Expect last-minute changes. Build flexibility into your schedule.

# Hosting Your Own Event

Hosting a reception or dinner is a hallmark of the IBA. Done well, these events become talking points and strengthen your firm's profile. Done poorly, they can be forgettable or, worse, poorly attended.

***In Mexico City, a firm that hosted a reception in a 19th-century courtyard with local musicians became one of the “must-attend” events of the week. Another, who booked a plain hotel meeting room, struggled with empty seats.***

The most memorable events are those that lean into local culture. In Paris, rooftop views of the Eiffel Tower proved a big draw. The point is not extravagance, but creativity and relevance.

## Tips

- Secure venues early — the best locations book quickly.
- Add local flavour, whether in food, venue, or entertainment.
- Be clear in your invitations (cocktail vs dinner).
- Expect dropouts. Manage numbers realistically.
- Use your event to showcase your brand, but keep it authentic.

# Meeting Your Peers

IBA is not just for lawyers. For BD and marketing professionals, the High Tide conference on the Sunday before the main week is invaluable. It gathers more than 100 peers and provides both practical insights and a sense of community.

***“High Tide is group therapy,” one BD director joked in Mexico. “We share the pain, swap survival tips, and it sets the tone for the week ahead.”***

Beyond the professional benefit, building your own network is hugely valuable. Firms often turn first to BD contacts when seeking referrals, and the relationships you build can support your career as much as your firm.

## Tips

- Attend High Tide – it is the best way to connect with peers.
- Build your own referral network, not just your firm's.
- Keep in touch after the conference – BD friendships often turn into professional opportunities. Expect dropouts. Manage numbers realistically.
- Use your event to showcase your brand, but keep it authentic.

# Communication

The IBA week is unpredictable. Meetings move, events change, people get lost. Without good communication, chaos can quickly take over.

***The best delegations treat communication as a core part of their plan. They set up group chats, share live updates, and make sure no one is left behind.***

Call-out: In Paris, a last-minute venue change almost derailed a dinner – until the BD team updated the WhatsApp group instantly. The whole delegation arrived on time, while other firms were still scrambling.

## Tips

- Create a central WhatsApp group for your delegation.
- Assign one BD professional as the “control centre.”
- Share live updates and daily notes in a shared document or CRM.
- Encourage quick communication rather than long email chains.

# Follow-Ups Are Key To Success

The IBA is only the beginning. The real value comes from what happens afterwards.

***At Seoul, one firm admitted they lost the benefit of 70 meetings because no follow-up was done. Another firm secured two major referrals six months later by staying consistent with their outreach.***

Follow-up requires discipline. It is easy to get back to the office, bury yourself in client work, and let the momentum slip. The firms who track, record, and act on their follow-ups are the ones who see results.

## Tips

- Hold a debrief call within a week to review all meetings.
- Log outcomes in your CRM and assign actions.
- Schedule follow-up reminders at 2 weeks, 1 month, and 3 months.
- Use personalised follow-ups, not generic thank-yous.

# How To Measure Success

ROI is often the hardest part to define, but it is also the most important if you want to secure budget for future IBAs. Success rarely shows up immediately; it often takes months or even years for referrals to materialise. The key is to track consistently.

***One firm in Mexico created a simple ROI dashboard in Nexl. By year end, they could show three new referrals, dozens of warm leads, and increased engagement with best-friend firms – making the case for next year's budget easy.***

## Tips

- Track referrals given and received linked to IBA.
- Monitor new matters arising from introductions.
- Measure engagement: event attendance, social activity, and website traffic.
- Evaluate relationship strength over multiple years.
- Share results in a short internal report for leadership.

# Tips For First-Timers

The annual conference is organised by The International Bar Association (IBA), which is the global voice of the legal profession. Established in 1947, it has grown to include more than 80,000 individual members and 190 bar associations and law societies worldwide. The IBA provides thought leadership, sets professional standards, and offers a platform for lawyers and firms to connect across borders.

The Annual Conference is the IBA's flagship event, rotating each year to a different global city, and attracting more than 5,000 delegates. It combines panel sessions, committee meetings, and practice group seminars with unrivalled networking opportunities. It is also surrounded by a busy "fringe" of firm-hosted receptions, breakfasts, and dinners.

Recent locations have included Miami, Paris, and Mexico City, each with its own atmosphere but the same goal: bringing the global legal community together.

Each conference includes:

- **Official IBA sessions:** Practice group panels, plenaries, and committee meetings that cover everything from energy law to legal tech.
- **Networking opportunities:** The main reason most firms attend. Delegates meet referral partners, strengthen client relationships, and expand their global networks.
- **Fringe events:** Breakfasts, receptions, and dinners hosted by law firms, clients, and service providers.
- **Specialist gatherings:** Including the "High Tide" conference for BD and marketing professionals, now an established part of the IBA week.

## Why First-Timers Should Pay Attention

Walking into your first IBA can feel overwhelming. The scale is hard to grasp until you experience it. Days start with breakfast meetings, are packed with back-to-back sessions and side meetings, and often end late at receptions. For lawyers, it can feel like a marathon of conversations. For BD and marketing professionals, it means constant coordination, problem-solving, and relationship-building.

But first-timers should also know this: the IBA can be career-changing. It is the one week when you will meet more international contacts than in the rest of the year combined. It is also the best opportunity to position yourself within the global BD/marketing community. Many BD professionals say the network they built at their first IBA has stayed with them throughout their careers.

## Practical Tips For First-Timers

### Before the Conference

- Do your homework: Read up on the IBA, the host city, and which firms are attending.
- Align with your firm: Make sure you know why you are going, what your firm wants to achieve, and how you fit in.
- Pack smart: Bring plenty of business cards (yes, still useful) and comfortable shoes.

### During the Conference

- Pace yourself: Do not book back-to-back meetings from 7am to midnight. Leave space for informal conversations and unexpected opportunities.
- Attend official sessions: They are a great way to meet lawyers in your practice area and add substance to your conversations.
- Visit the High Tide Conference: If you are in BD/marketing, this is the best orientation you could hope for.
- Build your own network: Introduce yourself to other BD professionals, share notes, and learn how other firms are approaching IBA.

### After the Conference

- Capture everything: Notes, business cards, conversations, and follow-ups should be recorded before you forget.
- Follow up promptly: Send thank-yous and LinkedIn requests within days of returning.
- Share your learning: Write an internal summary of what you saw, who you met, and what the firm can improve next year.

## Final Words for First-Timers

The IBA Annual Conference is big, busy, and sometimes chaotic. But it is also inspiring, energising, and full of opportunities if you approach it with the right mindset. Remember that everyone there, from senior partners to first-time BD managers, is trying to achieve the same thing: building stronger relationships. Go in with curiosity, an open mind, and a plan, and you will walk away with contacts, ideas, and experiences that will shape your career for years to come.

# The Check-List

## 9–12 Months Before (Right after the previous IBA ends)

- Review and debrief: Analyse what worked well and what did not at the last IBA. Gather feedback from lawyers and BD team.
- Set initial objectives: Agree what the firm wants to achieve at the next IBA (e.g. deepen best-friend ties, explore new markets, brand visibility).
- Budget discussions: Secure early budget approval for travel, hotels, events, marketing materials, and contingency.
- Book hotels and venues: Reserve central accommodation and hold potential event venues before they sell out.
- Form project team: Assign a BD/marketing lead, logistics manager, and partner sponsor.

## 6–9 Months Before

- Delegation planning: Decide which lawyers and BD/marketing professionals will attend. Ensure balance across practice areas and geographies.
- Research priority firms: Use Chambers, Legal 500, Nexl data, and past referral records to identify target firms.
- Initial outreach: Inform best-friend firms you are attending and start informal conversations about meeting.
- Event concept: Define whether you will host a reception, dinner, or breakfast. Align with firm strategy and brand.
- Marketing plan: Develop a content calendar (social media, newsletters, invites, pre-IBA thought leadership).

## 3–6 Months Before

- Confirm delegation: Finalise attendee list and brief them on expectations, objectives, and budget responsibilities.
- Draft briefing materials: Create firm-wide credentials, practice area highlights, and “talking points.”
- Secure event venue: Confirm contracts, catering, and entertainment for your hosted event.
- Logistics check: Confirm flights, visas, insurance, and per diems for delegation.
- Design branding: Prepare event invitations, signage, giveaways, and collateral that reflect the host city’s culture.

# The Check-List

## 2–3 Months Before

- Delegate training: Hold a prep session for lawyers covering networking etiquette, firm positioning, and objectives.
- Prepare CRM and systems: Set up shared folders or Nexl projects to capture contacts and meeting notes.
- Start scheduling meetings: Reach out to priority firms with personalised invitations.
- Plan communications: Set up WhatsApp/Slack group for internal coordination.
- Register for High Tide: Ensure BD/marketing professionals are signed up.

## 1 Month Before

- Briefing packs complete: Finalise firm-wide briefing notes for each meeting with key talking points.
- Reconfirm event details: Double-check venues, RSVPs, catering, and technical needs.
- Social media teasers: Start posting that your firm will be attending.
- Test logistics: Share schedules with all delegation members and run through likely “what-if” scenarios.
- Client outreach: Let clients know who from your firm will be attending and offer to connect with them in person.

## 1 Week Before

- Final team briefing: Walk through the schedule, objectives, and expectations. Share crisis contacts. Meeting confirmations: Reconfirm all scheduled meetings.
- Distribute materials: Ensure everyone has digital and printed briefing packs, business cards, and event invites.

# The Check-List

## During The Conference

- Stick to the plan, stay flexible: Keep meetings on track but allow time for ad-hoc introductions.
- Daily debriefs: Gather notes each evening and log them in CRM.
- Internal communication: Use WhatsApp group for live updates and changes.
- Track attendance: Record who attended your events and note quality of engagement.
- Leverage BD presence: BD/marketing professionals should connect the dots, capture intelligence, and support follow-up.

## 1-2 Weeks After

- Team debrief: Hold a post-IBA call to review all meetings, opportunities, and next steps.
- CRM updates: Upload notes, contacts, and actions. Assign responsibilities for follow-ups.
- Thank-yous: Send personalised follow-up notes to all priority contacts.
- Report to leadership: Share an initial ROI snapshot with highlights, photos, and early outcomes.

## 1-3 Months After

- Follow-up cadence: Check progress on introductions, referrals, and agreed next steps.
- Ongoing engagement: Share thought leadership, invite contacts to webinars, and stay in touch.
- ROI tracking: Update leadership on tangible outcomes (referrals received, introductions made, opportunities created).
- Begin planning for next year: Note what to improve and add to your “lessons learned” file.

# Conclusion

The IBA Annual Conference is demanding, but it is also one of the most rewarding opportunities for law firms and their BD and marketing teams. With careful preparation, clear goals, strong coordination, and disciplined follow-up, the week can deliver results that last for years.

Whether you are a first-timer or a seasoned attendee, approach the IBA with a plan, stay flexible, and remember to enjoy the experience. Done right, it will quickly become one of the most valuable weeks in your professional calendar.





1 Sussex Street  
Sydney, NSW 2000

**nexl.cloud**

Nexl is a leading provider of innovative legal technology solutions aimed at creating efficiencies, accelerating growth and providing data-driven insights that drive smart decision making. We offer scalable solutions for law firms of all shapes and sizes. Founded by legal professionals with vast experience working within legal firms, Nexl grew out of a desire to fundamentally change the way that legal firms grow and engage with internal and external stakeholders. The existing way of managing these relationships doesn't work. Today, we're driving the delivery of smart, innovative and technology-driven services to clients worldwide. Smart, insight-driven solutions underpin Nexl's purpose. Drawing from our own practical experience working within the professional services industry, our purpose is to develop and deliver technology solutions that will drive positive change in how law firms manage their client relationships and grow their practice.

Nexl™ Pty Ltd 2025 All rights reserved.