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If You're Going to New York City: Pub U and BEA Tips for First-Timers

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Last year, courtesy of IBPA and MBPA, I attended my first IBPA Publishing University. I was so excited and see/do/hear everybody and everything. Fortunately, I've been to enough conferences to tell myself to calm down, take a step back and think.

Now I'm suggesting the same to you, so you'll go to New York and be strategic so you can leave with great benefits. Here are my top ten tips for getting the most out of your first PubU and BEA experience.

1. **Make hotel reservations early and carefully.** Last year, I made my reservations through the website. Then I started to think about it. After a call to the hotel and a conversation with a knowledgeable and friendly hotel desk clerk, I changed my plans. New York City has incredible taxes, which added a lot onto the bill. While the rate itself was reasonable for New York City, the taxes kicked the cost way up.

Consider instead finding a hotel in New Jersey. There are many in the Secaucus/Meadowlands area. They are comparatively cheaper, near food and shopping, and the bus to NYC usually picks you up right at the hotel.

If you're driving just for the day, I recommend going to the same area and parking. It's not unusual to pay \$50/day to park your car in NYC. Add that to the \$6.00 cost of the Lincoln Tunnel, plus food, and you're spending some serious cash just for one day. Instead, for about \$20, you can drive to the Secaucus Park and Ride and [take the bus](#) into the city. They run frequently during the day and night, and so do the buses.

2. **Set goals.** What do you really want to accomplish? Do you want to (1) network with other publishers, (2) meet vendors, (3) Learn about a particular topic, or (4) something else? Decide your three top priorities. Doing so will help you sort the days out and focus on what you need/want most while you are there.

3. **Dress comfortably but professionally.** You'll see all kinds of dress from suits to jeans, so anything will be acceptable. BUT you don't know who you're going to meet. Business casual is the safest bet. And wear uber-comfortable shoes because you'll be walking around a lot – especially at BEA. Nothing will zap your energy more than tired tootsies.
4. **Bring your business cards** – lots of them – and one or two of your books. Again, you don't know who you might meet. Keep your cards in the pouch that holds your name badge so they're easy to get when you need them.
5. **Study the IBPA floor plan.** Based on your goals, circle the breakouts and venues you most want to attend. If there are speakers you want to meet, make a list of who they are and when/where they are speaking. Keep the list with you and make sure you get into their sessions. Drop off your books at the end of one session to save your place for the next session.

If you plan to connect with a speaker, I suggest doing it either after they are set up or after the session. If you try to talk to them while they are busy setting up their presentation, they won't be focused and you'll be disappointed. If you time it right and ask for what you want clearly and briefly, most of the time they are happy to connect with you afterward and will give you a way to contact them.

Last year, I wanted to meet Sara Nelson from O Magazine. She was on a panel and I sat in front and made eye contact with her during the presentation. I also made a point to write down some things she said that I liked. At the end, I went up to her and told her one of those things. I showed her a book and asked her how I could connect with her to get it included in the O book reviews. She gave me her information and told me to write PUB U in the subject line. Caveat: I did email her several times and she didn't respond. However, I took a chance – one I wouldn't otherwise have had.

6. **Study the BEA brochure.** BEA is so big that it's really easy to get lost, dazzled and distracted. It took me a couple years to really be productive. Here's how BEA is organized and how you can plan your time strategically:

Classes: There are some really good presentations at BEA by people you might want to learn from and/or meet – like about book clubs, Amazon, Google or digital everything. The presentations are on the exhibit floor and also in classrooms. Figure out what you want to learn and list the date and time. Study the floor plan and, when you get there, walk around and find the stages or classrooms. If you have a PDA that will buzz you, set it for fifteen minutes before the class and get there early. Some classes have tons of space while others are standing room only or closed.

Signings: There are free books in abundance and two kinds of book signings: Author events and the autographing area.

Author events: These are on the exhibit floor and are part of a publisher's booth. The day and time the author is signing is listed in the BEA book (which you get at registration, but can also download online). Go early to your signings. In 2010 there were some publishers who limited the number of books.

Autographing Tables: There are like cattle lines. The more popular the author is, the longer the line. The line for the Duchess of York's newest book was so long that it took about an hour. It was the same for the "stars" in every genre. Be prepared.

FYI: You can meet a lot of people in line while waiting. I've met book reviewers, reading group leaders, etc.

FYI2: You'll get more books than you know what to do with... and you really don't want to cart them around all day. So take a suitcase for your books. You can't bring it into the exhibit hall, but there will be places you can check your suitcase and fill it as needed; the fee is nominal.

7. **Food:** There are places to eat, including a food court in the Javits Center. I find that I'm usually so busy that taking a lunch is bothersome – not always because of the time it takes to eat, but because of the long lines. I suggest that you eat a decent breakfast and then pack some snack bars, nuts or trail mix and a bottle of water – enough to tide you over. You can keep them in your purse or, if you don't want to be carrying them around, in the suitcase you check. Then, when you go to unload the books you got, exchange them for food and water.
8. **Special Events:** Some publishers hold special events, like wine and cheese parties. If they are open to everyone, they'll be listed – usually at day's end. Sometimes, if they fit into your schedule, they are fun and worth doing.
9. **Follow Up:** When you get back to your hotel at night, make a list of whom you met and want to contact when you get home. This is really, really important. If there is one place that I've missed opportunities, it's here. Sometimes a follow-up goes nowhere, but other times it's led to an interview or something equally important.
10. **HAVE FUN!** It's easy to get so overwhelmed that you forget that Pub U and BEA are learning vehicles. If you take the time to follow these suggestions and chunk each event into your own "best fit" pieces, you'll have a great time and meet some really cool people. Enjoy it!