How to Make the Most of an Educational STEM Convention

Technology Conventions can be an amazing experience. The newest educational technology is on display and there are many opportunities for teachers to explore and stretch their knowledge in the many aspect of STEM. On the flipside, technology conventions can also be very overwhelming. There is a multitude of activities and materials to view and sometimes only two days to experience it all. So once the registration, airfare and hotel are booked, how else does one prepare to get the most out of an educational technology convention? Here are my top five tips:

1. *Don’t Miss the Opening or Closing Keynote Speaker.* You may be tempted to sleep in after a long flight or head out early to the airport but making time for keynotes is important. These speakers are the headliners of the convention. They are the experts in the field and are the most well-known of the presenters there. Even when I have been to a convention as a subject matter expert sharing insight at a booth, I have tried to sneak away to hear the keynote speakers and have never been disappointed.
2. *Make Time for the Exhibit Hall, bit Don’t Lose Time There*. Often, I have heard teachers walking by saying they missed a presentation because they stayed too long in the exhibit hall; where educational companies display their latest materials and services. These halls are open throughout the event, so don’t feel like you must get through the whole room in one visit.
3. *Be Selective Visiting Booths.* No matter what your school position, there’s many booths that provide a glimpse of what’s happening in your area of education. Be wary of the booths that may only have sales people who know little more than their products’ talking points. The “time worthy” booths are staffed with educational and technology experts who are there to answer your questions. A notable example of this is VEX Robotics’ booth. You can drive some actual robots, talk to tech experts if you are having issues with your hardware or software, or have a discussion on a variety of topics with their educational researchers.
4. *Use the App!* Almost all technology conventions offer an app for download a few weeks before the event. Most apps give you schedule times and maps for the event. Others offer great features, like a chance to register for classes earlier (many good ones get filled up so don’t miss out!) and save connections that you make while at the event (don’t have to carry business cards!)
5. *Divide and Conquer*-Conventions are a great way to bond with your colleagues, but don’t miss out on some great learning because your stick to your group. GO through the schedule the night before and decide what presentations everyone wants to here. Going to different ones and bringing back information to the whole group is a great way to get the most value for your school, while giving you a chance to connect with new people and collaborate of what other schools are accomplishing.

Educational Connections are the place to be if you want to see a collection of the latest innovators that are sharing their ideas, solutions and goals. It is truly a worthwhile experience and one that every teacher should a have chance to attend if he or she can.