

Preparing for the PASS Summit 2017

First Timers' Tips for Maximizing and Enhancing Your Conference Experience



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Introduction

I prepared this guide for some of my friends and colleagues to help them make the most out of their very first SQL PASS Summit experience. Besides, I wish someone wrote something like this back in 2007.

Based on the feedback I got a few years ago about this guide, I've decided to make it available as an e-book for a quick reference.

Congratulations! You have finally decided to attend the largest SQL Server conference in the world. You're not alone. Every year, more and more SQL Server professionals try their best to attend the PASS Summit. It's like a mecca for anybody who works with SQL Server. And, whether it's their first time attending or have been coming back since their first attendance, the feedback has been the same: **this is the best Microsoft Data Platform event you could ever imagine**. I wouldn't want to spoil the surprise but I assure you, you are in for a big one.

As you prepare to attend this year's PASS Summit in October, I've put together several tips and guidelines on making the experience worthwhile. Like you, I was once a first-time attendee back in 2007 when the PASS Summit was held in Denver, CO (it was also my very first time to speak at a North American event.) I will never forget that experience simply because it has influenced my career growth, my involvement in the SQL Server community, and developed my personality in the process.

I hope you find these tips and guidelines valuable.

Preparing for Your Trip

This year's PASS Summit will be held in Seattle, WA. If you are not from Seattle, chances are that you will be travelling to attend the conference. The PASS Summit has been held in different cities around the US – from Denver, CO, Charlotte, NC, Orlando, FL, etc. Whether you're flying or driving to Seattle, here are several tips to help you prepare for your travel arrangements.

United States Travel Visa



If you're from the United States or from a country that does not require a visa to travel to the United States, you can skip this section. The reason I've included this section is because the PASS Summit has become a melting pot of SQL Server professionals from all around the world – Asia, Australia, Europe, Africa, etc. Make sure you have a US visa even before you arrange your flights. Citizens from countries that do not require a US visa are lucky enough that they can come any time they want. I had to apply for a US visa back in 2007 to visit Disneyworld in Orlando. And I still have to renew my US visa until now.

Airfare



Whether you're from the mainland US or outside, chances are that you will be flying in to Seattle (or maybe you're like me who prefer to do road trips and stop to see sights along the way.) The [Seattle-Tacoma International Airport](#) (Airport Code: **SEA**) is accessible via the local US carriers like [Delta](#), [US Airways](#), [United](#), [Alaska Airlines](#), etc. You should be booking your flights by now or you run the risk of increased airfare prices as you come close to the event.

Plan which flights and routes to take. Sometimes, even the routes and the arrival/departure dates have an effect on the price. This is where travel sites like [Expedia](#), [Travelocity](#), [Priceline](#), etc. can help you with the planning.

Accommodation



It is recommended to book hotels within the vicinity of the [Washington State Convention and Trade Center](#). Check out the [PASS Summit website](#) for more information about the room block that PASS has arranged with those hotels. Alternatively, your next best option would be about 1-2 miles (1.6-3.2 kilometers) away from the venue. If you can no longer find any accommodation, check whether or not you know somebody who would be willing to share a room with you. Just make sure you bring extra ear plugs in case you or the person you're sharing the room with snores. I've done my fair share of room sharing on some of the events that I have attended due to budget constraints. But these have been with people that I know and have engaged with. **Trust is key** here especially that you'll be leaving some of your personal stuff in the room with someone that you don't regularly spend time with.

It is recommended to find a place within walking distance from the venue. That's because there will be activities and events outside of the main conference where you will be prompted to consume alcoholic beverages (I don't drink so I don't worry about this.) In the past, parties from [SentryOne](#), [PragmaticWorks](#), Microsoft, etc. were hosted within blocks away from the venue.

And, I'm pretty sure you wouldn't want to miss those. It's best to be very familiar with reading maps – Google, Bing, MapQuest (I don't know anyone who uses this nowadays) or your good old-fashioned printed maps – to get an idea of how far away your hotel is from the

convention center and from the party venues. You certainly wouldn't want to be bringing your backpack/bag to the party after the conference day is over.

[AirBnB](#), anyone? [CouchSurfing](#) is also another option.

Public Transport



Whether you're taking a cab or the [Light Rail Transit](#) from the airport to your hotel or taking a bus daily from the hotel to the conference center, knowing your means of moving around helps relieve a bit of stress. I know, because back in 2007 when I attended my very first PASS Summit, my accommodation was about 2 miles away from the conference center (that's all my budget can afford.) You can check the [local Seattle public transport website](#) for options and the schedule. This also helps you plan your after-conference events to make sure you do not miss the last trip of the local bus. Plus, if you intend to go sightseeing before or after the conference, knowing which public transport to take to get you to your location can maximize your time to get to see more places.

Or you can always call [Uber](#). Or [Lyft](#).

Travel Packages



I've tried arranging flights and accommodation both individually or as a package. Depending on the availability, one may be cheaper than the other. It might be better for you

to book your travel and accommodation as a travel package thru [Expedia](#), [Travelocity](#), [Priceline](#), etc.

TIP: Think you're saving a few hundred dollars with one option versus another? Think again. If you end up spending more time, effort and stress muscles, I doubt it would be cheaper in the long run. Sometimes, you don't get to pick the hotel you are in. You could wind up further away from the convention center than you expected.

Communication



You can skip this section if you're from the United States.

Roaming charges are expensive if you're coming from outside the United States. You don't want to blow up your monthly plan by incurring international call charges. Besides, you already paid so much by deciding to attend the PASS Summit. When you're on roaming, both incoming and outgoing calls are charged. Grab a prepaid phone from any 7-11 or CVS stores for US\$ 20 and top it up with a US\$ 20 load. That is usually enough for about 200 minutes. You can forward calls from your phone to this prepaid phone to save on roaming charges. Plus, you can call anybody at the event using this prepaid phone in case you need to meet up before you go to the next session or the after-event parties. I've been using [TracFone](#) for 3 years now and that has saved me a lot every time I travel to the US. Just keep work-related calls to a minimum. You're here to attend a conference, learn and enjoy.

Data plans are a bit challenging, especially if your phone is locked to your service provider. [AT&T](#) and [Sprint](#) provide prepaid data plans where you can just plug the SIM card on your phone and you can be online. You can search for other cost-effective alternatives for surfing the internet on your phone without breaking the bank.

WiFi is available at the conference center. But don't expect it to be as fast as what you have at work. Plan your internet usage when you're at the conference center. You can

download work-related emails while at the hotel and sync them back at the end of the day. It doesn't hurt to be disconnected every once in a while.

TIP: Always be cautious about connecting to public WiFi access, especially if you're working with sensitive information. **As data professionals, security should be a high priority.** Consider using a secure VPN connection every time you connect to public WiFi.

What to Bring

Don't ever think it is too early to plan for what you need to bring to the event. You need to be strategic to make sure that you bring your necessities but not overly packed that you incur charges for your excess baggage – unless, of course, you are driving to Seattle.

Gadgets, a laptop, power adapter and possibly transformer



You're a geek so I know without a shadow of doubt that you'll carry a laptop or a tablet of some sort. Besides, I'm sure you'll sneak in some work in between sessions because you're sharing the on-call DBA duties with the new hire. If you can, bring the lightest and thinnest laptop you possibly can have. I'm not suggesting that you buy one just for the PASS Summit, although, it doesn't hurt to do so. But imagine walking around the conference center the whole day with your heavy laptop in your backpack. That's a quick way to get a back pain. An iPad Pro, Surface Pro, the new Surface Book or any Android tablet can be an alternative if you can do your work with those gadgets. I wish I can do that but most of the presentations that I do involve working with 5-8 virtual machines for the demos so I can't just ditch my brick-heavy laptop.



Bring the necessary power adapters that you need for your gadgets. I bet that you'll be using your smartphone a lot during that week to instantly check emails, the next session, send a quick tweet about that great idea you've just learned, or just simply answering phone calls. Your phone charger will be your next best friend throughout that week. Maybe a portable battery pack?

If you are coming from a country that uses voltage other than 110V, you definitely need a step-down transformer to get your gadgets charged. Plan to either bring one with you or check with the nearest [RadioShack in Seattle](#) if they have one available. Yes, RadioShack is still around - surprisingly. A cheaper alternative is to visit [Best Buy](#), [Office Depot](#), [Staples](#) or [Target](#).

TIP: Don't you know that power strips are a great way to make new friends? Since all attendees are geeks and carry their laptops and gadgets with them, the limited number of power sockets make them a scarce commodity. Bringing one with you to connect your own gadgets and share with others is a great way to be involved in the SQL Server community in a very simple way. That's the main reason I carry one with me during these events.

The Mighty Pen and Paper

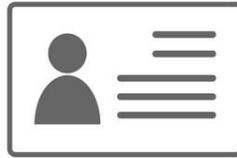


"The faintest ink is more powerful than the sharpest memory – Chinese proverb"

You might think I'm old school because I included the pen and paper. Besides, I can't even read my own handwriting so why am I encouraging you to do so? [Studies confirm](#) that the notes that you take with pen and paper help you retain what you wrote better than typing

it on your laptop or tablet. And, yes, the study includes using a stylus being used on tablets but using pen and paper is still better.

Business Cards



What's the quickest way to recall someone else's name and contact information? I bet a business card handed over to you is much quicker than you typing on your smart phone (unless you work for one of the sponsors or exhibitors who have those handheld scanners that scan your badges to take your contact details.) You still have several weeks to go before the PASS Summit. Make sure you bring business cards with you that you can easily hand out to people you will meet. You also need make sure that you have the correct information on your business cards, including social media accounts. Your PASS Summit badge will include your Twitter handle if you have provided it in your registration. And, don't be afraid to ask for others' business cards. It's a great networking tool.

Proper Clothing



Seattle is a bit colder during the fall. Weather forecast during the week of the PASS Summit will be between [11 C/52 F to 13 C/55 F](#) with a little bit of rain - even colder at night. Bring the appropriate clothes for the weather. Keep yourself warm whether you're outdoors or indoors. Conference room temperature is usually cold due to air conditioning. Pack sweaters and coats for the whole week. Just make sure you have enough space in your luggage to put in those swags that the vendors and sponsors give away during and at the end of the event.

TIP: As the PASS Summit is scheduled on the week of Halloween, be sure to bring a costume with you. You are going to need it for the Welcome Reception. That is if you want to dress up in a Halloween costume.

Camera



Take a lot of pictures. Even your phone has a digital camera in it. I bet that you would like to see what Seattle has to offer before or after the event. Or, maybe even just take a photo of the people you meet at the summit. If you're not from Seattle, you're technically a tourist. And as most travelers usually say, "**Take nothing but pictures leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time.**" Now, if you're really into this digital photography thing that you spend a lot of money for those fancy gadgets and lenses, maybe you can hang out with your fellow SQL Server professionals who are into the same thing. Pat Wright ([blog](#) | [Twitter](#)) started the PASS Summit Photo Walk back in 2010 for photography enthusiasts attending the summit to meet up and get geeky with photography. I haven't seen any announcements about it for this year. You might want to check out their [Flickr page](#) to see some of the interesting pictures taken during the previous PASS Summit events. Better yet, ping him on social media and ask if there is going to be one this year.

Extras

I've already mentioned the possibility of bringing along extra luggage to squeeze those event swags in. For those in the US, this is as easy as buying a box in the local US Postal Service office and shipping it back home. For us outside of the US, this is easier said than done. Coordinate with your colleagues and friends who are also attending the summit. You can split the swags among you so you can carry them back home. Just be careful not to carry items that are not allowed by the [US TSA](#). I remember Quest Software (now part of Dell Software) giving away sticky toys at a past event. Those travelling by plane had to leave them behind.

Carry extra cash (or credit card) if you plan to go sightseeing before or after the summit. For a list of recommended places to visit, check out the [Visit Seattle website](#) about this for more details.

Preparing Before Travelling

For those who travel a lot as part of their job, this comes as second nature. For those who don't, this is for you (and me, too.)

Travelling to a city you've never been to can be both fun and challenging. It's fun because it opens the door to a lot of learning opportunities; challenging because you need to deal with something new and unfamiliar. If you come from North America, the only challenge you might face when travelling to Seattle for the PASS Summit will be the time zone difference. You speak the same language, drive on the same side of the road, have burger and fries for dinner, etc. I could go on and on to assure you that it's no different from going on a road trip. Your body clock may throw you off a bit if you're coming from the west coast like I am because you now have to sleep and wake up a bit earlier than usual. Imagine how it felt like for somebody who comes from the other side of the globe. It took me about 22 hours to get from Singapore to Denver back in 2007. So, whether your time zone is off by 3 hours or 13, these tips will help you prepare before you hit the road.

Get enough sleep, be fit and have a balanced diet



I do my best to get an average of 7.5 hours of sleep a day. That's because my brain doesn't function well when I don't get enough sleep. And, I've proven that a lot of times when solving critical issues.

In order to really maximize your PASS Summit attendance, your body has to be prepared as well. Get enough sleep the week before you travel. This is the best preparation you could ever make especially if you're coming from a different time zone. You want to be physically prepared for the changes that you'll face during the summit. Plus, remember all those parties I told you about? You'll have the Welcome Reception and the Exhibitor Reception to start with. I haven't even told you about the [Denny Cherry and Associates](#)

[Consulting](#)-sponsored [SQLKaraoke](#) night and all the other unofficial parties going on that I'm not supposed to talk about. I bet that your earliest time to hit the sack may be at around 10PM every night. If you don't get enough sleep now, don't expect to get it during the week of the summit. And, you have to really be intentional about this especially when you're coming from a different time zone. I knew how it felt like to be half awake at work the week after my very first summit experience. And that was just because of the time zone difference because I was already in bed as early as 10PM.

This is the main reason why I got myself a [Fitbit Surge](#). I make sure that I get enough sleep every day, regardless of whether or not I'm travelling.



Physical exercise is something that a lot of IT professionals don't get much of. We sit in our desk the whole day to fix issues and fight fires. If we're lucky, we get to implement cool projects. But that shouldn't prevent us from keeping ourselves fit. I always say that **we are the only person responsible for taking care of ourselves**. Get yourself fit and exercise. You don't need to go to the gym. All you need is determination and willingness to fit (pun intended) this routine in your schedule. Even a 20-minute walk twice a day would be enough. This will help you become a better IT professional overall, not just in preparation for the summit. Oh, and if you want to join your fellow SQL Server professionals do the **SQLRun** tradition at the summit, follow the [#SQLRun hashtag on Twitter](#) (they used to have an Eventbrite registration page for those who want to join.) It's a fun way to be fit at the summit.



Since I already mentioned about those official and unofficial parties at the summit, expect a lot of junk food pouring along your way. I'm not a big fan of eating out because my wife's a great cook but you can't avoid that when you travel. This is especially true at the summit. You will be digging in to a lot of great food and refreshments – alcoholic or not – most of which is definitely junk food for those health-conscious individuals. You might want to load up with a lot of healthy food prior to hitting the road. Now, I'm not saying there won't be any healthy ones during the parties but they usually don't go well with alcoholic beverages – vegan, anyone? All I'm saying is to get yourself ready with a lot of unhealthy food during the summit and make sure you prepare for it. That also means a lot of coffee in the morning to keep you awake during the sessions.

Prepare Your Personal Schedule



You'll be at the summit for a week at most – maybe even longer if you decide to see the city. You want to learn as much as you can and meet as many people as possible. But that doesn't mean you're completely off the radar. As you prepare your summit schedule, be sure to include time to call back home and say "*Hi*" to your family. Put it in your calendar so you get an alert when it's about time to make that phone call. You also need to include time to call your colleagues back at the office for updates. They may have a pressing issue that can be resolved by implementing an idea that you've just learned from one of the sessions. You might even be able to raise this issue with the Microsoft engineers at the SQL Server CSS Clinic – a free engagement with the Microsoft SQL Server CSS engineers, the very folks who get on the call when you open up a ticket with Microsoft. Or, you may even share the excitement with your team that they would think about attending next year's summit. This is crucial if you're coming from a different time zone. You wouldn't want to be calling your colleagues at 6PM

when they're on the east coast (you should be calling your spouse or your kids instead). Get it in your calendar so you don't forget.

Learn How to Read Maps



In the digital age of [Google Maps](#), [Bing Maps](#), [Waze](#), [MapQuest](#) (does anyone still use this nowadays?) or other mapping technologies available today, it's easy to laugh at somebody holding a printed map to find locations and directions. But this has been one of the most important skills that I've learned during my years in the army reserve training (I even [blogged](#) about its importance). When your smartphone battery has run out of juice and there's no power outlet in sight, knowing where you are and how to get to where you want to go spells the difference between a sumptuous meal and a chilling walk back at the hotel.

Know where your hotel is relative to the convention center. If you're driving, know where the parking spaces are. If you've scheduled attendance to the parties, know where the restaurants are. This will help you schedule which parties to go first. If the venues are completely opposite to one another, measure the distance and the time it takes to go from one party venue to the other. I'm not really concerned about the weather during the week of the summit – Canadian weather is so much colder – so walking to the party venues is not a challenge. However, I'm more concerned about carrying my bag to go to these parties if they are about four to six blocks away from each other. Also, know the architectural layout of the convention center. If you have scheduled a session that is on the other side of the convention center, be sure you get there in time to get a seat. We had feedback several years ago about the location of the conference halls relative to the banquet halls. Reading the [conference center layout](#) is the first thing that I do after I get my registration onsite.

For those who live in North America, this might seem trivial. But knowing [cardinal directions](#) is very important. I didn't know where north, south, east and west were when I first drove around Canada back in 1999.

Prepare Your Party Schedule



This is the nth time I've mentioned this. It doesn't mean that I only go to the PASS Summit to attend parties. But I certainly want you to have as much fun as you can possibly have during the summit. And, going to these official and unofficial parties is one way to make sure you do. I've listed down some of those that are publicly available. Those that aren't publicly available, I leave that for you to find out. I'm sure you are aware of the party etiquettes but here are the top three in my list – RSVP, network and D.I.M. (drink in moderation.) I use the acronym **R.n.D** to remind myself of these three things, although the last one doesn't really apply to me. Still, while these parties are open to public, some of them require that you sign up prior to going. For the official ones that are sanctioned by PASS, you need to show your conference badge and, in some cases, a wrist band as proof of attendance. The unofficial ones do have their own registration sites so be sure to check those out and register if you plan on attending.

Official PASS Summit Parties

(This is an incomplete list. As of the time of writing, details regarding both official and unofficial PASS-sanctioned parties are still not available. This reference will be updated as information becomes available, hopefully, before the PASS Summit)

- [PASS Summit First Timers Orientation Meeting](#) – Tuesday, 31-Oct 4:45PM to 6:00PM (Convention Center, Ballroom 6E) sponsored by [SolarWinds](#)
- **Welcome Reception** – Tuesday, 31-Oct 6:00PM to 7:30PM (Convention Center, Hall 4A & Atrium Lobby) Get your Halloween costumes ready
- **Exhibitor Reception** – Wednesday, 01-Nov 6:00PM to 8:00PM (Convention Center, Hall 4B)

Un-Official Incomplete List of PASS Summit parties and events

- [MidnightDBA Meetup](#) –Monday, 30-Oct 5:00PM to 7:00PM ([Top Pot Doughnuts](#), sponsored by [MinionWare LLC](#))
- [PASS Women in Technology \(WIT\) Happy Hour](#) – Tuesday, 31-Oct 4:00PM to 6:00PM ([TapHouse Grill](#), sponsored in part by [SentryOne](#))
- [SQLKaraoke](#) –Tuesday, 31-Oct 9:30PM onwards ([Cowgirls](#), sponsored by [Denny Cherry and Associates Consulting](#), [SentryOne](#) and [SIOS](#))
- PragmaticWorks After Party – Wednesday, 01-Nov 8:00PM onwards ([Hard Rock Cafe](#), sponsored by [PragmaticWorks](#)) **NOTE:** *You need to pick up your wristband at the Pragmatic Works PASS Booth #307*
- [Idera PASS After Party](#) – Thursday, 2-Nov 7:00PM onwards ([Highway 99 Blues Club](#), sponsored by [Idera](#))
- [Redgate Rocks Party @ PASS Summit](#) – Thursday, 2-Nov 7:30PM onwards ([1927 Events](#), sponsored by [RedGate](#)) **NOTE:** *You need to pick up your #RedgateRocks ribbon at the RedGate booth*
- [PASS Summit 2017 LGBT Meetup](#) – email [Andy Mallon](#) for more details
- [PASS Summit Games Night](#) - Thursday, 02-November 7:00PM to 10:30PM (Convention Center)

If you would like to get in on the unofficial parties, be sure to check out their registration links. As I've mentioned, there are a lot of those that are by -invitation only and I am not allowed to mention those. There are probably more coming up as we come close to the PASS Summit dates. If you want to find out more about the unofficial parties, watch the [#SQLPASS](#) or [#PASSSummit](#) Twitter hashtags between now and the conference.

I'm pretty sure you're excited to attend the much-awaited gathering of SQL Server professionals worldwide. You've got a few more days to go to prepare.

Networking Before the Event



Networking and meeting people should be a part of your goal as an attendee. As SQL Server professionals, we feel alone sometimes when resolving issues or even implementing a solution. Knowing that there is someone out there who feels the same pain and agony (and sometimes victories) as we do is comforting.

But meeting other SQL Server professionals should not just happen at the event. Social media has opened doors of opportunities to meet people virtually before meeting them in person. Below are some of the tips that you can use to get started.

Connect with Other Attendees

Do you remember being asked for your Twitter and LinkedIn profile when you registered for the summit? PASS has dedicated a page to let other attendees know who is coming. Be a white-hat stalker (hey, I do this before jumping in on sales calls.) There used to be a **Who's Attending** page to see, well, who's attending. For now, check the [#SQLPASS](#) or [#PASSSummit](#) Twitter hashtags to find out who's attending. Find out where they're from and what their interests are. What are they talking about on Twitter? What is their job role? How long have they been working with SQL Server? You can also connect with [the speakers](#). These are just some of the things that you need to know to get the conversation started. Also check if your profile is there. If not, make sure you update your profile so people can find out about you.

Introduce yourself early on by joining the conversation on Twitter. Use the [#SQLFirstTimers](#), [#PASSSummit](#) and [#SQLPASS](#) hashtags on Twitter. By the time you meet them at the summit, it'll be like an alumni homecoming.

Connect with the Speakers



By now, you've probably seen the [summit schedule](#) and you have an idea which sessions you'll be attending. Find out who the speaker will be for that session and learn more about him or her. The more you know about the speaker, the better questions you can ask during or after the session. Better yet, introduce yourself to the speaker even before the summit. Don't you know that speakers announce their presentation weeks in advance on social media? And they do monitor their followers. They're thrilled to know that someone is already planning to attend their presentation that they worked hard and prepared for. Interact with them before the summit. Share their tweets or LinkedIn/Facebook updates to your contacts. And, who knows, you might be able to stir up an idea that the speaker can include in their presentation.

Connect with other First Timers

In 2011, PASS introduced the Big Brothers/Sisters program to enhance the experience of first time attendees. I wished they have done this back in 2007 so I could take advantage of the experiences of a PASS Summit alumnus. If this is your first time attending the summit, you will be included in the First Timers program. Better yet, register for the [Buddy Program NOW](#). Then, sign up for the [First Timers Orientation Meeting](#) (*sponsored by [SolarWinds, makers of Database Performance Analyzer](#)*) to get up-to-speed on what you need to know about the whole week's events. The registration page uses EventBrite and will inform you of who else in your social media friends are also first-time attendees. You can get in touch with them even before the meeting so you won't feel alone on the day of the event.

Connect with Other Party Goers

I can't help it; I keep mentioning the parties.

Seriously, when you sign up for the parties, you'll probably see an [EventBrite](#) page for registration. It will list folks you know who are attending as well, depending on the social media settings of the site. Get in touch with them and maybe even arrange how to go to the party venue. If the venue is a few blocks away from the convention center, it wouldn't hurt having a chat with somebody who speaks T-SQL. You'll be surprised how those party conversations sometimes end up being a game changer for either your career or your organization. Zappos CEO Tony Hseh takes advantage of [party conversations](#) to engage customers and partners with their awesome company culture.

Connect with Sponsors

Sponsors play a very important role in the success and growth of the global PASS organization. They help fund SQLSaturdays, local PASS chapters and the PASS Summit with the goal of educating the community to improve the lives of SQL Server professionals.

I'm sure you're familiar with companies like [Redgate](#), [SentryOne](#), [SolarWinds](#) and the likes because you've used their products in your day-to-day job. Visit their booths at the [Exhibitor Hall](#). Their representatives would appreciate any feedback or comments that you can provide to help improve their offerings. Share stories about how their products have helped make your job a lot easier.

Take Notes



“The faintest ink is more powerful than the sharpest memory – Chinese proverb”

Don't you wish you've got 64GB of memory to store all of the valuable information that you come across with? Apparently, we don't have memory chips embedded in our brain. That's why note taking is still a very important skill.

I've mentioned about bringing business cards at the summit to hand out to the people that you meet. But before you even meet them in person, jot down what you've known about them thru their social media profile. It helps drive meaningful conversations. You could write down their hobbies, where they are from, or even their musical inclinations. Trust me when I say that these become the foundation of meaningful relationships that you'll build at the summit. I hang out with the SQL Server experts who are not only very good at high availability and disaster recovery but also enjoy writing music and slapping their bass guitars and keyboards. The stories that you'll share will become the bond that brings you closer (OK, I better stop right here before I get too emotional.)

Scheduling Session Attendance

Whether you're a database administrator, a developer or a BI professional, the PASS Summit has something in store for you to learn about SQL Server. Attendees will certainly pick the sessions that they will attend to and schedule accordingly. While most will just pick from the available sessions, keeping these tips in mind will help you maximize your attendance at the summit.

Define Your Goals



It's probably a cliché since we all have them: New Year's resolutions, career objectives, personal development, etc. But we can never underestimate the power of having goals. Without them, we'd be like beating against the wind or travelling without a destination.

What are your primary reasons for attending the PASS Summit? List them out, maybe just a handful of them to make sure you achieve those goals. Be as specific as you possibly

can. If your goal is to learn as much as you can to become a better BI professional who uses Excel and Excel Services in SharePoint for information delivery, then plan to attend sessions that help you achieve that goal. Notice how specific I was in defining that goal. It helps me zoom in to what I really need to do to achieve it. Your organization might have a different expectation as to why they want you to attend the summit. Define those as well and make sure that you meet them before going back to work. Microsoft Certified Master Brent Ozar ([Twitter](#) | [blog](#)) takes this a step further and using this as a **ticket to your next summit attendance**.

Create a Schedule



The [PASS Summit session List](#) is already available. Based on your defined goals, list out the different sessions that you intend to attend. You might want to consider attending the [whole-day, pre-conference events](#) for a more detailed coverage of the topics you intend to learn about. When the final schedule is released, prioritize your list based on timing and criticality. Timing because there may be sessions that plan to see but are running at the same time. Criticality because you may have a pressing production issue that needs to be resolved and attending one particular session can secure you a 5-minute conversation with the speaker to help you address the issue. Better yet, you might want to pay the SQL Server Clinic a visit and have one of the CSS engineers fix it for you. If you have a smartphone, check out the [Guidebook iPhone mobile application](#) (you can download the Android version on Google Play Store) that the PASS Summit team has provided. It's a great tool to help schedule your selected sessions and alert you when the next session is about to start.

Plan to Buy the Session Recordings



Let's admit it. Until human cloning is yet to be invented, you are a limited resource. And you certainly can't be at all the sessions you want even if you've carefully selected or prioritized your list. Make sure you buy the session recordings for future reference. I still view some of the recorded sessions from the 2007 and 2008 PASS Summits when I have time (I am still gauging how much I've improved in my presentation skills throughout the years) or when a specific session will help me further resolve an issue. While you may not be working with Azure HDInsight, Azure SQL Database, Cosmos Db or Machine Learning in your current job, who's to say that you won't next year. Preparation is key and having the session recordings is part of your preparation to become a better SQL Server professional.

Arriving at the Summit

With the anticipation of the conference proper, the excitement builds up especially as you see other talk about it on social media. But there's still a few more things to prepare for before the main conference starts.

Checking in To Your Hotel



Since I come from outside of the United States, I have to fill up a customs declaration form that asks for my address while in the US. Knowing the address of the hotel is one thing

but knowing how to get there is another. If you are booked at one of the hotels within the vicinity of the convention center, then, the only thing you need to worry about is how to get to your hotel from the airport and back. There are taxis and buses from the airport that will take you to downtown Seattle. If you prefer to rent a car, there is a shuttle outside of the SeaTac Airport Arrivals area that will take you to the rental car complex. Know how to efficiently get from the airport to your hotel whether via public transport or rental car. If your hotel is a few miles/kilometers away from the convention center, know how to get to and from these venues. Or you can always call [Uber](#). Or [Lyft](#). I find that this sometimes causes a bit of stress on the first day of being in a new city. Don't let this ruin a great summit experience. That is why preparation is key.

TIP: If you pay close attention, there will be a lot of conference attendees at the airport. Don't be afraid to ask questions and introduce yourself. This is a great way to meet new people even before the summit starts. You can even ask if you could join them on their way to the hotel.

Check in to your hotel as soon as you can. Find out what amenities are available to you. Ask if they have a free shuttle back to the airport on the day of your departure. Do you have free breakfast and Internet access included in your reservation? This is very helpful especially if somebody else made the reservation for you.

Event Registration



Summit registration starts at 5PM on Sunday, 29-October and it goes on from Monday to Friday, from 7AM to 4:30PM. Once you've finally settled in to your hotel, head over to the PASS Summit registration booth at the convention center. The registration booth is organized by the first letter of attendees' last name. You will need to provide proof of identification when you register. Part of the registration will be the event badge with your name, company name and Twitter handle if you've provided it in your registration. You will also get a printed schedule and a layout of the convention center. I find the printed schedule helpful for me to

circle out the sessions that I plan to attend. Once I finalize the schedule, I key them in on the Guidebook mobile app in my phone. Also, familiarize yourself with the layout of the convention center. Since you're already there, you might as well walk around with the map to know where you need to go for your chosen sessions.

The registration package also contains some marketing collaterals, raffle entries for some of the vendor events and even your attendee party pass. Vendors are very generous during events like this so make sure you look into your registration package to see what's in store for you.

Internet Connectivity in your Hotel and at the Convention Center



Can you imagine yourself living 30 years ago when there was no wireless Internet available? Well, you're not alone. We've all become very dependent on the Internet for just about everything. So, when you get to your hotel, check if wireless Internet is available to you. If it is, then, good for you. If not, check the Internet connectivity at the convention center. PASS provides wireless Internet connectivity to all summit attendees. Check the signal and speed after registering for the event. Don't expect it to be as fast as what you have back home. That's why you need to check when and where you can get a good signal and speed. If you need to connect to your corporate VPN while at the summit, you need to know where to go and what to expect. There will also be restaurants and stores around the convention center that have wireless Internet available.

Wrap Up

I bet by now you're all too excited to be at the summit. The worst part is having to read all of the Twitter updates from folks who are sharing amazing stories from their past experiences while waiting for the conference. Don't worry. You can catch up all you want once you're in Seattle. And once you do get to catch up, you'll understand what that **#SQLFamily** hashtag on Twitter is all about.

About the Author



[Edwin M Sarmiento](#) is the Managing Director of 15C, a consulting and training company that specializes on designing, implementing and supporting SQL Server infrastructures. He is a **[Microsoft Data Platform MVP](#)** and **[Microsoft Certified Master](#)** from Ottawa, Canada (but he's originally from the Philippines) specializing in high availability, disaster recovery and system infrastructures running on the Microsoft server technology stack ranging from Active Directory to SharePoint and anything in between. He is very passionate about technology but has interests in music, professional and organizational development, leadership and management matters when not working with databases. Edwin lives up to his primary mission statement: "**[To help people and organizations grow and develop their full potential as God has planned for them.](#)**"