15 Tips for Webinars
How to Add Impact When You Present Online

BY PATRICIA FRIPP / JULY 2009

TYPE: EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Whenever you open your mouth, whether you're talking to one person or a thousand, you usually want to get a specific message across. How do you do that best when you are communicating through a webinar? What's different when the lecture is in the virtual world? How do you catch and keep your audience? Here are 15 tips.

In the Beginning

1. Use looping slides. Once your audience tunes in, how do you make sure they are entertained and feel involved even before the talk starts? The best way is with a series of looping slides.

Using looping slides is a great way to convey important information and keep attendees entertained while they're waiting for your presentation to begin.

These slides should communicate:

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- when the session will begin
- the conference dial-in number
- your photo, name, and title
- what the audience is going to learn
- what to do in case of problems.

You might also have quotes about the content they will be learning.

2. Think Hollywood! Be creative in your use of visual appeal. Just as you would in a live presentation, tell stories and give specific examples-but in a webinar you'll need even more visuals to engage the audience.

Use more slides than you would in a face-to-face presentation. An easy way to do this is to reveal bullet points one at a time as you bring them up, rather than all at once before you discuss them. Using mostly visuals and little text (see the image) is even better. Keep it simple, keep it moving, and interact often.

3. Plan your structure. Outline your presentation on paper or a flip chart before you build the PowerPoint presentation. Don't be afraid to get messy before you get tidy. It's better to have fewer points and illustrate them well.

Be sure to

- introduce your objective
- sell the benefits
- explain the agenda and timing of your session (when will you allow for Q&A?)
- add any logistics, such as how the audience will interact with you.

Knock 'em Dead

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4. Open with a grabber slide. Open with a grabber slide, a visual that will grab your audience's attention.

5. Use a hook. After the grabber slide, it's up to you to engage the audience immediately with a powerful and relevant hook that includes the word "you." Your hook might be:

- A catchy fact: "It may interest you to know Ferraris hold their value more than polo ponies! I first learned this lesson when..."
- A startling statistic: "Did you know that if you had spent a million dollars a day, every day, since Jesus was born, you would not have spent a trillion dollars. Please keep that in mind as we strategize how to increase sales by only 5 percent."
- An intriguing challenge: "Ten years ago we were the market leaders. This year we are 13th. You are now in an exciting position to turn that around."

Strong openings grab your audience's attention—then, it's up to you to keep it. It's less effective to start with, "Good morning," than, "Welcome! You are in for a treat! You are about to learnï¿½"

As you introduce the session, sell the listeners on how they're going to benefit. Keep them glued. Remember, they can't see you, so it's all too easy for them to answer their email or get a cup of coffee.

6. Introduce yourself second. Only once you've sold the session can introduce yourself (unless someone else will be introducing you). Do not introduce yourself first. You'll need to say something the listeners care about before they will care who you are.

Forge An Emotional Connection
7. Use a high I:you ratio. The most powerful communication combines both intellectual and emotional connections. Intellectual means appealing to educated self-interest with data and reasoned arguments. Emotion comes from engaging the listeners' imaginations, involving them in your illustrative stories by frequent use of the word "you," and answering the unspoken question, "What's in this for me?"

Use a high I:you ratio. For example, don't say, "I'm going to talk to you about webinars." Instead say, "In the next 56

minutes, you will learn: the six secrets of making a webinar work; the four benefits of using webinars as part of your client interaction; and the three mistakes our competitors are making when they use them."

8. Build in interaction. Depending on the technology you use and the format of your talk, make sure you interact with the audience when it's most logical. A simple method is to find that logical place and time, then stop and ask, "Based on what you have heard so far, what are your questions?"

9. Use memorable stories. People rarely remember your exact words. Instead, they remember the mental images that your words inspire. Support your key points with vivid, relevant stories. Help them "make the movie" in their heads by using memorable characters, exciting situations, dialogue, and humor. With a combination of your examples and visuals, it will be a memorable presentation.

10. Use effective pauses. Good music and good communication both contain changes of pace, pauses, and full rests. Pauses mark the time when your listeners think about what they have just heard. If you rush on at full speed to cram in as much information as possible, chances are you've left your listeners back at the station.

It's okay to talk quickly, but whenever you say something profound or proactive, or ask a rhetorical question, pause.

11. Avoid filler words. "Hmm, ah, er, you know what I mean?" In a webinar, filler words sound even more prominent than in person. Are you using them? Why not have a run-through and record yourself? As Michael Caine has said, "Rehearsal is the work, performance is the relaxation."

Before Closing
12. Review, and assume there are questions. As with an in-person presentation, always review your key ideas with the webinar audience before concluding. Then ask, "Before my closing remarks, what questions do you have?"

13. Tell them what to do next. Additionally, emphasize what the audience should do once the webinar is over. Be clear what their next logical steps should be. Send them off energized, focused, and ready to do something.

14. End on a high note. Your last words will linger. Make sure they are your own. Don't quote anyone else-and make sure they are powerful.

Prepare for Hardware and Software Mishaps
15. Have backup computers. Always have two computers tuned into the webinar. My associate Tom Drews, who is very experienced at hosting webinars recommended this technique to Jim Prost and me, and just in time, too.

During a recent webinar, right as Jim took the lead, his computer froze. I was able to jump in and delivered my portion of the talk earlier than planned, which bought Jim enough time to get his second laptop to the place where the first had frozen. He had it keyed up and ready to go, so it only took a few moments to synch himself back up. With technology, you never know!

Comments

Fri, 06 Jan 2012
Post by Craig Hadden - Remote Possibilities
My post about this article is at the following link - if HTML is accepted:
http://remotepossibilities.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/intrigue-people-firstframework-part-1i/#looping_slides

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Fri, 06 Jan 2012
Post by Craig Hadden - Remote Possibilities
I love that this article gives so many tips in such a compact format!
I've linked to it from my blog: Please see this post

Tue, 01 Sep 2009
Post by Chris Metcalfe
Great article Patricia! I will definitely be putting these tips to use when creating our demo videos for our application. Thanks for the tips!
Chris Metcalfe Vice President www.mavenlive.com

Sun, 30 Aug 2009
Post by Britta Bohlinger
Think Hollywood! - Does it work in all cultural context? Or may participants in the Middle East, Austria, Russia - or New Zealand (to name only a few) feel they are excluded? One size fits all may cause problems which will not surface during the session but afterwards. The web implies global audiences, however, webinars still take place among individuals - and we should make an effort to address them as such.
Small bites of generalised guidance are a starting point (back up you data, memorise your points) - so what's missing here is point 16: be prepared to engage in a meaningful Q&A. Too often, skilled presenters come across as sleek and knowledgeable but unable to genuinely related to their audience. Or even worse so: unwilling to learn from and with their audience.

Sat, 29 Aug 2009
Post by Maria Droujkova
"Use a high I:you ratio" - it's the other way around. You want a high you:I ratio, or a low I:you ratio.
Thank you for advice! It's quite useful.

Fri, 24 Jul 2009
Post by Jill Duffy
Another tip I have learned is to use a "filler" slide when transitioning between major points or segments. The filler should just be a picture, something that lets the audience break from the current focus of the talk and prepare for something new to come. Showing photos of real people works well. This tip is for both live and web-based presentations.

Tue, 21 Jul 2009
Post by Greg Friese
This list of tips is really helpful. I presented a webinar last week and am planning more webinars. The webinar was about test taking tips. I had 10 specific tips that I wanted to be memorable. I gave the first 5 tips as the first slide of the session - to start on a bang. I spread the next 5 tips out over the rest of the webinar to keep the audience tuned in. It seemed to work well.

I also think it is important to have a moderator that can help manage and answer quick audience questions so the presenter can focus on making the presenter. Then the moderator can present the questions during the Q and A period of the lesson.

Tue, 21 Jul 2009
Post by Allison Rossett
Two webinar "addicts" took an irreverent and almost systematic look at webinar practice. Here's the article we wrote about it. Hope you enjoy it.
Rossett, A., Chan, A., & Cunningham, C. (August 2008). What stinks about webinars? CLO magazine. http://www.clomedia.com/features/2008/August/2317/index.php
Rossett, A., Chan, A., & Cunningham, C. (August 2008). What stinks about webinars? CLO magazine. http://www.clomedia.com/features/2008/August/2317/index.php

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Sun, 20 Jan 2008
Post by Lisa Neal
Since writing my top 10 list (http://www.c4lpt.co.uk/recommended/lisaneal.html) I started using WordPress and would easily put it in my top 3 tools now (see lisaneal.wordpress.com to see how it has changed my life).

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