

Conducting a Webinar: A Step-by- Step Guide



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Introduction

Organizations are using the Internet as a tool to cut costs, generate revenue, increase productivity, and communicate effectively. Web Meetings are a prime example. They are a cost effective way to communicate a wide range of information to your target audience, build your brand, generate quality sales leads, and build strong customer and prospect relationships. Traditional face-to-face sales and marketing events have always been recognized as effective relationship builders, however the cost associated with travel and time away from the office is a significant barrier. Organizations are using the Internet as a tool to cut costs, generate revenue, increase productivity, and communicate effectively.

New Web Meeting technology leverages the strength of the telephone and connects it with the Internet's capacity to deliver real-time visual communications at low cost. Web Meetings enable presenters to conduct virtual seminars for anyone to participate as long as they have a PC with an Internet connection. This technology not only makes traditional seminars more affordable, they facilitate reaching a far wider audience and adds considerable advantages over traditional on-site seminars, such as interactive Q&A, real-time collaboration, and the ability to archive the materials for future playback from a Web site. Internet-based technology also can help facilitate seminar registration, attendance management, and post-event reporting.

How Does it Work?

Follow these simple steps to conduct an effective Web Meeting. The keys to a successful meeting are: selecting an interesting or timely topic, developing engaging content that isn't just bullets points, and having a speaker that is an expert on the subject matter. Other vital factors to keep in mind include:

1. Determine the goal of your event. Is it to educate clients and prospects, generate sales leads, or launch a new product?
2. Develop an interesting, compelling, and timely topic that will drive the registrations and attendance of your target audience(s).
3. Choose your technology wisely. You'll want a Web Meeting solution that works with a variety of operating systems, is reliable, can scale to a large number of attendees, and has the features you need including polling, chat, Q&A, and recording. There are two options for delivering the audio portion of your seminar: a teleconference call or audio streaming. Audio streaming is less expensive for large audiences, however, only allows for one-way communication and the sound quality is inferior. A teleconference (via a conference audio bridge) is more reliable and allows for two-way interaction.
4. Select your speaker and meeting support team:
 - **Pick the right speaker.** It's preferable to have a speaker who is recognizable to the audience, credible, and has solid presentation skills.
 - **Pick the right moderator.** A Web Meeting is much like a radio show to your audience. A skilled moderator improves the flow and feel of your event in several ways. A moderator will put a nervous speaker at ease with easy questions and prompts that will help them stay focused on his or her presentation. In addition, a good moderator can read the audience's mood by viewing the questions and comments submitted by online participants (so the speaker can also focus on his/her presentation). This gives the moderator cues about speeding up the program, or taking time to answer pressing questions raised by the audience.
 - **Pick the right support person.** Have at least one support person on hand to handle any technical issues experienced by participants.

5. Select an appropriate time for your event. For events based in the U.S., 10:00 am PST, 11:00 am MST, 12:00 pm CST, 1:00 pm EST is usually a good time. Skip Mondays and Fridays when possible.
6. Establish your registration process before you start to promote. Streamline it as much as possible. Make it quick and easy. Online registration is effective and convenient, but if you ask too many questions or make the process cumbersome, you will lose a lot of registrants. Also, make sure the technology can separately track who attended the meeting for follow-up.
7. Invite and engage the attendees with a mix of offline and online promotion early and follow-up, follow-up, follow-up. Send confirmation e-mails immediately after registration and at least two reminder e-mails prior to the Web Meeting. Reminder phone calls the day before the event are also effective.
8. Pre-seminar walkthrough. Practice your Web Meeting with your speaker(s) and moderator at least once prior to the actual event.
9. Conduct the Webinar:
 - **Join early:** Presenters should join at least 15 minutes early to set up the presentation including any interactive content such as polling or Q&A.
 - **Interact with the audience:** Your content can be delivered with PowerPoint slides only or also include interactive polling, Q&A and the sharing of a desktop application like a browser or Excel. Polling is the most popular method of increasing interaction. Once a participant responds to a polling question, results can be shared with the entire group for further interaction. Many web conferencing solutions offer a chat feature so that participants can send questions to the presenter without interrupting the presentation. Interactive content is recommended when possible in order to keep your

audience engaged in the seminar, plus it enables you to collect valuable information and feedback. Remember, keep your seminar educational and avoid sales pitches.

- **Emphasize the main points:** Annotation tools are a great way to emphasize what you are talking about at any given time. These tools allow you to highlight areas within your presentation, draw on the screen, and keep your audience focused on the subject at hand.
10. **Collect feedback.** Use the polling, Q&A and chatting transcripts to learn about your audience and develop a post event FAQ.
 11. **Archive for playback.** By selecting a Record and Playback option, both the audio and the Web portions of the presentation are synchronized for future playback, further extending the reach of your event.

More Tips Improve Your Next Event

Let your event determine the technology, not the other way around. Is it important for your attendees to communicate with the presenter during the presentation? Is a valuable element of your presentation to show live software? Do you want the option to record and archive the event for playback?

Offer something valuable. Don't be disappointed if your attendance numbers are only at 30-40 percent of your total registration numbers, that's the industry standard for attendance at Web Meetings. It is just how it is. You can work to increase those numbers by offering a prize or valuable item at the end of the program. A special gift that only those that registered, signed on, and attended the entire event is eligible for. Also, don't forget that a recognizable speaker is the best way to draw a higher attendance percentage.

Make it interesting. To keep your attendees interested in your event, and not off checking their e-mail, make sure it's designed to be appealing, fast moving, and interesting. This doesn't mean that you need to become an expert (although it wouldn't hurt) using all of the robust Web Meeting tools; it means that the presentation material itself should be both timely and exciting. Web Meeting tools help you get your point across; they should never be a replacement for good content.

Reminders are the key to increased attendance, "It's so easy to attend a Web Meeting!" We've heard it over and over again, but it's also just as easy NOT to attend. E-mail and phone call reminders is a key to increasing attendance.

Start and end the event on time. Unlike a face-to-face meeting, where you physically scan the room for familiar faces, search for a seat and greet your neighbor, Web audience members are generally sitting quietly in their offices reading e-mail, and checking the clock for the event to begin. A slight delay in a face-to-face event generally goes unnoticed, but at a Web Meeting, a few minutes can seem like a lifetime.

Create a welcome slide that lets the attendees know they are at the right location and what to expect. When starting your event go through ground rules such as how they can mute their phones and how to use chat and polling features.

Troubleshoot before the event begins. It's important to know what to do in case of technology related problems. They will happen. Review all possible solutions for if the presenter loses his/her connection, or what happens if attendees can't hear the presenter's voice. It's important to be prepared and to stay calm.

Proofread and test everything twice. It can be devastating to a Web Meeting if the "log-in link" doesn't work, or if the date and time of the event on the confirmation is incorrect. One of the most common—and avoidable—mistakes in producing a Web Meeting is providing incorrect information. Remember, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

About weBranding

weBranding is a small marketing and interactive virtual consulting firm based outside St. Louis, MO. Our primary focus is helping small to mid-sized organizations harness the Internet and emerging technologies to generate leads and build brand awareness. Feel free to contact Tommy Young at 618-566-0034 or via email with any questions or to set-up a short initial "sourcing" meeting to talk about your requirements and how we'd approach meeting your needs on time and on budget.

