
So, You're Going to Present in a Webinar. Here are Some Tips for Hitting a Home Run

Chances are you've participated in a webinar. If not, it's almost certain you've been invited to participate in one. The growing popularity of these web-based seminars is no surprise. Business people have limited time, so travel to a nearby, out-of-state or even international location to attend a seminar may not be ideal. There's also a financial cost associated with that travel. Webinars provide a time- and cost-saving way to replace traditional face-to-face contact. What's more, a wide variety of both free and fee-based technology tools are out there making distance learning easier and more common.

Just what is a webinar?

A webinar is an online mini-seminar. To participate, all you need is an internet connection and the appropriate software.

Here's how it works: Typically, a moderator or facilitator orchestrates the event involving one or more presenters who speak on a specific topic. Webinars usually run between 45 minutes and an hour, and can include video, PowerPoint or other audio-visual elements. (The most compelling webinars avoid mere "talking heads.") Webinar presentations tend to be followed by a Q&A session, where audience members ask questions by phone. These events occur live, but can be recorded and archived for additional viewing.

The success of a webinar depends on many things, including selecting a killer topic, conducting the event on the right day (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays are best) and using reliable technology. But perhaps the most important determiner of success is [the presenter](#).

[Tips for success:](#)

Here are some things to keep in mind if you plan to present in a webinar.

1. Content is King.

When people spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars to attend a seminar, they expect to come away better informed about the topic. Ditto for a webinar – even if it's free. If you're going to present, you must have something worth saying. Listeners expect to hear from a credible, authoritative content expert – someone with the appropriate knowledge and experience.

Have you ever listened to a TED talk? (If not, visit the TED website and listen to just about any speaker who has presented; all of them are experts on their topics.) You've got to do likewise – *know your topic inside out*.

Another good model to follow would be a “how to” video on YouTube. Some presenters are great at explaining such things as how to texture a ceiling. They draw upon years of experience and make what they do sound easy – easy enough for you to do it.

A few caveats: Although webinars can be effective marketing tools (after all, people are giving you contact information, such as their email address), avoid the mistake of turning your presentation into a commercial for your company’s product or service. *Audiences can easily spot a sales pitch.* Also, avoid what someone once called “the curse of knowledge.” Experts know a lot about their topic, and they want to share everything. Avoid this “curse.” Lose the jargon and keep it simple.

2. Begin with a Bang.

[Savvy presenters](#) know that the only part of a presentation guaranteed to get audience attention is the opening. But audiences will give speakers only about one minute to show that they have something interesting or valuable to say. So don’t squander this key moment on the ordinary or mundane. *Find a story or anecdote for your opening.* (That’s right, share it before you even tell the audience what you’re going to cover during the session!) In their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, authors Chip and Dan Heath identify six characteristics of messages that grab attention and that people remember. One of them is “unexpected.”

3. Have a script but don’t read it.

You’re at a concert. The performer plays or sings every song without once using sheet music... for the entire two-hour show! You’re impressed... even if you weren’t consciously aware of it. Do likewise when presenting in your webinar. Have a script or road map (i.e., an outline or talking points) but avoid reading it word for word as you would in a formal speech. Even though the audience can’t see you reading, they can hear it. Research shows that *script readers are perceived as less knowledgeable.* They also sound less interesting. Speak conversationally and don’t be afraid to go off script occasionally.

4. Use appropriate visuals.

During conventional presentations, most speakers overwhelm the audience with way too many PowerPoint slides, including slides loaded with words. Worse yet, they read those words. Do something different... and better. Use PowerPoint sparingly – for pie charts, bar graphs, flow diagrams and pictures. *Try to steer clear of word slides.* Remember, you are the messenger; no visual can compete with the power of a human being to connect and communicate with an audience. If you feel compelled to use those predictable (but counterproductive) bullet points, put them in the “take home” version of the visuals the audience can download after the webinar.

5. Practice your presentation.

Once you’ve nailed down your content, do several run-throughs. Our advice is: three times, aloud, on your feet (or sitting down if that’s how you’ll deliver in the webinar), into a recording device (use your smart phone). Review at least one of the recordings, and make the appropriate adjustments in your delivery. Yes, all this takes some time, but your audience will benefit and you’ll be pleased with the outcome.

6. Don't forget Q&A.

For most presenters, preparation usually excludes Q&A. After all, *how do you prepare for questions someone else might ask?* Easy. Make a list of the questions most likely to be asked. (Do it in writing.) Then answer those questions. (Do it aloud; there's a big difference between knowing how you'll answer or even writing out the answers, and actually vocalizing those answers.) Also, make a list of the questions you hope no one asks, and practice answers to them as well. Just in case you get no questions (unlikely), have a few of your own ready to "jump start" this segment of the webinar.

Participating in a webinar as an audience member requires little effort. Not so if you're the presenter. [Presenting a webinar effectively](#) means not cutting corners and using many of the same techniques used in conventional presenting.

Interested in webinar training? [Get in touch with us.](#)