

Best Practices on Making Your Webinar a Success: Engage the Audience



Webinars are a cost-effective alternative to in-person meetings, and they allow companies to expand their reach, target more people more often, and deliver a compelling, fully branded experience. Successful webinars can be used to generate and qualify sales leads; seed the market with branded, content-rich messaging; train employees, partners and customers; and drive collaboration and productivity within an organization.

But to make your webinar a success, you must conduct it with all the care you would use during an in-person event. That will allow you to take full advantage of the meeting itself, as well as leverage web conferencing technology to deliver certain benefits an in-person event can't match.

In this guide, Frost & Sullivan, a leading growth consulting firm, offers key best practices for conducting a successful and engaging webinar.

Keep the event exciting and relevant—and deliver what you promised.

1. Engage your audience the moment they join the event. An opening slide with a relevant and arresting fact or anecdote is one way to catch people's attention.
2. After welcoming people to the webinar, explain how the technology works—including how (and when) to ask a question or participate in a poll. Outline any giveaways you are offering, including raffle prizes (a popular way to keep people on the call for the entire event) and collateral, such as whitepapers, how-to guides, book excerpts and even the presentation itself.
3. At the start of the presentation, clearly outline what you will be discussing during the event, and in what order. Make sure people know that they will leave with actionable advice and recommendations (and then make sure they do!).

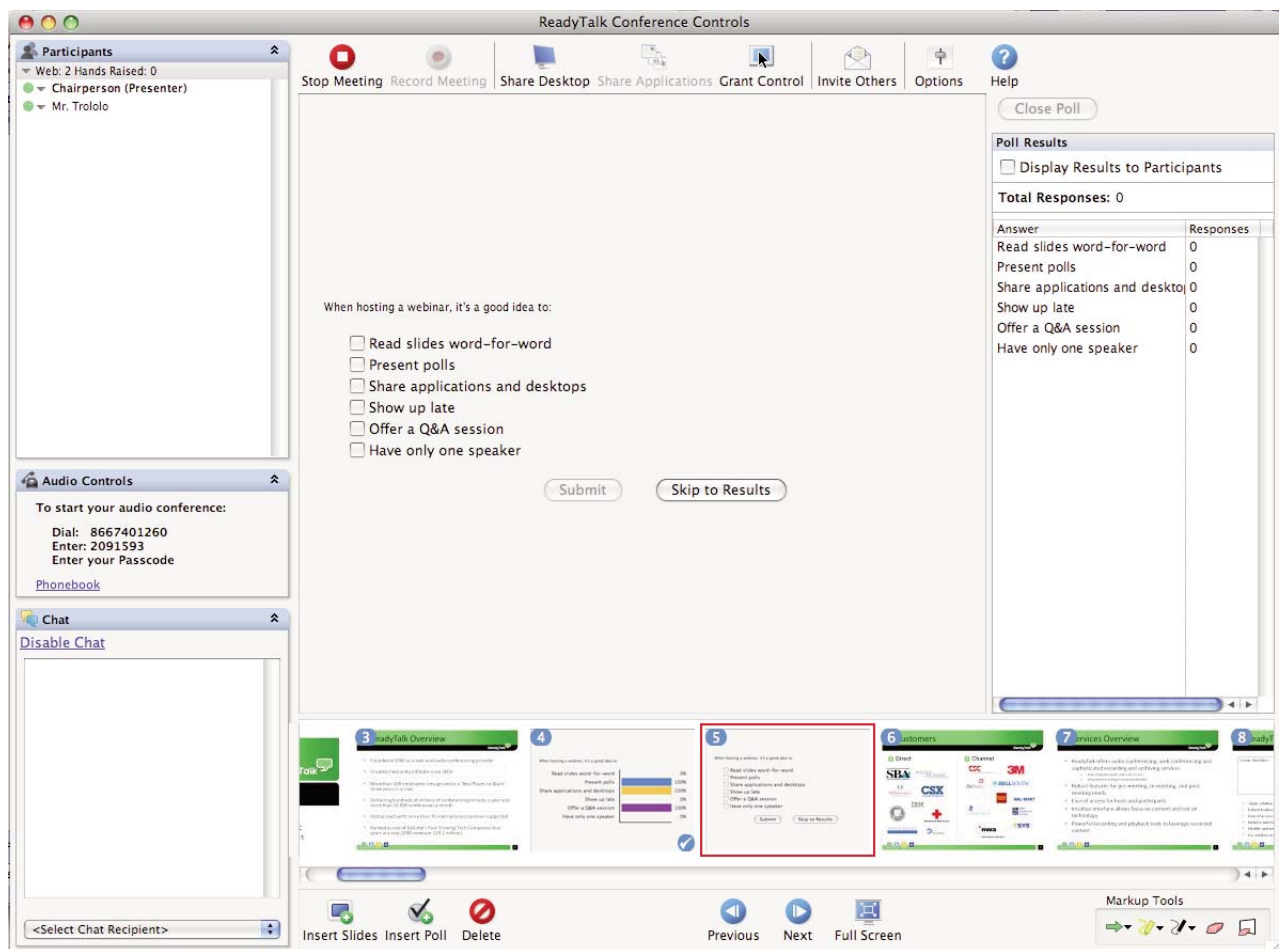
Prep your presenters with three or four questions, so they can answer them if the audience is slow to get started. And do let participants know that if you don't have time to get to their questions, you will be sure to follow up after the live event.

Make sure the event is interactive.

1. Don't limit yourself to the standard slideshow. PowerPoint is a fine way to share information, but sharing applications or your desktop is a good way to engage attendees. Rather than show a screen shot of a website, you can go to the website and navigate through the content you are discussing.
2. A single speaker is great but live, ad-hoc discussions and moderated panels are more interactive, and will often enliven and engage your audience more than a stagnant presentation.
3. Use slides to illustrate your points, not as a visual crutch—and don't simply read content from the deck. Also, make sure your presentations have plenty of anecdotes and case studies. Digestible but counter-intuitive facts and figures are good; hard-to-understand charts and graphics are not.
4. Consider allowing participants to ask questions during the event itself, rather than during a specific time period at the end. This will likely lead to off-the-cuff discussion that will feel real and relevant, and it can even uncover hidden areas of interest or confusion.
5. Use mark-up capabilities as they make sense. Drawing a circle around a key point or a line to connect related issues, for instance, brings a sense of immediacy to the presentation that a static, pre-marked PowerPoint slide can't match. It is also a good way to bring clarity to a slide that may need further explanation.

- Publicize a Twitter hash tag for attendees to use during the event. This will help the audience stay engaged with the discussion, with one another and with the speakers and hosts. It will also let their followers see what they—and you—are up to, which is especially valuable for lead generation. Hash tags are also a great way to follow the conversation before and after the event, furthering your lead generation efforts and success. Make sure you have someone specifically assigned to monitoring the feed during the event, and allow them to answer questions and re-tweet as necessary and appropriate.

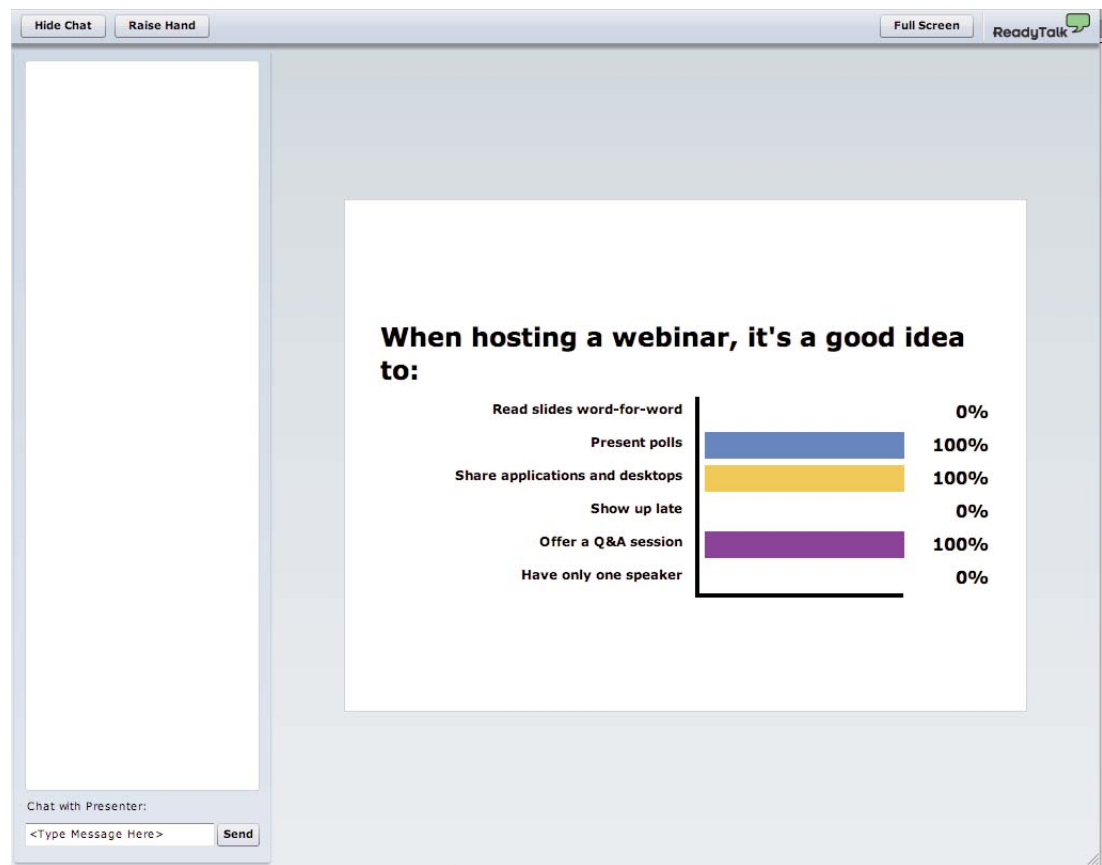
Engage someone from within your organization to monitor the chat feed during the entire event. Make sure they can answer technical questions about the web conferencing platform itself, as well as evaluate content-related questions and identify the best ones to use during the live Q & A.



Take advantage of polling for maximum interaction.

1. Polling the audience during your webinar keeps participants engaged and allows you to discuss the results, live. This can be a great way to create a sense of interactivity while also moving the content goals forward.
2. For best results, carefully consider the types of polling questions you want to ask. These should include simple yes/no responses; single-answer or all-that-apply multiple choice; ranking answers in preferential order; opinion (strongly agree or disagree, etc.); and open-ended, which allow respondents to post their answers or comments.
3. Participants generally like to see results, so be sure to follow up with a discussion about what the results mean and why your audience should care.

4. Come back to the poll results later in the presentation to re-engage the audience. For example, if you ask attendees to select their greatest marketing challenges, come back to those results as you address each of those challenges.
5. If you're doing a lead-generating event, ask questions that will help you qualify the audience members, such as identifying levels of interest or familiarity with your product, or the biggest challenges they face (and which your product can solve).
6. If you're performing a training session, poll the audience about their skill gaps so you know where to focus your attention. Ask about particular usage needs to gauge where to place your focus on features and functions.



Use a web conferencing tool that will allow you to see how each participant answered each polling question. This will help you qualify leads in a marketing event, or assess the needs of your audience in a training session.

Leave your audience wanting more (contact)—and knowing what to do.

1. Wrap up your presentation with best practices or actionable advice. Leave your audience knowing what to do next.
2. Provide contact information for all the speakers, as well as key contacts within your organization. Include links to relevant web pages, presentations, recordings and follow-up materials.
3. Conduct a post-event meeting for all the presenters, to get feedback on their experience of the technology, the content and the audience reaction. Keep track of what worked—and what didn't.
4. Within 24 hours, provide attendees with any 'bonus' materials you offered, such as whitepapers, the event recording or a copy of the presentation.

Use a post-event survey to assess the success of your event. As you wrap up, redirect participants to a web-based questionnaire, with three or four questions, so they can weigh in on the value of the presentations. Offering an incentive for their participation, such as a gift card or free whitepaper download, is a great way to encourage audience feedback.

Which poll is right for you?

- Yes/No, for simple questions and clear answers
- Free text, for when you don't know all the possible answers or want feedback from the audience
- Multiple choice, with single answer and multiple answer options, for when there are a finite number of possibilities
- Ranking poll, for rating things in relation to other things
- Opinion polls, to assess a person's feelings about the topic at hand

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