

Best Practices for Making Your
Webinar a Success: Plan, Plan, Plan



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 plan for it as you would 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 planning a successful webinar.

Design an event people will want to attend.

1. Web conferencing technology allows you to develop your event to meet the specific needs and interests of any group of people—not based on where they are located, but based on what they do, what business they're in, what hobbies they have... the options are limitless. Identify the groups that make the most sense to target, then develop compelling content just for them.
2. Recruit speakers who will add real value to the event, rather than deliver a sales pitch. Your attendees aren't signing up for a time-share presentation; they want to learn something new in the time they spend with you, so make sure you give it to them. This will also help them associate your organization with thought leadership and expertise in the relevant areas.
3. Create a title and abstract that gets your message across, quickly and easily. Cute and catchy isn't good if it doesn't immediately tell people what the event is about, what they will learn, and why they should make time in their busy days to attend. Make sure to emphasize what's in it for them.
4. Consider the best day and time for your event. Mondays and Fridays are generally out—they are the most popular days of the week for people to take off, or call in sick. Of course, the same goes for holidays and popular vacation times, like the week between Christmas and New Year's. When it comes to timing, think about where your attendees are likely to be when they call in. For instance, if they are primarily located in North America, mid-day is best—around 1pm or 2pm Eastern. But if you're reaching out to a global audience, consider their time-zone needs, too.

Keep your abstract and title brief! Ten words max for the title, and no more than 200 for the description of the event.

The screenshot shows an Outlook email interface. On the left is a navigation pane with folders like Inbox, Junk E-mail, Calendar, Contacts, Tasks, Folders, Public Folders, Options, and Log Off. The main window displays an email from 'DO DANEY' with the subject 'Meeting Invitation: Best Practices for Making Your Webinar a Success' and an attachment 'eventpage_body_bg.gif(1 KB)'. The email content is a meeting invitation from Frost & Sullivan. The title is 'Best Practices for Making Your Webinar a Success'. The date and time are 'Thu, Mar 25, 2010 02:00 PM EDT' for a duration of '1 hour' hosted by 'Frost & Sullivan'. The presenter is 'Melanie Turek', with a small photo. The meeting description states: '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. But to make your webinar a success, you must plan for it as you would an in-person event.' It then lists key best practices: 'Design an event people will want to attend', 'Promote the event to the targeted audience', 'Prepare your speakers and moderators', and 'Planning features to look for in a web conferencing'.

Promote the event to the targeted audience.

1. Web events allow you to target very specific audiences for your meeting, so take advantage of that capability when you promote and market your event. Clearly identify your prospective participants early, then send targeted invitations that will appeal specifically to them.
2. Use existing marketing channels to reach your audience, such as newsletters, blogs and email campaigns. Ask speakers to post references to the event in their blogs and share them with their networks.
3. Customize your event invitations so that they match the look-and-feel of other company collateral. Be sure to include the date and time of the event; a Twitter hashtag for followers to use before, during, and after the webinar; and a link to the registration page. Also, encourage recipients to forward the invitation to others, so they can invite their partners and colleagues.
4. If you're hosting an event to generate leads, make ample use of social media tools like Facebook, Linked In and Twitter to get the message out—often. Create Facebook and Linked In groups that will attract members who are interested in your product or services, then promote appropriate webinars to them. And tweet, tweet, and tweet again. Because Twitter posts last minutes, or even seconds, before they are bumped out of the way by newer updates, you need repetition to get the message out to the most people.
5. Take advantage of the questions you can ask as part of the registration. While you want to limit your registration process to no more than eight fields, carefully consider the type of information you can get. For instance, if you are hosting a lead-generation event, ask whether the attendee has decision-making authority over purchases, as well as control of the relevant budget; if you're hosting a training session, gather info on attendees' current skill levels, and what they hope to learn from the session.
6. Ask all registrants for a Twitter handle as well as an email address, so you can stay connected after the event. By following them, you'll get a good sense of their business and priorities; should they choose to then follow you, they'll stay up to date on your company's messaging, too.
7. Make sure to send reminder emails to your registered attendees. Do this once when you confirm their registration; again about 24 hours before the event; and again 2-3 hours beforehand.

F R O S T S U L L I V A N

Best Practices for Making Your Webinar a Success

Please complete the form below to register for this event.

Meeting Description:
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. But to make your webinar a success, you must plan for it as you would an in-person event.

Join experts from Frost & Sullivan to learn how to:

- Design an event people will want to attend
- Promote the event to the targeted audience
- Prepare your speakers and moderators
- Planning features to look for in a web conferencing solution

If you are responsible for your company's webinar program, this is a can't-miss event!

Date & Time

Date: Thu, Mar 25, 2010

Time: 02:00 PM EDT

Duration: 1 hour

Host(s): Frost & Sullivan

Presenter Information

Melanie Turek

Melanie is an expert in unified communications, collaboration, social networking and content-management technologies in the enterprise. For 15 years, she has worked closely with hundreds of vendors and senior IT executives across a range of industries to track and capture the changes and growth in the fast-moving unified communications market.

Register for this Meeting:

First Name *

Last Name *

Email *

Phone

Company

How many webinars do you conduct each year?

None

1-4

4-9

10 or more

* Required Field

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If your lists and your efforts are good, you should get about 40% of registrants to actually show up to your event. If you get significantly less than that, you know you need to tweak your outreach for next time!

Prepare your speakers and moderators.

1. Make sure the presenters know how to use the Web conferencing software, and that they are comfortable with the format and process. Prep them on how to move slides or queue up questions if needed, and how to launch polling questions and publish the results.
2. Encourage presenters to call in from a landline phone, in a quiet location where they won't be interrupted. Also remind them that if they are sharing applications or their desktop, they should turn off pop-up email notices, IM chat windows, and other items that maybe distracting or not appropriate for the audience to see.
3. Be sure to have a dry run at least a week before the live event, and come prepared to coach speakers on how to improve their delivery and content as needed. The best presenters are those who speak with confidence and strength. The online format may throw off people who are used to speaking to in-person audiences, so make sure even your most experienced presenters have time to rehearse.
4. Remind everyone to keep the session interactive. As you plan your agenda, include time for polling the audience, banter between the speakers (if there is more than one), and audience Q & A—for which you should reserve at least 10 minutes at the end.

Planning- Features to Look for in a Web Conferencing Solution

- Ability to brand event emails and web pages
- Customizable registration form
- Built-in social media promotion tools
- Option to create and track multiple marketing campaigns
- Automated reminder emails

Prepare three or four questions to kick things off, in case your audience is shy. Give them to your speakers in advance, so they can prepare thoughtful answers that meet your goals and needs.

Summary

Webinars can be a valuable, cost-effective alternative to in-person events, but they require careful thought and planning to deliver that success. Companies that invest as much effort into designing and marketing their online event as they would a live one will reap significant benefits, including better reach, more and more-qualified leads, high registration and attendance rates, and a clear return on investment.

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