Hosting a Successful Webinar

WHITE PAPER

ReadyTalk

They might be conducted online, but Webinars are no less serious than traditional, on-the-ground events. With careful thought, planning and teamwork, your Web Seminar will be a huge success. After the planning phase, you'll move into marketing, registration, confirmation, speaker management, contingency plans and follow up. Let's start at the beginning.

I. Planning for Success

Consider the following details when planning your Webinar:

A. Objectives

B. Audience

C. Content

D. Title

E. Budget

F. Technology

G. Speakers

H. Agenda

I. Timeframe

J. Incentives

K. Next steps

If you break the event into smaller, more manageable components, you'll feel less overwhelmed and more in control. Start by answering the following questions:

A. What do you want to achieve?

Outlining your objectives will help you achieve a big-picture perspective of your Webinar, which will then help you strategize event details and plan for success. Is your goal to:

- Increase sales leads?
- Train employees, volunteers or franchisees on new processes?
- Establish your company as a thought leader in your industry?

B. Who is your target audience?

Specify not only who you want to attend your Webinar, but also who could benefit most from the information you're going to present. This will help you tailor your content appropriately.

Current customers are your best prospects because they already know the value of your company and are likely to attend the Webinar.

Prospective customers can also respond well to an informative Webinar, because their worry about the sales pitch is lessoned.

C. What's the subject of your Webinar?

This is a biggie. While your Webinar must benefit your company by achieving your objectives, it should also clearly benefit your audience.

The most successful Webinars present useful information to the audience.

Select a topic that addresses an audience hot button — a problem they face or a topic they need to know about.

D. What's the title of your Webinar?

Use words that will both capture the subject and appeal to your audience.

Keep your title brief, but make sure it's catchy.

E. What's your budget?

Don't waste time shooting for the moon if your budget can only get you to the launch pad. It's best to know how much money you can spend before you begin!

Your budget may need to cover these elements:

- The Webinar itself (audio and web portions of the event)
- Participant registration and data collection
- Personnel who help set up and manage the event
- Speaker fees
- Technology such as hardware and headsets
- Post-Webinar material preparation and distribution
- Thank you gifts for speakers

F. What Web conferencing vendor will you use?

You'll need to secure a vendor immediately, for a number of reasons.

If you are using a service that requires registration, it's important to reserve lines, phone numbers and times far enough in advance so you can communicate this information to your participants.

It's downright critical to the success of your event that your moderator and speakers become fully trained and proficient in using the technology that will deliver the Webinar to your audience.

G. Who will be your moderator and speakers?

The answer to this will depend on the scope of your Webinar. A smaller event will require only one person to serve as both moderator and speaker, while a larger event would be managed more effectively by a moderator and one or more speakers.

Designate a moderator (or chairperson) — This person will manage all aspects of the events, ensure it goes smoothly, oversee the recording and facilitate the Q&A. Keep in mind that your conferencing vendor can provide someone who's an expert at serving as a chairperson.

Determine speakers for your Webinar. Examples of speakers you might want to consider include:

- In-house personnel such as company executives and product managers
- Industry experts (recognized authorities will boost your attendance)
- Satisfied customers

H. What's your agenda?

Along with determining your content, you'll want to make sure that your event agenda follows a logical presentation of the material. Don't forget to include basic agenda items that you'd find in any on-ground seminar — such as introductions, conclusions, and a question-and-answer period.

I. What's your timeframe?

When it comes to maximizing attendance, timing is everything. To determine the right day:

- Forget about Mondays, which are too busy, and Fridays, when people are finishing projects or leaving early for the weekend.
- Eliminate holidays and the days before and after holidays.
- Consider any conflicts, such as tradeshows your audience might attend or end-of-the-month quotas.

To determine the right time:

- Because most participants like to attend during lunchtime, a good time is 1 p.m. Central time — if you're marketing nationwide.
- If you're targeting people in only one or two time zones, schedule the event between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

<u>It's important to realize that only 33 percent of the people who register for your Webinar will actually attend.</u> Giving your audience a choice between two dates for the same topic can greatly improve this percentage and generate more and better leads in the long run.

Charging a fee for participation definitely boosts attendance rates, since in most cases, registrants have pre-paid for your event. However, it is important to determine what kind of message you are sending by charging for attendance. A soft sell on a product or service during a free Webinar is less likely to antagonize participants. Participants who paid to attend may have a lower tolerance level for any kind of promotion during the event.

J. What about incentives?

From giveaways to drawings, incentives for participation can also help improve attendance rates. If you decide to provide incentives, you'll need to:

- Determine participation requirements for incentives
- Establish a process for rewarding incentives
- Develop legal parameters and guidelines for any drawings

K. Next Steps

Once you've addressed these important questions and outlined your strategy, your immediate next steps will be to:

- Create an event project plan
- Determine your to-do list
- Assign staff to handle tasks
- Develop a list of risks, including researching dates for conflicting events
- Confirm speakers and schedule a kickoff call
- Procure an incentive

II. Spreading the Word

Now that you've planned a great Webinar, the hard part begins — reaching your audience, convincing them to register and getting them to actually attend. Although web events are easy to join and usually require no registration fees, building an audience can be challenging.

That's why defining and implementing an effective marketing strategy is crucial to your Webinar's success. This is also why it might be a good idea to consider seeking the assistance of Webinar marketing experts for your first event — even if you have internal marketing and event planning resources.

Webinar promotion channels include:

- **Advertising** — Place ads in print publications, online, on your own website, through your company's voicemail and on-hold recordings, and in the lobby of your building.
- **Media releases** — Target publications and other media that reach your desired audience and don't forget to post the release to your own website's press room.
- **Articles** — Develop and submit articles about the event topic, bylined by your speaker, to key print, broadcast and online media.
- **Home Page Promotion** — Create a noticeable link from your website's home page to drive visitors to the registration page.
- **Viral marketing** — Encourage people to spread the news about your Webinar through email, instant messaging and word of mouth.
- **Third-party sponsors** — Secure sponsorships with vendors like ReadyTalk, who often sponsor events that provide great education for their own customers and who are willing to help promote these events through their own channels.
- **Email newsletters and HTML blasts** — Include links to your Web site within these online channels, but keep in mind that you must comply with the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003. For more information, visit http://www.the-dma.org/antispam/.
- **Direct mail and telemarketing** — Reach desired audiences by targeting members of appropriate associations or organizations; however, understand that traditional channels like these will be less effective than online mediums because it's easier for people to simply click on a link.
- **Existing marketing programs** — Explore ways to add Webinar promotion to your current marketing efforts, which can be done for little or no extra cost.
- **Partners** — Gain access to a partner's customer and prospect databases, secure event sponsorships or get help with publicity by proposing a swap for services, products or promotion.

[4] http://www2.icao.int/public/cfmapps/carbonoffset/carbon_calculator.cfm

[5] www.carbonfund.org/site/pages/carbon_calculators/category/Assumptions: 100 miles ÷ 20.3 mpg × 8.87 kg CO2 per gal.

- **Your sales force and in-house staff** — Ask your sales team to place personal invitation calls to customers and current prospects and encourage all staff to discuss the Webinar every time they have contact with a customers
- **Tradeshow exhibits** — Display fact sheets and registration materials and encourage booth staff to mention the Webinar to visitors (which can often lead into serious discussions of products and services on the spot).

Start 30 Days Before

The best time to begin promoting the event and accepting registrations is 30 days before your Webinar.

Longer than 30 days — Prospects will forget or lose interest

Less than 30 days — You won't have enough time to promote for maximum attendance and your prospects won't be able to plan to attend

Invitation Tips

When sending invitations makes the most sense:

- Provide a clear and concise event and speaker description
- Include information on fees, technical requirements and FAQs
- Gain attention with pictures
- Build your brand with company logos

How much is enough?

You might be wondering how much promotion you'll need to do to achieve a certain attendance rate. Here's the standard calculation:

- Promotions (reach x frequency) = 100,000 impressions
- Average response rate of 2% = 2,000 clicks
- Registration among visitors of 50% = 1,000 registrants
- Actual attendees among registrants of 33% = 333 attendees

A word to the wise: If you're planning to record and archive the event, don't tell registrants. This will lower your live attendance!

Note: In our experience, the more you target your Webinar to a specific audience, the higher your response rate. You may be best off choosing a very specific topic for a very specific audience and promoting your event specifically to the association that serves that niche. You may need fewer impressions to get the response you desire.

III. Creating a Registration Page

By the time you begin promoting your Webinar (30 days before the event), you need to provide a website or page that allows people to get more information and register online. This means that as soon as your event strategy is in place, you should begin developing your event registration page.

Listed below are some of the steps you should follow when creating your event registration page:

- **Planning** — Outline registration page details, such as content, page flow and technical issues.
- **Approvals** — Secure necessary in-house approvals before involving designers and programmers.
- **Page structure** — Determine your site registration requirements and include the following pages at a minimum:
- **Information page** — Include an event description, a bulleted list of event benefits and what attendees will learn, speaker photographs and biographies, and information about program incentives.
- **Registration form** — One simple page should make it fast and easy to register.
- **Thank-you page** — Thanks people who register and informs them they will receive an email confirmation with more details.
- **Tracking** — Decide what data you want to capture and assign somebody to monitor the process.
- Confirmations — Your database should automatically generate confirmation emails.

- **Registration numbers** — Keep track of your registrations throughout the marketing process so you can evaluate which channels are working best and adjust your marketing strategy, if necessary, to meet your registration goals.
- **Registration validation** — You might not want some people (such as competitors) to attend. Decide during your planning process how you want to deal with these registrations. You can simply ignore these individuals and not send the access information, or inform them that the event has reached its capacity.

Registration Form Tips

Keep in mind that the average conversion rate of visitors who view your registration page or site is 50 percent. Don't try to gather a lot of information from registrants — or you risk annoying them and losing registrations. Build a one-page registration form that's quick and easy to complete. Your goal is to:

- Get complete contact information
- Find out the source of the lead
- Obtain some qualifying information

IV. Confirming Registration and Boosting Attendance

Once people register for your Webinar, up to 67 percent of them won't show up to the event! If registrants don't know details — such as how to join the event or what time it will take place — or have not been reminded about the seminar schedule, they will not attend.

You have to work to keep registrants interested in attending by keeping them informed as your event draws closer. Plan on the following communication schedule to maximize event attendance:

- Upon registration — Send an immediate "thank you for registering" email with a request to mark their calendar
- One week before the live event — Email a calendar reminder and instructions for checking browser requirements
- One day before the live event — Send an email with conference access information; also, place a reminder phone call (either automated or live)
- Morning of the event — Send the access information email again and place another reminder phone call (either automated or live)
- Send a minimum of three reminder emails to help ensure strong attendance.

Confirmation Email Tips

- Include a clear, concise subject line
- Keep the email brief
- Provide contact information for general questions
- Include your contact phone number and email for technical questions
- Avoid using all caps and words that will cause your emails to be filtered, such as "free"

Confirmation Email Structure:

- To: (Keep the names of registrants confidential by putting all email addresses in the BCC space)
- From: Your company name
- Subject Line: Confirmation – (Title) Web event on (date)
- Title: (Insert event title)
- When: (Insert date/time)
- Where: (Include access information here or indicate it will be coming soon)
- Why: (Remind them of the event highlights)
- Who: (Specify who to contact if they have questions)

V. Working with Speakers

Finding great speakers and working with them to organize the presentation can be a challenge — but if you communicate with them constantly, provide a solid structure for them to follow, outline specific deadlines and prepare them well, you'll go a long way toward ensuring your Webinar's success.

You'll need to follow these key steps with your speakers, which will take you from event planning to completion:

Kick-off call

All speakers must attend this initial call, which will review the event topic and determine who will be presenting what information. Make sure you cover:

- **Schedules and deadlines:** Required presentations, rehearsal, technology training, pre-event call and live event
- **Promotional items:** Pictures, bios, titles and logos
- **Technology:** What you will be using and the features speakers can make use of
- **Presentation guidelines:** The number of slides speakers are allowed and tips such as keeping slides simple

Technology training

Your vendor should thoroughly train speakers who are unfamiliar with the technology you plan to use

Presentations

Drafts should be turned in one week before the rehearsal, with final slides and other materials completed no later than two days before the rehearsal.

- Review speaker content, ensuring it covers key messages and meets objectives
- Review special slides and video and audio needs
- Develop call-to-action strategy (survey audience, suggest downloads or drive to Web site)
- Submit presentation to technology vendor
- Test the presentation with the presentation technology

Rehearsal

Conduct a dry run one week before the live event so you'll have time to make any necessary changes. Some pointers for your rehearsal:

- Schedule the rehearsal for the same time of day as the live event to get everyone used to that time
- Send the rehearsal access information at least a day in advance so speakers feel informed
- Ensure that everyone has tested their access information hours before the rehearsal to avoid start delays
- Reserve and set up all rooms and equipment — try to mimic the live event by holding it in the same room and with the actual equipment, testing attendee dial-in, running through presentations and practicing Q&A with the operator
- Make sure all speakers will be on handsets or headsets
- Test the presentation on a slow connection (dial-up modem)
- Test any high-bandwidth components such as video or Flash
- Discuss the flow and transitions between presentations
- Review Q&A and chat processes
- Define the incentive/drawing processes
- Finalize and rehearse the call's ending and call to action

Touch-base call

Held two hours before your event, this very valuable call will:

- Ensure everyone remembers the event date
- Allow a final review of the slides
- Make sure nothing was destroyed during file transfer
- Calm everyone down

Live event

Dial in 30 minutes before the event to touch base with the operator and be available in case anyone is having difficulties. Your speakers and support team should dial in 15 minutes before the event begins.

Debrief

Ask the operator to put your speakers and support team into a sub-conference after the event for a quick debriefing while event details are still fresh.

Tips for working with speakers

- Gather all pertinent contact information — email addresses and numbers for office, cell and home
- Know and become friendly with your speakers' assistants
- Find out if anyone is techno-phobic so you can pay them special attention
- Push speakers to use the e-conferencing tool's various features
- Perceive group dynamics, such as how they relate to each other, who's in charge and any areas of sensitivity

VI. Preparing for the Best — and the Worst

One of the most time-consuming — and important — steps to online event planning is event setup. It's best to over-prepare, get as much done in advance as you can, establish contingency plans and recruit co-workers to help you with event logistics.

Remember: It's better to over-communicate than under-communicate! Constantly send reminder notes during every stage of the event.

Recruit Help

- Receptionist — To help with calls (provide this person a cheat sheet or script)
- Technical staff — To assist if needed (make sure they are standing by and know you need the servers to be kept free of any large processing)
- Runners — To help as needed
- Q&A manager — Assigned to handle the Q&A and chat
- Audience "plants" — To ask questions and get the Q&A rolling (have them dialed in and armed with a few good questions)

Reserve Now

- Technology — Phone lines and Web technology for all calls (test it beforehand and make arrangements to record the event)
- Rooms — For presenters and support teams
- Equipment — Laptops, servers, phones and backup equipment
- Prepare for Emergencies
- Equipment — Get a backup modem and remote
- Communication — Have a direct line with the operator at all times
- Contact information — Make sure your speakers and the event team have everyone's information in case a problem arises

Pay Attention to Details

- Validate logins and phone numbers one more time
- Place water near each speaker
- Make notepads and paper available
- Give hard copies of all the presentations to each speaker and keep one for yourself
- Test backup equipment
- Create and post "quiet" signs

VII. Ending on the Right Note

No amount of pre-event planning or success will help if you fail to end your event properly and in a timely manner. By following a few simple steps, your attendees, team and speakers will leave your event with a powerful impression.

Surveying Attendees

Right at the end of the event, ask attendees to immediately complete a quick survey. About 75 percent of attendees usually fill out the survey, so plan yours carefully. Be sure it offers opportunities for attendees to:

- Ask additional questions
- Provide input that can help you improve future events
- Give you information about their level of interest and needs

Maximizing Attendance After the Event

Even with all your reminders, some people who register won't attend. By recording the Webinar, you can avoid losing these valuable prospects, who have already expressed their interest.

Send non-attendees a "sorry you couldn't attend" email that includes a link to the archive

If you choose not to archive the event, be sure to call or email non-attendees information with dates and times of repeat Webinars

Following Up

Make sure you deliver everything you promised and take care of the following:

Attendees

Follow up with attendees within a week of the event by sending:

- A thank-you for attending email that includes the archive notification and a link to presentation slides and other materials
- Any white papers or items you offered as attendance incentives
- Notification of drawing winners, which builds credibility and gives you one more reason to communicate with your attendees
- Another great way to solidify your relationship with conference participants is to send them to a destination URL after the event, featuring offers such as:
- A link for more information
- A promotion or special offer
- A needs or interests survey
- A way to sign up for future events

Leads

Hold a meeting to discuss sales leads within a few days of the event.

- Include as many sales representatives as possible
- Sort leads into hot, warm and cold categories and assign each lead to someone
- Document lead assignments and check their progress a week later
- Speakers/Support Team
- The day after your event, send a thank-you email or small gift to show your appreciation.
- When completed, share survey results with everyone
- Notify speakers and team members when the archive is available, encouraging them to review it

Post-Event Audit

Create a post-event audit to document your event and provide qualitative and quantitative results that will justify your next Webinar. Outline the following in your document:

- Whether you met your objectives
- Number of impressions
- Number of clicks
- Number of registrations
- Sources of registrations
- Number of attendees
- Number of leads
- Cost per lead
- Budget vs. expenditures

VIII. Checklists and Timelines

Pre-Event

1. 30 days before — Registration page goes live; begin event promotion
2. 1 week before — Send reminder email to registrants; presentation drafts due; rehearse presentation

3. 2 days before — Presentation slides and materials finalized
4. 1 day before — Send reminder email to registrants with login and dial-in instructions

2 hours before

Touch-Base Call:

- Meet/ brief operator
- Go over speaker names
- Discuss intro script
- Review Q&A structure
- Confirm roles
- Review presentation and flow
- Test all equipment — including backup
- Give the speakers tips and reminders

1 hour before

Send reminder email to registrants with login and dial-in instructions

30 minutes before

Hosts Dial In

- Dial in to make sure the access information is OK
- Touch base with your operator to discuss final details and any changes

20 minutes before

Speakers Dial In

- Perform a final sound check
- Send final reminders to speakers
- Respond to access questions
- Check final registration numbers

Immediately following

Debrief

- Have the operator pull the team into a sub-conference
- Get feedback on what worked and what didn't
- Determine changes for next time
- Establish next steps