



VCALL WEB EVENTS



ENHANCE YOUR NEXT ONLINE EVENT

A Dozen Ideas To Improve Your Next Online Event

Web events are powerful and practical applications of technology for optimizing communications between employees, customers, prospects and suppliers. These combine the power of a live meeting with the cost-effectiveness of a conference call or streaming audio. Web events allow you to conduct seminars, train new employees, make sales presentations, hold press conferences and enhance on-line collaboration with colleagues from around the world, right from your desktop!

Planning your first web event and don't know where to start? Perhaps you're a web event veteran looking for ways to improve your online events. In either case you'll find value in these twelve ideas for delivering an online event.

Get off to a fast start. Don't you hate it when you attend a presentation and the emcee takes forever to introduce to the main speaker? That effect is amplified during a web event. Spend two minutes or less introducing your event and covering the features of your web conference. Then get out of the way and let the main presenter start to give your event a fast-paced feel that will keep participants tuned in.

Keep it short. Web events of 60 to 90 minutes are most effective. If your program requires more time, consider breaking it into segments delivered over a period of days or weeks. Identify only the three or four key messages you want to leave with your audience and build your presentation around them exclusively. A 90 minute program will give you enough time to interact with the audience, asking and answering questions.

Keep it simple. It's easy to become enamored with the features offered by today's web presentation systems. Avoid the temptation to try all the bells and whistles if you're just starting out or if you're trying a new system. Master the basic controls: slide control, polling and messaging. Once you are comfortable with these elements, you can gradually introduce more sophisticated features that require more setup such as streaming audio, whiteboarding, and application sharing.

Ask good questions. As you design your event, think about what you want to get from the event. Use those goals to formulate the questions you want to ask the audience. Don't use a live event to ask pointless demographic questions such as "Where are you attending from?" That kind of information can be determined in pre-event registration. Use your time in front of your audience to ask questions that collect critical feedback and measure the effectiveness of your message.

Use a specialist. For live events with more than twenty participants, use an "online specialist" to answer audience questions. The participation barriers are low in an online event, so you can expect to receive more questions and comments than in a typical face-to-face presentation. Using a specialist ensures every question will receive a personalized response. This also allows your presenter to stay focused on delivering his or her key points without being distracted by a high volume of questions.

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Successful web events...Guaranteed!



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Pre-flight everyone. Encourage participants to complete a pre-flight check before attending your event. Pre-flight checks are web pages provided by the service provider that check the participant's computer to ensure it is capable of participating in the program.

Start with the phone. To ease people into the technology, use web conferencing in conjunction with a familiar medium first, such as teleconferencing. Let the teleconference deliver the audio of your program and let the web conference offer participants a way to see visual material and ask questions without interrupting the program. Use the interactive features of the teleconference bridge such as live question and answer sessions to simulate a radio "talk show" format. As your audience becomes comfortable with the basic elements of a webconference, you can migrate some participants to Internet-based audio to reduce your teleconference expense.

Keep slides simple. Web conferencing works best when slides are formatted with simple designs and a few consistent colors. Don't use full-screen photos in your slides -- these images will take too long to display for participants. Flat colors and simple graphics, when made "web ready" for your event, will display quickly on the screen.

Need to demonstrate a computer application to your audience? Select a system that supports application broadcasting, and you can show the application directly from your computer. Practice with this before your event to get comfortable with how it works and how it looks from your perspective. Most systems require you to download and install a plug-in to capture and display what's on your screen. These plug-ins are typically required only for presenters, not for the audience.

Rent an emcee. For important events, hire a professional online moderator to facilitate your event. A moderator can add a great deal of polish to the many transitory tasks that occur during an event. For example, the moderator can serve interactive polls and talk with a presenter while waiting for results to come from the audience eliminating the awkward "dead air" while waiting for the audience response. A moderator can make the question and answer process happen smoothly by asking prepared questions and glean the best questions from the online audience to present to the speaker. Most importantly, these professionals know how to keep an online event moving when glitches occur and allow your speakers to focus on their message.

Test, test, and retest. Once your event is ready, ensure you test the "links" that will be sent to your participants. Double-check the phone number for your teleconference for participants and presenters. As simple as it seems, failure to check links and phone numbers are the most common mistakes made in producing web events. These are completely preventable with a minimal amount of due diligence.

Use both views for your presentation. On the day of the program, set up two computers. Set up one computer with your presenter's view and another logged on as an audience member. This gives you a much better sense of what your participants are actually experiencing. Slides that are slow to advance for you may display quickly for the audience. This will also allow you to check the formatting and appearances of your visuals from the participant's perspective.

Finally, don't go looking for trouble. Glitches can happen during any type of presentation whether in person or over the Web. In web-based events, glitches are often only an issue if they are acknowledged by the presenter. For example, if you click a button to advance to the next slide and it is slow to change, you gain nothing by telling the audience, "Gosh this sure is taking a long time to come up." Perhaps you're on a slower-than-average Internet connection. Just make a mental note to advance slides a little sooner and no one will be the wiser.