

WHITE PAPER

A Complete Guide for Executing a Successful Webcast



Introduction

In recent years, the tools and techniques that companies use to do business and engage their customers, associates, and even their own employees have transformed. In the changing technological and social landscape, webcasting has become a prominent communication tool, but many companies still struggle to understand how to use webcasting in the most effective way and fully leverage its power to engage.

What Changes Have Paved the Way for Webcasting?

- In an increasingly virtual world, online communication has become the norm for businesses in every industry. Many companies work on entire projects online with virtual teams, and use online platforms to reach out to customers throughout the country or around the world
- Online activities are becoming more and more social. Social marketing became a huge buzz word in the last decade, but you may have already noticed that it isn't as easy to get attention on Facebook or LinkedIn as it once was. The era of easy viral success has passed, but that doesn't mean you can't still get in on the action. Webcasting gives you a new social media marketing tool to leverage, not just by sharing your webcasts on social networks, but also by socially engaging your audience members.
- You can also use webcasting effectively within your own organization to train personnel, host meetings between management staff members in different offices, and more. The same rules apply: the more engaging your webcasts, the more effective they will be, whether you present to the public or to members of your own organization.

Since webcasting is still an evolving technology, those who make the leap now are going to be able to make the greatest impact on both employees and customers. You can use webcasting effectively within your own organization to train personnel, host meetings between management staff members in different offices, and much, much more. The same rules apply: the more engaging your webcasts, the more effective they will be, whether you are presenting to the public or to members of your own organization.



Webcasts vs. Online Meetings

- Webcasts take on a “live”, one-to-many, format. Traditional online meetings focus on a small group of individuals all having a conversation about a single topic. Webcasts focus on a small number of presenters (usually one or two) presenting to a larger audience where the audience interacts through polling questions, social media and live Q&A with the presenters.
- Webcasts are typically planned presentations where speakers have prepared and staged their content in advance. Online meetings tend to be free-flowing conversations that can be conducted on an ad-hoc basis. The key difference is control: webcasts give presenters greater control over their content.
- Webcasts are more interactive than an online meeting. Webcasts provide the audience a unique ability to engage with the presenter’s content (polling questions, handouts, link slides, etc.), interact directly with the presenter (surveys, Q&A, etc.), interact with fellow audience members and have clear takeaways from the session (handouts, exit actions, websites, etc.). This type of trackable interaction is not available for a traditional online meeting, where the audience is limited to seeing what is shared by presenters.

Guidelines to Help You Prepare for a Webcast

Your webcast is only going to be effective as it is engaging. Without further ado, we will introduce you to the best practices for hosting a compelling webcast that will leave a lasting impact on your audience members and help you to achieve your presentation goals.

Create Anticipation

Creating an engaging webcast starts before your audience even logs in to the webcast. Your goals before the presentation are two-fold. First, you want to spread the word so you can get as many interested audience members as possible. Second, you want those viewers to be excited about the webcast even before they view it, so that they are eager recipients of your message.

- List any speakers and their credentials, especially if you have a celebrity or someone high profile within your organization joining the webcast.
- A compelling abstract is one tool to generate anticipation. Your abstract should clearly and accurately reflect the purpose and content of your event in a creative, articulate way. A dry or confusing abstract will deter audience members.
- Email marketing may seem old-fashioned, but it's still one of the most effective marketing tools out there. You may even already have analytics on your mailing list subscribers that can help you put together a targeted campaign. Setting up multiple e-mail reminders prior to your webcast can increase your attendance rate as much as 30%.
- Post on intranet forums and internal networking sites. This includes any niche forums that are pertinent to your products or services.

Remember that people online are usually busy and distracted. So in your posts, emails and video teasers, make sure you tell your employees how they can access your webcast, when to register, and what date and time to log in.



Have a Plan

Even if you excel at improvisation, you won't want to rely on it entirely for your webcast. The best presentations usually have a high level of planning, even if you expect to spend some time improvising during the presentation. New webcast presenters often underestimate the amount of planning they will need to do in order to produce a compelling webcast that has a sense of flow and direction, and makes its point succinctly and with impact.

When preparing for a webcast, it is critical that the speakers understand:

- Who the audience is
- The format of the presentation (panel, single speaker, single speaker with a moderator)
- The length of the presentation and how much time should be reserved for Q&A
- The delivery options for slide content (PowerPoint, animations, polls, desktop sharing, video clips, etc.)
- How they will be delivering the audio/video (telephone, webcam/microphone, in a studio, etc.) and what, if any, special equipment is required.

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Once the speakers understand the format and parameters for the presentation, they should develop a PowerPoint deck specifically for the online audience, utilizing as many engaging features as are available and appropriate. Often, speakers will reuse the same decks over and over, but not tailor to audiences or online, which can create a dry experience for the online user. Speakers will want to plan for moments where they can ask open-ended questions of the audience, and have them reply through the on-screen mechanisms. When doing polling questions, speakers will need to plan content to deliver while the audience is responding to the poll so there is no dead air.

Prepare Anecdotes and Questions

Anecdotes are stories which make your content relevant and memorable to the audience. Real-life stories, startling statistics, and surprising facts can all make information more meaningful, and work great for grabbing attention throughout your presentation (especially at the beginning). Stories are a great way to close a presentation. Stories include a chronology of relatable events that are easy to remember and leave a lasting impression on an audience.

If you plan to take questions from the audience, have a few “seed” questions prepared in advance. These are questions that are written in advance of a presentation, and are a great way to kick off a Q&A session without a delay. Sometimes audience members are slow to type in their questions so a few seed questions will keep you from having dead air.

It's also important to solicit your audience's opinions during the presentation through the use of polling questions and open-ended questions. Polling questions are pre-defined, questions that the audience can respond to by filling out a form; it's important to address their responses and use them answers to inform how you deliver the rest of your presentation. For example, if your audience indicates that they are new to a topic, make sure your speech and delivery style adapt to their level or you risk losing the audience.

Open-ended questions are great to get the audience interacting with you. Pose questions to the audience, and be sure to comment on their responses and provide your own follow up information. This allows your audience to feel more connected to you as a speaker, making them more likely to receive your message.

Use Visuals and Variety

Studies have demonstrated that webcast audience members are more likely to stay focused and engaged if you regularly hold their attention with changing visuals. It is recommended that the content on the screen change every two to three minutes. This can be done by using animated PowerPoint, polling questions, video clips, screen sharing or virtually any other type of content.

PowerPoint slides provide additional information in a creative, compelling way. However, attendees don't respond well to slides with too much text. Use graphs, short bullet points and animations to keep the content on screen fresh and interesting.

Also, be sure to use the PowerPoint as a cue for what you want to say, not as a script to be read from. Treating a PowerPoint file as a script is a surefire way to bore your audience.



Finally, remember to use your best public speaking skills when presenting online. Whether the audience can see you or just hear you on audio, it's important to be upbeat and excited about what you're presenting – smile while you speak! If the speaker sounds bored or lethargic, it's a cue to the audience that the content is boring, and they will lose interest. If you're on video, be sure to look at the camera and maintain (virtual) "eye contact" with your audience. This can be difficult for speakers who are new to online presentations, so be sure to practice before the live presentation to get comfortable with the medium.

The Opening Act

Your webcast begins the moment an attendee logs in to the session. Most online sessions allow attendees to login 10 to 15 minutes before the actual start time. You may not be on the air yet, but you need to make sure that the viewers who arrive early are engaged from the moment they join.

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Take this opportunity to display a slideshow of quarterly news, employee anniversaries, or upcoming milestones. Playing music and having something to watch let's attendees know they've successfully logged on to the webcast, and sets the tone for the upcoming presentation.

You can display pre-recorded videos, polling questions or a PowerPoint slide during this period. These can set the stage for the presentation and give the audience something to interact with while they wait.

When it's time to begin the presentation, make sure you start on time. If you are late with your introduction, you will test your audience members' patience, and that tells them you do not respect their time. Don't run long either, for the same reasons. If you say a presentation will take one hour, don't take one hour and fifteen minutes. Respect your audience's valuable time and listen to them as they interact with you during the course of the event.



The Introduction

- When you do begin the main event, remember to lead with something attention grabbing. Audience members are typically at work during webcasts and have a lot of demands on their time. If they aren't engaged within the first two minutes, you might lose them. Here are some ideas for opening statements:

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- Tell a real-life story which has some grab value. Stories are wonderful for engaging audience members because they are relatable, and make audience members want to know more.
- Share a surprising statistic. Numbers, like stories, can make an impact, because they are palpable and concrete.
- Open up with a compelling quotation. Quotations, like stories or statistics, may be more effective if they are somehow surprising, counterintuitive, or challenge expectations.
- Start with some other type of content. You could begin by sharing a pre-recorded video which tells a story, or start out with a demonstration that illustrates your main objectives for the session.

A strong main event starts out with a confident, engaging introduction from a well-prepared presenter. Get started on the right foot, and the rest of your presentation will naturally flow from there.

The Main Event

As your presentation unfolds, you will need to maintain the level of engagement that you created during your opening act and introduction. Here are some essentials to keep in mind if you want to stay on track for a successful webcast:



- Be interested in your own presentation. If you expect other people to take an interest in what you have to say or demonstrate, you should set an example by being interested yourself. There is nothing worse than listening to a dry, disinterested speaker.
- Be interested in your audience! You can't expect your audience members to respect you or what you have to say if you do not show the same respect and interest in them. If you solicit feedback or open up the forum for discussion, then really participate. Don't try to direct every single conversation. Don't ignore audience input just because it wasn't what you expected or planned. Give your audience members a real voice.
- Entertain as you educate. Webcasts are meant to be fun, compelling events. Prepare ways to excite and entertain your audience members as you inform them. Information is always retained better if it was delivered in an entertaining way. Take your presentation seriously, but don't be afraid to have a sense of humor.

Never forget that you are not entitled to your audience and their interest. Whether you are a company reaching out to potential buyers or a member of HR training employees, your audience members are the people you rely on for your success. Those people deserve nothing but respect and gratitude. Show them that throughout your webcast, and you will earn theirs.

Polling Questions

Another feature you can use to interact with your audience and keep audience members involved is polling. Polls allow you to ask your audience members for their opinions, and provide a simple, effective way to gather statistical feedback. This tool can be used creatively in a number of different ways:

- Poll your audience members to make sure they are paying attention and comprehending the information you are sharing with them. This is very helpful if you are running a training session or some other educational event. Quiz your participants regularly to check their knowledge. This is a great time to prompt them to share any questions they may have via the Q&A tool.
- Ask audience members for feedback or opinions. Perhaps you are a product developer showing off your latest product, still in the design stages. You could poll your audience for feedback on product size, color, or other specifications and then actually use that feedback to create a product that will be in high demand.
- Gauge knowledge gained during a presentation. Ask a polling question about the topic you are presenting on to see their responses at the beginning of the session and then ask the same question again at the end. This will allow you to see if your audience understood the concepts being presented and gauge overall effectiveness of the session.
- Poll your audience for suggestions on future presentations. Do you deliver regular webcasts? Trying to decide on topics or activities for your next session? Give your audience members a chance to voice their opinions by voting on your options.

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Those are just several ways you can use the polling feature included in your webcasting platform to engage your audience. As you can see, polling fulfills several different purposes. It keeps your audience members involved, tests their knowledge, and allows you to glean important insights into their wants and needs.



Question & Answer Session

It is important to build in time to take questions from the audience during the presentation. Be prepared to go over additional concepts, demonstrate ideas and discuss what matters most to your attendees.

When answering audience questions, remember:

- Read the text of the question and who it was from. Audience members like to feel as though they are a part of the presentation. Addressing their question and reading out their name allows them to feel invested in the content.

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- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." If you're not sure about an answer, let the audience member know you'll follow up with them after the session with a response. It's important that you actually do follow up with them though so make sure to address this in a timely manner.
- If you don't have time for all the questions, follow up after the webcast. Make sure to address all the questions either live or with a post-webcast email. This will ensure your audience knows that their questions matter to you, and will encourage them to attend future sessions. The answers you find may serve inspiration for future webcasts.

Every presentation should leave the audience with one or more "to do" items. Presentations should invite the audience to take further action, such as buy a product, download a document, engage with a new service, take additional courses, or call for a demo.

Call to Action

- Provide documents to download that contain additional information. You can also ask participants to submit their own documents and content. Have a regular webcast schedule? Offer your participants the chance to submit content to be featured in your next installment.
- Share links to your website or other pertinent destinations online.
- Ask your audience members to share your webcast with others online through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networks. Social sharing buttons embedded in the information make it easy to do this with just one click. Getting others to share your content is challenging, but it's much easier to do when your audience members are already engaged with you in the moment.
- Prompt your audience members to contact a company representative. If you are giving a sales presentation, you can ask your participants to contact a representative to finalize a sale at any time.

You can also have your audience members fill out surveys to provide you with detailed information about their opinions or situations—more on that in the next section!

Surveys

Surveys give you a chance to learn more about your audience members. The analytics you receive allow you to make important decisions about products, customers or even future webcast content.

Surveys are typically used to gauge satisfaction levels with the content, style and presenters following a presentation. Ask your viewers for topical feedback. For example, did you show off a new product? Ask your customers for their thoughts on what they saw, and how satisfied they are with the features you demonstrated. You could also survey them on their past experiences with other products you have developed. Do you have regular news broadcast? Find out which aspects of your company's operations and which projects viewers are most interested in learning more about.

Solicit feedback on your performance as a webcast presenter.

- Ask whether your performance was engaging and insightful.
- Find out whether your participants would have preferred more or fewer slides.
- Discover whether your participants enjoyed videos or other content you shared.
- Find out which features viewers found most helpful, and which they didn't enjoy.
- Learn whether your viewers would have wanted more or less time devoted to Q&A.

Ask for ideas for future presentations. Having your audience members rate their satisfaction on a scale for topics and features helps you predict a lot about their future expectations. But it can also pay off to present open-ended questions.

Your viewers have creative minds, and they may be able to come up with some amazing ideas for future webcasts. Since those ideas come straight from your viewers, you know that they will tune in and find them relevant and interesting.

Surveying your audience also demonstrates to your viewers that you truly care about their experiences with you. This strengthens the bond with your audience.



Evaluate the Data

Once your session is complete and the live event is over, your work doesn't stop. One of the great advantages of running a webcast is the fact that everything is recorded. That includes the session itself, and the activity of all your participants. Q&A, downloads of documents downloaded, links clicked, polls, and surveys, are all tracked and reported on.

Reviewing and understanding post-webcast data is critical to understanding the success of the webcast and planning future sessions.

Evaluate when people joined and left the session to understand how your audience responded to your content. Perhaps you need to shorten your webcasts or tighten up your scripts to not run long.

Webcast reporting will also show the details of how users answered the polling questions and surveys. In aggregate, these statistics will help you to understand how well the audience understood the information. Individually, you can see how each person responded and use this information to follow up with that person as a potential lead, a potential speaker, or as someone who can provide insight into what went well or poorly, and adjust for future sessions.

You might use more slides (or less), change your speaking style, include additional presenters, increase the number of polls or open-ended questions, etc. You may also receive requests for

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information on particular topics or clarification on certain points that were raised during the previous installment. This may determine what topics you decide to discuss in your next presentation.

Final Thoughts

Webcasting is ultimately a collaborative endeavor between you and your audience. While webcasting is presentation-based, it is not a one-way street. The best communicators have their presentations follow an intended path, while allowing them to be transformed in response to audience input.

Like any other skill, this one takes some time and effort to develop. You'll learn many lessons from your first presentation, which are all part of the process of growth. Keep refining your presentation style based on feedback from your audience, and you'll eventually pick up not only the concrete elements of presenting, but also the intangible essentials. You'll be able to integrate careful planning with improvisation, and you'll discover how to balance your audience's contributions with your own. This is not only fundamental to webcasting, but to business a whole, which is why webcasting is ultimately a reflection of the way you run your company and engage your personnel and customers.

About Us

Lime Crane's webcasting solutions help organizations communicate in a more interactive manner with their employees, customers, prospects, partners, and members. Each webcast can be deployed as a link on a website or in an email.

To learn more about how Lime Crane can fit into your organizations communications strategy please visit <http://www.limecrane.com/webcasting>, email sales@limecrane.com, or call us at **(404) 822-9922**.