12 Tips for Conducting Effective Webinars

Webinars have become increasingly popular in recent years for conveying information to a range of virtual attendees in remote locations. While this form of media is great for distributing information to individuals and organizations that would not be able to attend a live presentation, it can be difficult to achieve the same level of engagement with a virtual audience. We were curious about what webinar attendees most valued in their webinar experiences, so we asked them. We asked respondents to rate their experience with the following attributes on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfying) to 5 (very satisfying):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall value</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall learning experience</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain your interest</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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It seems clear that webinars represent value to participants, particularly from the standpoint of cost/value. The ability to gain information and knowledge from the convenience of their own home, office—or backyard—is clearly valued!

When asked about the likelihood of participating in a webinar in the future, the overall rating (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being “extremely likely”) was 4.3. Interestingly, the ability to interact with program presenters did not represent a significant benefit to these respondents, suggesting that “on-demand” programs carry equal value to live presentations. In terms of the length of time respondents were willing to spend with this form of training, the overwhelming majority—58 percent—said one hour.

Based on this feedback and our own experience, we’ve compiled 12 tips for conducting effective webinars.

12 Tips for Conducting Effective Webinars

1. **Keep your registration page as simple as possible.** You want your attendees to be able to register for your webinar with as little hassle as possible. This means not asking for an undue amount of registration information from attendees. Additionally, the description of your webinar should be concise and to the point so potential attendees do not have to sift through too much text to find out what they will gain by participating in your presentation. Simplicity does not mean leaving out important details, however. The registration page should clearly state the time and date of the presentation and the planned length and any relevant technical requirements, such as software, for participating. **Our bias is to also include the price—don’t be coy!**
2. **Prepare for technical difficulties.** One complaint many survey respondents had was that webinars often experience technical problems that can be very distracting and waste time. Additionally, regardless of the content and quality of the presentation, technical difficulties can portray a lack of professionalism that attendees are likely to remember. Have backup plans in place. For instance, have a backup computer with the presentation loaded in case your primary computer freezes or crashes during the event.

3. **Double check all information and test links.** Just as with technical difficulties, a broken link or typo can distract attendees from the content of your presentation and reflect negatively on your presenters or your organization. By taking a little bit of time to go through your presentation to carefully proofread and test links, you can avoid an embarrassing error.

4. **Increase attendance with regular reminders.** The rates of attendance relative to registration can be fairly low for many webinars. What seemed interesting at the time of registration may seem less intriguing when time restrictions emerge closer to the presentation. Simple email or phone reminders can help encourage commitment from registered attendees. Be sure to remind your audience of the key topics of the webinar and the benefits they will receive if they attend.

5. **Use well-known and knowledgeable speakers.** Attendees will perceive much more value from your webinar if you have a speaker who is well known in the industry and has credibility with the audience. As webinars become increasingly popular and easy to attend from a functionality standpoint, there will be more webinar opportunities than time to attend webinars. Therefore, you will need a solid speaker to make sure your webinar is a priority for your attendees.
6. **Keep the webinar low cost or free if possible.** Our survey found that roughly 45 percent of respondents were willing to attend a webinar if it was offered for the same price as a live session on the same topic. On the other hand, approximately 85 percent said they would attend a webinar that was offered at no cost. The goal of a webinar doesn’t necessarily have to be driving income from the webinar itself. Instead, it should be seen as a powerful marketing tool to build awareness and credibility for your organization.

7. **Begin the event with a welcome slide.** A welcome slide to let attendees know they have reached the correct webinar and to remind them of the major topics is recommended for starting the webinar. The slide should also contain information on the procedures for any type of interaction with the presenter, such as a Q&A session.

8. **Make your slides visually appealing.** While this tip is relevant for any presentation, it is especially important for webinar presentations where your audience will not be physically present. It will always be tempting for attendees to check email and do other work online while the webinar is being presented; however, this temptation will be reduced significantly if the material is visually appealing and can hold the attention of the attendees.

9. **Interact with attendees.** While not all attendees are interested in interacting with the webinar presenters, many find such interaction more engaging. Live interaction using a Q&A session, for example, can make a webinar feel more like a live presentation and keep the audience engaged, whether they choose to interact or simply observe the interaction with other attendees.
10. **Offer an on-demand option for viewing.** One complaint mentioned about webinars was the fact that the ability to connect attendees and presenters from around the globe means that there are often substantial timing problems caused by differences in time zones. To increase attendance, offer an on-demand option for viewing. While this will eliminate some of the interaction for those selecting the on-demand option, it gives your attendees the option to watch the webinar on their own time and can provide a boost to your attendance numbers. Our survey found that 82 percent of respondents said they would attend a free webinar, assuming the topic and speaker were of interest to them, if it was available on-demand, while only 55 percent said they would attend the same seminar if they could interact with the presenter.

11. **Keep the presentation to 1 hour or less.** It is important with webinars to start and end on time and to not have the presentation unnecessarily long. Our survey revealed that the majority (58 percent) of respondents felt that one hour was an appropriate length of time for a webinar. As with live, in-person presentations, the longer it takes to present the material, the easier it is for attendees to lose interest and become distracted. This is even truer when the attendees are watching from a remote location with a computer in front of them.

12. **Follow up with attendees after the presentation.** Use an email to follow up with attendees a few days after the webinar. The follow up can include questions to generate feedback that will help with future webinars. Additionally, a follow up can serve as a subtle reminder of the benefit that the attendees should have received from the webinar. Include a brief summary of the key points to remind them of content and key takeaways.
Webinars are a great way to reach a large, geographically diverse audience by bringing the content to the attendees rather than forcing them to commute to a central location.

*Today's technology makes it easy and inexpensive to create your own webinars to promote your products and services, or as revenue-generating training programs.*

As webinars become more prevalent, it will be increasingly important to offer crisp, professional presentations with useful content and credible presenters. By following the above tips, you can help ensure that your webinars will generate consistent attendance and a positive impression of your organization.

*Need help? Let us know. linda@stratcommunications.com*