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PRESENTATIONS ▼

10 Ways to Keep Your Audience Engaged During an Online Presentation

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*Written by:
Julie Hansen*

I once made a sandwich, responded to an email, and let the dog out--all while “watching” an online presentation. I’m not proud. And I’m not alone.

InterCall (<https://hbr.org/2014/08/what-people-are-really-doing-when-theyre-on-a-conference-call>), the world’s largest conference call company found that audiences are engaged in a number of activities while on conference calls. Everything from doing other work (65%), to eating or making food (55%), to online shopping (21%).

It’s not a huge leap to conclude that similar behaviors extend to web audiences where the cloak of invisibility and easy access to multiple devices invites the opportunity to escape.

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When you are presenting online, maintaining your audience's attention presents a unique set of challenges. What often works in in-person presentations – FASTER, BIGGER, LOUDER! – doesn't always translate to a virtual audience where the name of the game is Engagement.

Understanding how to keep your audience engaged, and working with the challenges of the medium and the technology, requires some strategic but necessary adjustments in the design and delivery of your online presentation. Be sure to find the right conference app (<https://whova.com/whova-event-app/>) for presenting as well.

Here are 10 ways to ensure your audience keeps their eyes on your web presentation, and off of their email.

1 Increase your visibility.

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Many presenters complain that they can't see their audience. But the bigger problem is that (most of the time) they can't see you. There are few things as compelling to other humans as the human face.

A classic study by Richard Fantz (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-big-baby-experiment/>), which revealed that infants stared twice as long at simplified human faces than shapes, indicates our fascination is hard-wired. Add to that the fact that over 90% of how we communicate (http://finance.yahoo.com/news/pf_article_102425.html) is through nonverbal cues like gestures and facial expressions, and you start to get a picture of what a disadvantage being simply a faceless voice to your audience is!

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Obviously the easiest and most effective way to increase your visibility is to use a webcam. Despite this quick fix, I've found that a surprisingly small percentage of business presenters take advantage of this. (I've even gone to Fortune 500 companies where the entire sales team has tape over their webcam...*just in case they accidentally turn it on!*)

If you're one of those camera shy individuals, at least have a simple slide with your photo and credentials on it which you can show when you open and close, as well as during Q&A. The more you can make yourself visible -- and not just a disembodied voice -- the more engaged your audience will be.

2 Leverage your voice.

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When you remove the physical component from your presentation, your voice carries a much larger load. A monotone, unclear or hard-to-hear voice is magnified in the virtual world. As your primary communication tool, you need to make sure you are in your best possible voice.

Start by recording yourself and analyzing your strengths and weaknesses, then get to work. There is plenty of advice online about how to improve various vocal issues. At the least, do some simple warm-ups before your presentation. Just like a great vocal artist, your money is where your mouth is, so don't treat it lightly.

3 Embrace the pause.

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Under the cover of invisibility, online audiences can be a very passive lot. As a result, presenters have a tendency to go into long monologues that only further discourage participation and encourage tune-out. Make friends with the pause.

It can be a great tool for giving your audience a chance to process what you've said, ask a question, or make a comment. There are other strategic uses for the pause as well. A pause before revealing something important can build anticipation, while one at the end of a sentence can reinforce a key point.

4 Start on time.

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Between connectivity and log-on issues, arrival times are rarely consistent among audience members. As the host, how do you avoid frustrating the people who are on time without penalizing the latecomers?

Here's a suggestion: Have two openings! The first opening is a "soft" opening, designed to get your audience engaged without revealing too much.

For example, a poll that your on-time audience can answer which leads into your topic. Whatever your soft opening is, make sure that it is a) interesting, b) relevant and c) not vital to your audience's understanding of the topic.

The second opening is your hard opening, reserved for when everyone is in attendance. This double opening is a bit more work, but pays off big by keeping everyone happy.

5 Plan interaction.

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In order to keep your audience engaged, you need to build some interaction into your presentation. With the average focused attention span (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/3522781/Stress-of-modern-life-cuts-attention-spans-to-five-minutes.html>) of humans hovering around 5 minutes, sporadic attempts at interaction are not going to cut it.

Get your audience interacting before they hit the attention free fall by planning some form of interaction every 4 to 5 minutes. This can take many forms, like a question, a poll, or a white-boarding session.

Whatever you choose, just make sure you plan and prepare ahead of time so interaction doesn't fall by the wayside with everything else you have to keep track of.

6 Visually reinforce key points.

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You can get away with using fewer slides during an in-person presentation because it's easier to gauge your audience's comprehension by their expressions or body language.

Places where you would naturally stop often get overlooked as on-line presenters mistake audience silence for understanding.

To make sure you don't leave your audience in the dust of confusion, prepare a summary slide with key points covered after each section and stop to recap and take questions.

7 Create word pictures.

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In a virtual presentation your words have to work even harder than in a live presentation. Think about creating pictures with your words.

For instance, when describing something use words that engage the senses. (e.g., “it looks like a sunset,” or “it feels like a piece of crushed velvet.”) Be specific and avoid broad generalities. (e.g., “it weighs 510 pounds” as opposed to “it’s really big.”)

Use personal stories or interesting comparisons. Listen to how your favorite podcasters use their voice and descriptive words to draw you in.

8 Simplify your slides.

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Have you ever decided not to watch a movie on that little airplane screen because it would be too hard to follow? The same holds true for a web presentation.

Since you have no idea what size screen your audience is viewing your presentation on (or what their connection is like), design your slides to work well on a smaller screen. Small screens can multiply already busy graphics. Animations can appear jerky or out of sync with your talk track.

Keep your graphics simple and crisp and limit your animations to simple fades and transitions and you can avoid alienating any audience members.

9 Use purposeful movement

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There is an area of the brain called the Limbic System (<http://biology.about.com/od/anatomy/a/aa042205a.htm>) that is highly sensitive to movement. This was probably meant to keep us safe from dinosaurs, but what this means for today's presenters is that any onscreen movement will draw your viewers' eyes. This has its pluses and minuses.

Purposeful movement, i.e., changing slides or using your web tools to guide your audience's eyes to different areas on screen works in your favor. Random or chaotic movement, i.e., jerky animations, a racing mouse, or rapid transitions work against you. Wield the power of movement purposefully and wisely.

10 End the party on time.

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While this applies to in-person presentations as well, ending on time plays even greater importance in a web presentation where it's easy for people to drop off or tune out. Make it very clear upfront that you plan to stop at a specific time. When that designated time arrives, deliver your closing and take any additional questions off-line or schedule another call.

Keeping your virtual audience engaged is no small task. Understanding where and how you are at risk for tune out and making some adjustments in your presentation will help you achieve your goal and keep you from talking to yourself.

Your Turn

Keep your audience fully awake during your online presentation by not only applying these expert tips but also using the right tools to deliver it. The last thing you want is to botch your presentation because your attendees are busy downloading bulky software and can't get on the same page as you.

One way to prevent these kinds of technical problems is to use a browser-based tool like Visme that allows you to share a URL and conduct your presentation online. Another advantage is that you have plenty of graphic and animation tools at your disposal to increase the visual interest of your slide deck. You can try it for free here (<http://www.visme.co/>).

And if you have any questions or tips on how to keep your online audience from multitasking during your presentation, we'd love to hear from you. Drop us a line in the comments section below!



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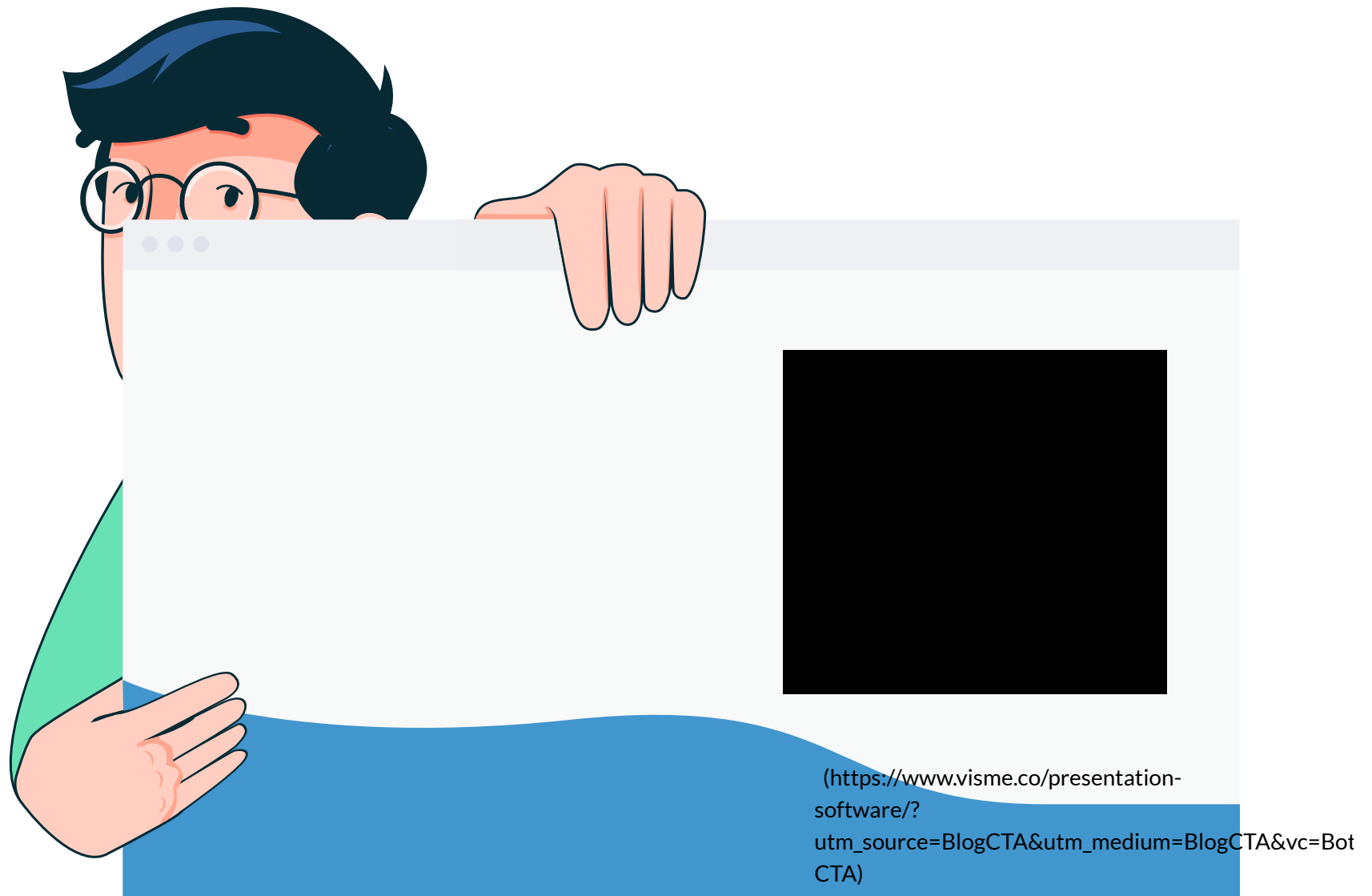
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Julie Hansen is the author of Sales Presentation for Dummies. She specializes in helping sales teams craft and deliver winning presentations and demos by applying today's best practices from business, acting, improv, and storytelling.

She is the founder of Performance Sales & Training (<http://performancesalesandtraining.com/>) and has been featured in numerous business publications, including Selling Power, Sales Mastery, Entrepreneur Magazine and Sales Management Digest.

9 responses to “10 Ways to Keep Your Audience Engaged During an Online Presentation”

Lee Keller says:

October 30, 2016 at 7:39 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-26093>)

Excellent! I try to get the same points across to people I train on giving presentations. Teaching it is easy, but getting them to change their habits is an uphill battle. I hope you don't mind me sharing your link with them. You've created a reference and a way to reinforce what I'm teaching. Thank you!

Reply

([https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-](https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/)

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Nayomi Chibana (<http://www.visme.co>) says:

November 10, 2016 at 5:22 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-27062>)

Thank you, Lee, for the feedback. Please do share the link with anyone you think would find it useful 😊

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=27062#respond>)

Julie Hansen (<http://www.performancesalesandtraining.com>) says:

November 14, 2016 at 4:08 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-27506>)

Lee, thanks for your comments. It is difficult to get people to change – especially when they think they have to change too many things! I like to ask people to pick 1-3 things they're going to practice, and then as they master that, incorporate the next.

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/>)

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replytocom=27506#respond)

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Ogundipe Lukman says:

January 28, 2017 at 2:17 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-32821>)

thanks Nayomi. I really enjoy the tips, please can I edit the tips for podcast presentation in Nigeria?

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=32821#respond>)

Nayomi Chibana (<http://www.visme.co>) says:

March 1, 2017 at 2:52 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-34431>)

Hi Ogundipe. If you can please reference us and provide a link back, that would work.

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=34431#respond>)

Mdu Rohtak (<http://mdurohtakresults.blogspot.com/>) says:
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November 13, 2016 at 12:34 am (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-27357>)



Hey,

There are many things to keep your audience engaged with the content. The articles you have mentioned in the list should be read.

I would surely go for them.

Thanks for sharing with us.

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=27357#respond>)

Julie Hansen (<http://www.performancesalesandtraining.com>) says:

November 14, 2016 at 4:12 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-27508>)

Thanks Mdu. You're right, there are many ways to keep people engaged. I would say the most impactful things you can do are to to make yourself more visible by using a web cam and and planning various types of interaction with your audience.

Reply

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SOLOMON G. JATO says:

August 2, 2019 at 9:27 pm (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-97229>)

Great tips, Julie! I find the list of tips you provided to be really engaging and will put them into practice. Thank you for sharing this post.

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=97229#respond>)

Daniel Ndoumbe says:

May 2, 2020 at 3:22 am (<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/#comment-119381>)

Hello, your tips on online presentation was quite instructive. Now, let me know how possible it is to use powerpoint in giving an an online presentation.How do I also use the webcam along side the link to deliver the presentation. Thanks.

Reply

(<https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/?replytocom=119381#respond>)

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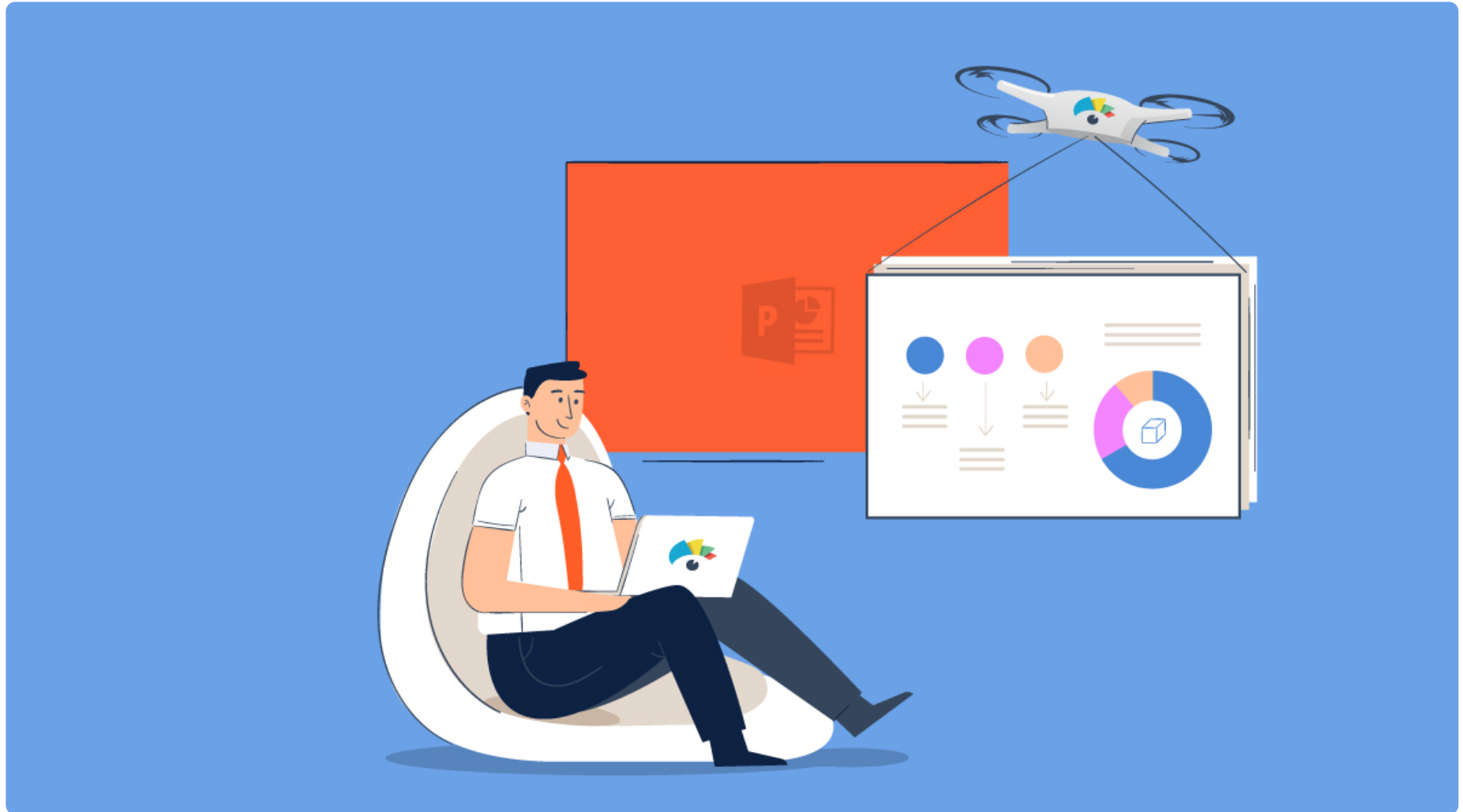
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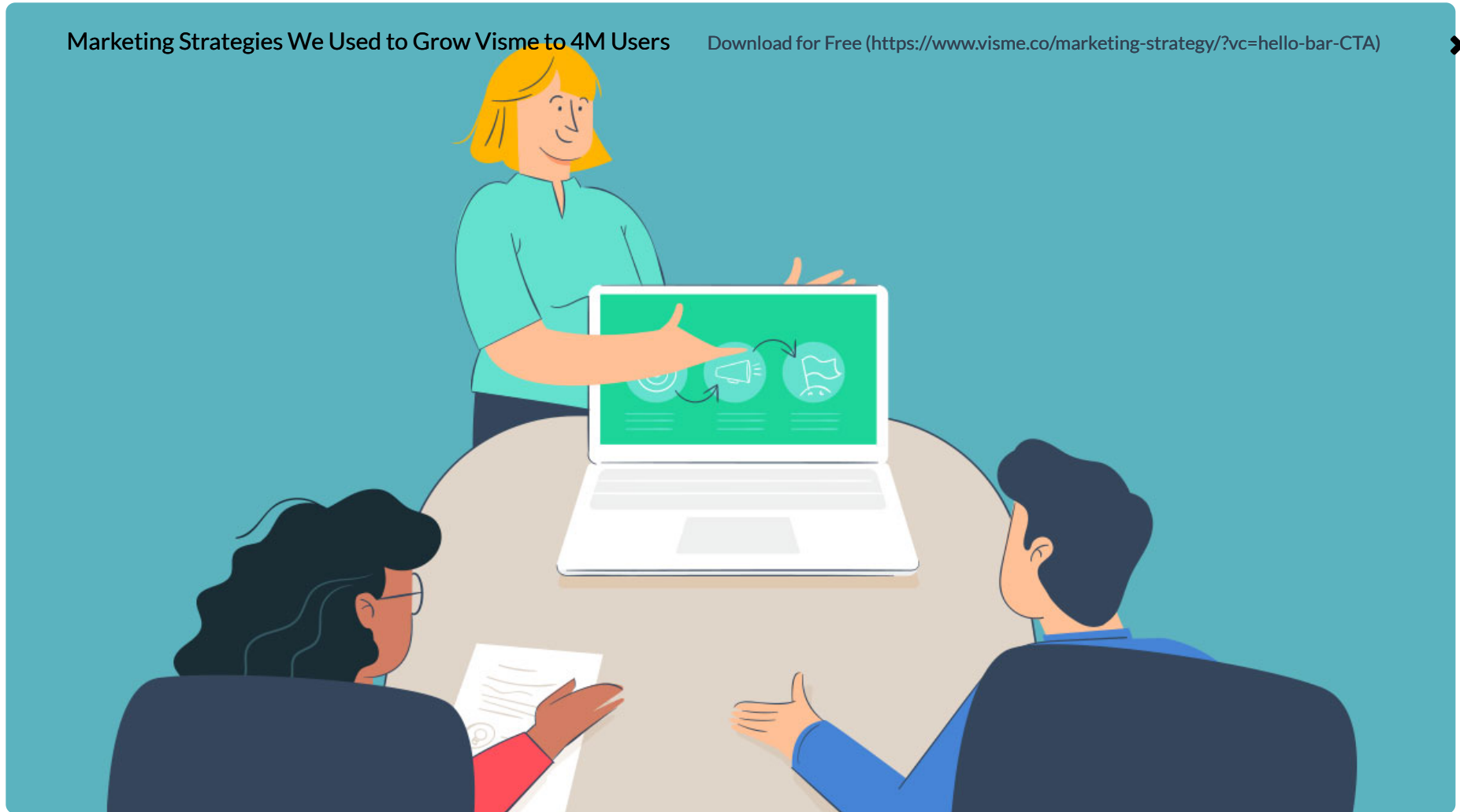


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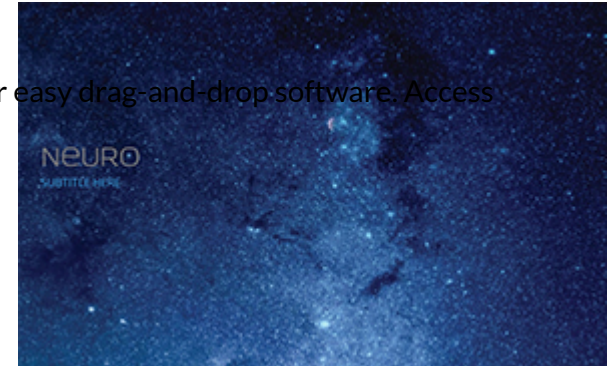
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