Presenting online

Online or virtual presentations and meetings are becoming more and more commonplace. From taking part in courses such as this MOOC, to participating in web seminars (or webinars as they are commonly called) or being part of your company's virtual meetings using Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, or other video conferencing software, business people are now often required to take part in or create online presentations as part of their jobs. According to the poll results in a webinar run through the Harvard Business Review by Rob Ashkenas on the topic of 'Presenting the Perfect Online Presentation[1], 41% of business people will attend 1-3 virtual meetings or presentations a month, 30% will attend more than three of these presentations monthly, and 30% of these business people are also required to present virtually at least once a month. Clearly, this is a topic that affects the majority of business people in our times.

Presenting virtually can make many people extremely nervous. They may be nervous because they lack confidence in their public speaking abilities. They may also be nervous because when presenting virtually, the speaker does not usually have the opportunity to interact or connect with the audience members so there is no chance to use face-to-face tricks, such as eye contact, to interact with the audience.

This reading will focus on providing tips[2] on how to deliver an effective online presentation in a business context.

Use the right tools

If you are presenting virtually to a team of people spread out all over the country or all over the world, it can be difficult to know who is taking part in the audience or if they are able to follow along with your presentation as you move from slide to slide. To counteract this stress and ambiguity, make sure everyone is participating and following using **collaborative software** that will allow you to monitor who is online and to be certain that everyone is talking about the same slide.

Keep slides simple

Even more so than in 'real-life' presentations, slides for online presentations must be kept simple. A large amount of text will be difficult to read and potentially confusing, and your audience will not have the advantage of having you in the same room if they need to ask questions. Instead, think of your slides a simple reminders of the topic you will present verbally. This means use just a simple heading and a maximum of three or four bullet point to support

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[1] This HBR webinar can be found at: https://hbr.org/2014/01/presenting-the-perfect-online-presentation
[2] Tips summarized from 10 Tips for Giving Great Online Presentations: http://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/10-tips-for-giving-great-online-presentations.html

what you are explaining. If the audience needs to review, they can listen to your presentation again (it should be recorded) and can use the slides a reminders.

Clarity and efficiency is key

If you are presenting information virtually, it is imperative that you make the presentation itself easy to understand and concise. This means that each slide should represent about 3-4 minutes of material and that the maximum number of slides you should cover would not be more than 15-18. If you really do have more material you need to present, seriously consider putting this additional information in another presentation.

The way you present must also be clear and concise. Rehearse your presentation and remember that when presenting online, you must focus on articulating clearly and at a slow enough pace that everyone can follow. You will not be able to adjust your presentation flow or speed to match the feedback from your audience, so speak clearly and slowly to be sure everyone understands what you are saying.

Keep your movements even

Actors, newscasters and politicians are all aware that in the world of video fast, jerky movements look especially frenetic on-screen. If you are giving an online presentation, you are essentially on-screen so should follow the same advice. Be aware of your gestures. Try to use slow, smooth movements that will translate well for video.

Entertain

Engaging with any audience is made easier if you use personal stories and humor to create a connection with the people listening. This is even more important when presenting online. Stories or anecdotes and little self-effacing humor will make your presentation more 'fun' and more interesting.

A picture is worth 1000 words

Again, just as with face-to-face presentations, the visual aids are usually more effective if there are more 'visuals' and less text. On the other hand, do not go overboard with cutesy clipart and inappropriate images. Focus on providing a few good images that are truly relevant for what you want to communicate. There is also the opportunity to use video, but if you choose to do so, make sure it is short and to the point (1-3 minutes). If the video is longer, just post the URL and let your audience members watch it on their own time.

Encourage conversation

The lack of interaction and connection with their virtual audience is something that is very concerning for novice online presenters. This lack of connection can be somewhat overcome if you choose to use collaborative software to give your presentation. Most collaborative software allows attendees to communicate with the presenter and each other during the

presentation using messaging so the presentation itself is not interrupted. In order to encourage engagement and connection, it is a good idea to invite your audience to communicate like this from the beginning of your presentation. The added bonus of this type of messaging while you present is that you will be able to see how engaged your audience is so you can tailor the presentation if need be.

Prevent outside noise

The little noises in everyday life can seem especially loud and distracting when they are picked up by a microphone and sent to the ears of your audience. This means you should try to present in a quiet place. Put your phone on 'vibrate' rather than 'ring', turn off your phone, put an 'on air' or 'do not disturb' sign on your door. All of these sounds could seriously disturb your presentation.

Leave time for questions

The time set aside for questions is very important during an online presentations. Make sure that you set aside enough time to answer questions and engage in discussion with your audience. For example, if you have an hour for your presentation, put aside 15 minutes for the Q & A. Attendees could be encouraged to send you their questions as the presentation is being given or they could ask these questions verbally at the end, it is up to you. Manage the questions with authority though. Do not let questions go on and on or get redundant.

End on time

Most business people are busy and will probably have other meetings or activities scheduled for after your online presentation. It is respectful to finish at the agreed upon time so your audience can move on to their next duties. If you are unable to finish answering all the questions in your designated Q & A, send your written response to the team after the meeting is done. Make sure to send everyone the link to your recorded presentation so they can review.