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Step By Step Process for Creating and Delivering Effective Webinars

Introduction

A webinar is a seminar that is conducted over the Internet. It is an effective learning tool (Cater et al. 2013) for reaching new audiences (Allred and Smallidge 2010). Online learning events as opposed to inperson events save travel time and vehicle emissions providing agencies and organizations with economic benefits (Bardon et al. 2013). Furthermore, webinars provide clients a convenient opportunity to learn (Allred and Smallidge 2010) and to earn continuing education credits. This fact sheet takes the Extension professional through a step by step process of choosing an interactive webinar service, creating content that is meaningful to the audience, recruiting attendees through the appropriate channels, practicing an effective presentation, and following up after the webinar. The step by step process better ensures Extension clients receive the learning experience they expect.

- Beginning from the ground up to develop a unique webinar program.

Whether starting from the ground up or using a ready-made webinar portal, Extension professionals should consider options that encourage engaging and interactive webinars. These options include webinar services that allow for polling, chatting, webcam, and video sharing during the webinar broadcast. Beside interactive features, Extension professionals should consider the number of attendees, ease of use, and help and support from the webinar service provider before choosing a webinar service. These items can affect the cost of the webinar service and the experience for clients (Web Conferencing Review 2015). To review and compare webinar services, Extension professionals may visit sites such as "Top Ten Reviews" [<http://web-conferencingservices.toptenreviews.com>].

1. Choose a Webinar Service

Currently there are a number of webinar service options with varying services and costs. Examples of options available to Extension professionals include:

- Using one-stop-shop webinar portals such as forestrywebinars.net or conservationwebinars.net
- Collaborating with other Extension professionals that are already offering webinars

2. Create a Webinar

Identify What Clients Want:

Extension professionals should begin by obtaining feedback from clients. Feedback should include client interests and learning expectations. Extension professionals can gather information from their clients on possible topics and presenters through surveys, interviews, and/or polls before or after other educational events.

Design Content:

When designing content, Extension professionals should consider the following list of tips based on research conducted by West (2005) and Grabowski (2010).

1. Describe “what” topic will be covered and “why” the audience should be interested.
2. Develop an outline of the key points with a purposeful flow.
3. Consider a more general presentation (as opposed to too detailed).

- Aim for 3 key points each 15 minutes or less

- Conclude each 15 minute segment with a check-in; either a brief summary or audience engagement question (see “Create Engagement” section)

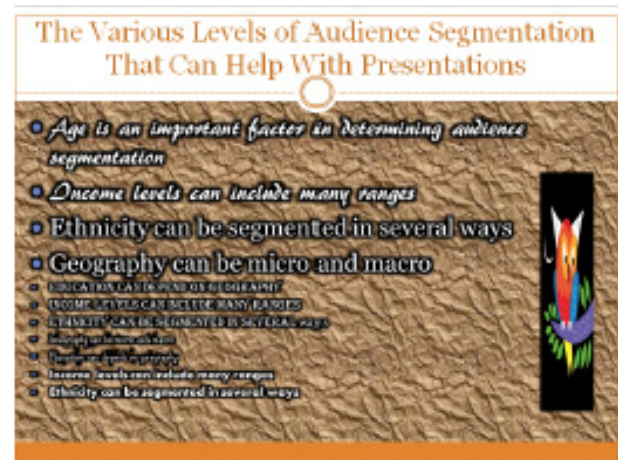
- Make slides and titles simple by using 4 words or less for the title and bullet points (Figure 1)

- Create readable slides by using a dark (color-blind friendly), simple font no smaller than 18 points (e.g. Times New Roman or Arial) and a plain, noncompeting background; steer clear of PowerPoint transitions and animations that can distract the audience

4. Stay within the time limit.

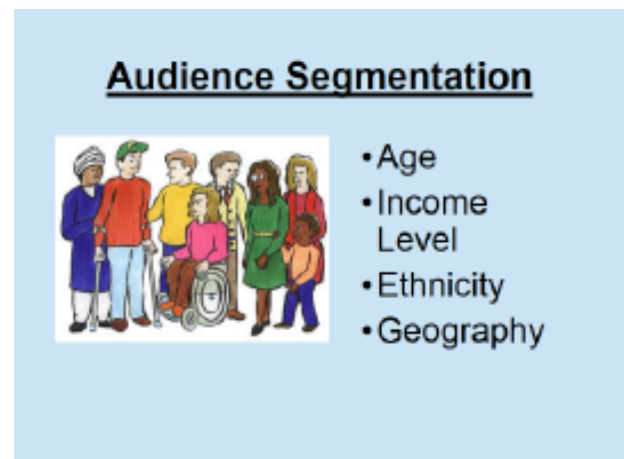
- Stick to 1-2 expert speakers and one moderator for a one hour webinar
- Design a script for each of the topics
- Leave time for an introduction, conclusion, and audience questions

Figure 1.
The Layout of a Poor and Good Slide



A “Poor” Slide:

Title with too many words, Too many bullet points and words, Small and hard to read text, Distracting background, Distorted picture with no relation to content



A “Good” Slide:

Title with 4 words or less, 4 points with less than 4 words per point, Large and simple text, Simple background, Crisp image related to slide

Create Engagement:

To make a dynamic and memorable webinar, Extension professionals should foster active participation. Active participation is when the audience interacts with the presenter and other audience members instead of simply listening. Extension presenters may encourage participation at the beginning of webinars by asking the audience simple questions that allow them to practice the poll and discussion features. This will allow audience members to feel comfortable with the webinar features before starting.

Extension presenters should consider asking the audience questions that will help them apply what they have just learned. Questions such as "Type in the chat box the technique you would apply to your work from this list of choices" help audience members apply the concepts. Scenarios that apply the taught concepts can also be useful. An example could be to ask the audience to, "Raise your "hand" if you think Suzie should take these steps, leave your "hand" down if she should not take these steps." Giving applied examples of what was just taught is a great way of involving and helping viewers to grasp the concepts. Avoid asking questions such as "Raise your "hand" if you will be using this concept" or "Do you like this idea?" These are one line responses that do not ask the audience to think critically about what was just taught. Another practice that can encourage participation is to use 'you' or 'your' in statements or questions to the audience. For example: "Do you use practice A, B, or C?" instead of "Does anyone use practice A, B, or C?"

Other key points to engaging the audience include:

- Entice webinar participants to come to the presentation prepared by posting questions, resources, and/or articles about the presentation ahead of time
- Illustrate the topic throughout the presentation (e.g. pictures, diagrams, videos)
- Engage the audience through questions
 - Ask the audience 1-2 applied questions for each presentation topic (Figure 2)
 - Obtain feedback from the audience through the webinar services (e.g. chat box, polling box, and/or hand tools)
- Interact with clients
 - Leave time at the end of the presentation for questions
 - Give the presenter's contact information for questions after the presentation



Figure 2.
Audience Engagement Example Slide

3. Recruit Participants

Message:

The message plays an important role in recruiting webinar participants. Webinar announcements should include the following information:

- Title
- Presenters/authors
- Date and time
- Education credits
- What they will learn
- Sponsors
- Who should participate
- Webinar access instructions

Consider capturing the attention of clients by including images of people and things the potential webinar participants can relate to or that visually show what participants will be learning in the webinar.

Media:

Extension presenters have the opportunity to survey and ask in person clients where they look for information about educational events or trainings. This information will better inform Extension presenters on effective communication routes. Past research has shown that the most effective marketing tool is e-mail (ON24 Webinar Benchmarks Report 2013); however multiple other options for reaching clients exist including social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube), websites, and/or newsletters.

To increase marketing efforts, Extension professionals can:

- Include social media
 - If including social media, consider

adding images, working effectively with 1-2 social media applications clients currently use, and continuing to connect with clients in the real world (King 2013)

- Useful social media tools for natural resource professionals' work place missions include Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Gharis et al. 2013)

- Work with others – Extension professionals can broaden their outreach by asking partner organizations to help market through email and website postings
- Link your efforts – Post links to webinar registration on newsletters, social media sites, and other websites

Whichever route taken, Extension presenters should make sure that users register with the webinar service so that attendees' contact information is saved. Then Extension presenters can contact the attendees directly the next time a webinar is offered.

Timing:

Extension presenters should consider sending advertisement messages at least 1 month in advance and reminders two weeks before the event. A final reminder message should be sent the day before the event. Messages delivered on Tuesday generate more registrants than any other day (ON24 Webinar Benchmarks Report 2013).

4. Practice

Before delivering a webinar it is crucial that the presenter practices. Certain webinar services provide a moderator. If the webinar service does not offer a moderator, presenters may request help from colleagues. A moderator's duties include:

- Working with the speakers before the webinar to better ensure a smooth presentation
- Checking that the technology works properly before the webinar (e.g. internet connections, speakers, and microphone)
- Introducing the webinar and speaker
- Providing instructions to the audience on how to interact during the webinar
- Monitoring the event for client and/or technical difficulties
- Keeping track of audience questions
- Ensuring the webinar stays on schedule
- Concluding the webinar (Molay 2007)

A practice session should be set 2 to 3 weeks in advance with the moderator. Practicing ahead of time with a moderator or another individual familiar with the webinar service will allow the presenter to find where information is missing, test the flow and timing of the presentation, and pose questions. In addition, the presenter should practice the week of the presentation, this will allow him/her to iron-out technical difficulties and eliminate content that may make the presentation go too long or be redundant. When practicing, speakers should consider the event as real and time themselves. Speaking with energy and enthusiasm will transfer to the

audience. Audiences will lose interest if their speaker is monotone and detached.

5. The Day of the Webinar

Speakers should gather all materials at least 1 hour before going live. Materials include paper copies of the webinar presentation outline, materials that are referenced during the webinar, and additional information that may be needed for audience questions. Presenters should log-in to the webinar service 1 hour before the webinar to test the equipment. During the webinar, presenters should follow their outline and keep to the time as much as possible. Moderators should consider using a different computer network from the presenters, so that they can continue to advance slides and presentation material in the event that the presenter has technical difficulties (Molay 2007)

6. After the Webinar

Presenters should consider sending the participants a thank you e-mail with the following items:

1. Follow-up survey
 - The survey will help the presenter understand what the audience liked or didn't like about the webinar to make improvements for the future
 - The survey provides an opportunity to ask participants what they plan to do with the new information they have learned and what webinars they would like to see in the future
2. Link to a PDF of the webinar slides
 - The link should include a summary

page and the slides which webinar participants can refer to after the webinar is over

3. Links to related publications or other materials
4. Links to a recorded webinar
 - Almost one-quarter of registrants view the webinar after the live event (ON24 Webinar Benchmarks Report 2013)
 - A link will allow participants to watch the webinar again as a refresher and/or to share the webinar with others who were not able to attend the webinar
5. Advertisements for future events

Conclusion

Extension professionals and others are employing webinars to reach their clients. The step by step process in this fact sheet helps Extension professionals choose a webinar service, create useful content, and deliver effective webinars. Following the steps better ensures that Extension professionals meet the needs of their clients, while still receiving the benefits and economic savings of webinars they expect.

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