Book The Exceptional Presenter Goes Virtual

Take Command of Your Message

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Recommendation

The future of virtual conferencing, virtual meetings and virtual presentations has arrived, for those who can afford it. To see the high level of technological sophistication currently available, check Wikipedia's entry for "videotelephony." There, you will see a photo of 14 people conferencing, with six sitting on one side of a conference table, and virtual images – as real as life – of the other eight sitting at a similar table somewhere else in the world. The effect is as if all 14 individuals are in the same room. Expect teleconferencing to become even more lifelike soon. Cisco Systems currently is working on realistic holographic technology to replace videoconferencing. Presentation coach Timothy J. Koegel discusses new virtual presentation and meeting technology, and teaches you how to make effective use of this high-tech wonder. *BooksInShort* finds that he does an excellent job of explaining how virtual presenters can leverage their new toolbox.

Take-Aways

- Virtual meetings and presentations are now an everyday reality.
- With state-of-the-art virtual technology, presenters can communicate cost-effectively with audience members across the globe.
- Presenting virtually gives rise to more difficult challenges than conventional presentations.
- If you fail to engage your virtual audience, they will tune you out.
- Your virtual presentation's first 60 to 90 seconds must absolutely hook your audience.
- Lead with the information that will most engage people.
- Virtual presentations require careful planning, split-second timing and natural transitions.
- Presenters can learn many techniques from broadcast professionals.
- Telepresence is an expensive but effective option when face-to-face meetings aren't possible.
- Most customers and business associates prefer face-to-face meetings.

Summary

Today's Virtual World

Virtual presentations and meetings are becoming increasingly popular for numerous reasons, including tightened travel budgets, security hassles at airports and enhanced technology. People see virtual presentations as a cost-effective, efficient and practical communication method. Virtual presentations include training, teaching, account meetings, sales meetings, client reviews, job interviews, cold calls, customer service and board meetings. As technology advances, expect that more of your future communications will be virtual.

"The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we're ready for it." (Arnold Glasgow, American author and humorist)

If your virtual presentation is not relevant, no one will pay attention to it. Your message, purpose, topic and agenda must be compelling. If you do not engage people quickly, they will tune out. Request that your audience commit their attention. Say, for example, "Give me your undivided attention for the next 25 minutes. In turn, I will give you three strategies that will help you generate additional opportunities with your existing clients."

"The producer is responsible for making sure that what is supposed to happen, happens."

Ask your audience to turn off their electronic devices. Include your spectators in your presentation by calling on individuals for input. Raise a question and wait until someone speaks, no matter how long that takes. Your audience will understand that they must participate. Open strong. Get audience members involved by including "humor, visuals, video, sound and music." Stories enliven your message. So do visual props.

"If you fail to plan, plan to fail."

More practice means a better delivery, which will encourage audiences to respond to you. Sit comfortably at your desk, with your hands in a relaxed position, 8 to 12 inches in front of you on the desk. Avoid fidgeting. Maintain direct eye contact with the camera, which should capture your face, shoulders and upper body. Speak distinctly.

"Life is not broadcast quality, so don't expect your virtual presentations to be."

Watch the clock to keep your timing sharp. Avoid "verbal graffiti," such as "you know," "like," "uh" and "um." Successful virtual meetings are "exceptional presentations" that must feature seamless transitions between, for example, stories, film and audio clips, graphic items and background music. Technology enhances your message, but your success depends on what you say.

Learn from TV and Radio Broadcasters

Presenting virtually is not easy. Connecting to your audience is tough, and staying connected is even tougher. The necessary web tools can be tricky to master. And be assured that your unseen audience members will occupy themselves with emails, websites, tweeting and texting, among other distractions. Virtual presenters face the same challenges as radio or television broadcasters, so learn from them.

"In some organizations, online meetings are viewed as an opportunity to get other stuff done."

Broadcast professionals do not interact with their audience. They make no eye contact. They assume their audience multitasks while watching or listening. Yet most do excellent work presenting information virtually. Watch and listen to announcers with care. Adopt standard broadcasting techniques for your virtual presentations. Make sure your transitions are smooth. Observe how TV talent handles transition.

"Presenting to an in-person audience is difficult. Presenting to a remote audience is difficult squared, unless you have a process."

Plan effective handoffs and transitions. Broadcasters use a "rundown," a highly detailed outline depicting the broadcast's timing and flow. Use a "sequencing chart" as your outline. This includes the name of your virtual presentation, your objectives, your topics and your technology. Your sequencing chart shows five columns headed "Time, Topic, Talent, Tools" and "Transitions." Fill in the columns with detailed information as appropriate.

"Your virtual presentation must be relevant, or it will be ignored."

"The goal is to create a presentation atmosphere that appears to be as much like a face-to-face meeting as possible." So prepare a "virtual prep sheet," a basic speaking outline for your virtual presentation that includes your working information, time for questions and answers and resources you must develop in advance. Prepare a "Role Guidelines form" that details what part each person on your virtual presentation team will play. Like broadcasters, follow the "most interesting first" rule. Begin with the information that will most engage your audience. In planning, develop answers for five important questions:

1. What are my most important topics?
2. What is the order in which I will present them?
3. What is the depth of the information I must convey?
4. What time should I leave for questions and answers?
5. What can I reasonably expect to cover in the time that I have available?

"Keeping your presentation engaging is your most difficult task."

Notice that TV newscasters never seem rushed – but they are. Indeed, they must fit a huge amount of planned information into a tight time frame. They cannot waste a second of airtime. That's why you will never hear *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams open a broadcast by saying: "Um, good evening, uh, while uh few people were, you know, willing to, you know, say it like out loud, um..."

The Players and Tools

A newscast involves numerous professionals. Each has a distinct role, from reporter to tech support. One of the most important players is the producer, and you should have one for your virtual presentation. You may want a producer for setup before your presentation, plus a producer to assist you during the event. Other roles are host and co-host. Adding a co-host helps transform an otherwise boring monologue into a scintillating conversation. A facilitator can assist in managing panel discussions and question-and-answer sessions.

"Practice will improve your confidence, content, delivery and timing."

Numerous aids can help you deliver the most professional virtual presentation, including photos, slides, graphics, video, interactive computer screens and music, for example. Plan when you want to include such aids in your virtual presentation, what add-ons you should use for maximum impact, which visuals you need to set up ahead of time, and whether you'll handle them yourself or with a technician.

Organization and Planning

Failure to plan results in presentations that no one cares about, that serve no purpose, that are confusing, that are irrelevant, that go wrong technologically, and that begin late and end past the time announced. Make sure your participants all can connect at the right time.

> "The pace and timing of your virtual presentation should be quicker than it is during your in-person presentations."

The first 60 to 90 seconds of your virtual presentation are critical. At the outset, clearly convey the intent of your presentation directly. For example: "The purpose of the meeting today is to resolve any pending issues related to the Acme account." Introduce your primary concepts immediately. For example: "Keep three key points in mind during this presentation..." Quickly and briefly introduce the agenda – what you plan to cover. Outline the special situation that relates to your presentation. For example: "The primary issues that you brought to our attention relate to..."

> "As people become more comfortable and competent using virtual presentation tools, the preference for face-to-face presentations will begin to decline."

Explain "the end result, consequences, ramifications or benefits" that derive from the situation you are addressing. For example, you might say, "As a result of not having enough product in the warehouse, we are losing orders." Outline the necessary steps that you or other people must take. For instance: "Before we wrap up this meeting, I'd like Tom, Julia, Paul and Erin to tell me your next steps, as well as the timing and date by which you will have completed those steps."

Technology Options

Organize your presentation into separate, fast-paced segments. "Breaking a topic into segments allows you to change the pace, tempo or direction of the presentation on a continuous basis." Keep each segment to five minutes or less. Use a sequencing chart to plan out individual segments, and the time required. Think carefully about what information or elements the screen will show. Plan who will virtually attend your presentation, as well as the right technology to employ. Telepresence is the ultramodern choice. Using multiple high-tech loudspeakers, telepresence simulates the sound of having all the geographically scattered participants together in one room. Telepresence provides an experience that is fully immersive. However, it is costly.

> "If you can't clearly define the purpose of your presentation, don't schedule it."

A webcast is a good way to go when you need both video and audio, and when one-way communication is acceptable. Web conferencing lets participants in different locations communicate interactively, but it limits audience participation. Web conferencing works well when different people at different locations lead the presentation at different times.

> "Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice." (William Jennings Bryan, 41st US Secretary of State)

Conference calls do not have a visual element. Nevertheless, they provide an excellent method for people in different locations to interact with each other in real time.

Include Internet links where possible with all these virtual options. You can create a "linkinar" in which you add links to a document that you email to all participants. As you direct the presentation, instruct the participants to click on the various links as appropriate. Skype is a peer-to-peer application that provides video-based communication; ooVoo is another example.

Choose the technology option that best suits your purposes and goals. If you want to win a new customer and a face-to-face meeting is out, select a technology that enables you and your prospect to see each other anyway. Plan on the most intimate setting possible. Telepresence is the ideal choice. Conversely, if you are communicating with team members who you know well, a teleconference may be your most efficient and cost-effective choice.

Follow-Up

No matter what type of presentation you make, follow-up is essential. This is especially true for virtual presentations. Have your follow-up materials ready to distribute immediately. Send participants only a single communication, be it "package, email or document." Maintain this rule even if you have multiple presenters. Include all of their information in one communication.

Should Your Presentation Be Virtual or Face-to-Face?

People and organizations often prefer virtual presentations and meetings to communicate a message quickly or to avoid travel costs. Virtual presentations and meetings also are the ideal option when key presentation components are "information dissemination and data presentation." Face-to-face presentations or meetings are the favored choice when you need to develop relationships, close deals, network or share strategic ideas.

Research indicates that customers "require or prefer" face-to-face meetings. It also shows that companies increase their revenues by $12.50 for every business travel dollar they spend. Corporate executives strongly favor in-person meetings, which remain the clear winners when it comes to "persuasion, leadership, engagement, inspiration, decision making, accountability, candor, focus, clarity, brainstorming, strategizing and reaching consensus." And remember, "when virtual presentations fail, people are quick to blame the technology and the remote aspects of these presentations."

If No One Pays Attention, Your Presentation Is a Waste of Money

Virtual presentations can save money. But the savings will be meaningless if your virtual presentation does not engage your audience. Make sure your virtual

presentations and meetings are as compelling as live gatherings. If not, your audience or meeting participants will surf the Internet, send emails, multitask, or get something out of the fridge while you make your points. Be as engaging and relevant as possible.

About the Author

Timothy J. Koegel is a *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* best-selling author.