

Conducting an Effective Webinar Session



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Hello viewers, welcome to this presentation on “Conducting an effective webinar session”. Thank you for your interest in this topic, and I hope you benefit from the tips that I share in this presentation. I am Sanjaya Mishra, Education Specialist, eLearning at the Commonwealth of Learning, and it is my pleasure to share some ideas to use Webinars effectively.

These days, Webinars have become very common, as you can reach large number of people directly. The technology available today makes it easier for us to set up Webinar in minutes through few mouse clicks. There are many web tools that are also available on mobile devices, such as smartphones, making it easier to connect to people anywhere, anytime. It helps your audience to attend a lecture of an expert and engage in discussion with many people around the world at the same time. For your organisation, it may help in building audience engagement. And for you, it will help building your personal brand. So, it is important to conduct a Webinar effectively.

I recommend following a 4 steps approach which is the main focus of this presentation. These cyclic steps are Planning, Delivering, Sharing and Measuring. So, let’s start.

First, in the planning process technology plays a very important role. But we are assuming that you already have a web-based webinar tool. I am not recommending any specific tool here. Most of these, whether commercial or open source, perform equally well and are more dependent on the Internet bandwidth of the users. The planning process is more of a series of decision-making step, where you take decisions on several aspects of the Webinar.

In the planning, the first aspect is what would be your topic? The choice of the topic is related to the purpose of the Webinar and the audience you are targeting. So, you must ask yourself, will the topic be of interest to the target audience? Is it only an information and marketing type topic or a controversial one that will have more debate and discussion? If your audience need special knowledge to join your Webinar, you are certainly going to reach only a small but niche target group. Is the topic of significant importance to attract your audience? Can you cover the topic in about 30 minutes? Is it more of a procedural demonstration? Answering these questions will help you decide on the topic for your webinar. In fact, you need a bit of creativity to make the webinar title attractive, if the topic is not contemporary like artificial intelligence or use of AR/VR in education. Using a question on the title helps to raise expectations of the audience. But, doing all these will not bring large number of people to your Webinar, if you fail to market it adequately.

Since Webinars could be accessed by anyone from anywhere, you have the potential world audience. But you do not want the whole world to join your session., you have a specific target group. How do you decide the time of the session to reach your audience in different time zones? Sometimes, it is better to repeat your session to provide live audience interaction. But, most of the time a judicious choice of the time covering the most number of countries and time zones would help maximize participation. Of

course, the scheduling also has to be suitable to the expert speakers. Sharing the photo and profile of the speakers also help to get more people to the Webinar.

In addition to a suitable scheduling, it is also important also to focus on multiple channels of communications to reach the target audience. Most organisations have a safe mailing list that can be used for target marketing. Remember, in many countries there are strict regulations for spam. Therefore, your email-based communication has to be specific and only sent to those who have prior consent. Such communication works well, when it is personalised by name, and not just sent as “Dear All”. Other ways of marketing are to use social media platforms, where you can do paid promotion of the event to specific target audience. Some organisations create a webform for registration, and then use this to send reminders before the schedule, say one day before. Note that people are busy in their life and if you want them to join you, it is better to send them a gentle reminder.

In the planning stage for your Webinar, you also need to decide on the format of the Webinar. Depending upon the format you choose, you need to identify the experts or the speakers. For example, it may be perfectly alright for you to use a lecture or demonstration. But, for some topics you may like to have a discussion like a television debate to provide multiple perspectives on a topic or interview an expert or a celebrity professor to share her research findings. The decision on format will also dictate the kind of efforts and resources you may need to make the Webinar effective.

The next point in planning it to decide who will be the host. You may be a coordinator or the speaker. It is better to have a host who can perform multiple roles, such as introducing the speaker, moderating the session, summarizing the key point of the session and manage time. Sometimes, your host can also provide technical assistance to the participants having trouble. Host or moderator can play an important role when there is no question from the audience. So, you have someone besides the presenter, who is able to steer the presentation towards its goal.

If this presentation was a live Webinar, this point could have been a good break time to have a short 2-3 minutes for question & answer. But I will proceed here to explain the next step. Remember, a successful webinar depends on good content that is delivered well.

A successful webinar depends on good content and good delivery.

Having a good slide deck is half job done. Take note that you do not have lot of time to communicate your ideas. So, it is better to be precise, and thus less is better. Do not forget to check the technology in advance and join the session before 10 minutes to welcome others. Chatting with others in the beginning help build rapport with the audience.

Before the actual session starts, share a slide showing “Coming soon” or “starts at...” to help those joining early know that the session is coming up and they are in the right session. A key point in presentation is to engage the audience. So, while preparing your slide deck, plan for breaks -- preferably in every ten minutes. So, if you have a 30 minutes presentation, plan for break in 7 minute, 17 minute and 27 minute.

During presentation, speaking slowly is important to communicate your message. Normally, by practice and rehearsal you can achieve this. But you can also adapt to the situation and it is here a good host can help to guide by providing private message during the presentation.

Introduction is normally the task of the host. First welcome the participants. Recognise that many people have joined the session. Ask the audience to introduce themselves by sharing their country, institution, etc. in the chat box. As part of the introduction segment, the host should share the protocols, especially

about recording of the Webinar, how to ask question, and the importance of making the mic mute, while not speaking. Providing information about the presence of chat box and raising hand online to ask question, always help the audience. Those participants who are concerned about privacy should be advised to switch off their video.

While introducing the speaker/s, provide brief about his/her work and how it is related to the topic of the session. Highlight interesting facts about the person, without sharing personal information. Sharing a photo helps the audience to connect, as sometime the video may be switched off due to bandwidth issue.

During presentation, the key is to communicate your ideas and engage with your audience. So, to focus on key ideas use your mouse pointer to highlight. Use breaks to ask questions and interact. If there are no questions, use the breaks to ask couple of participants by name to reflect or comment. Of course, do not ask the same participants all the time. Give opportunity to as many people as time permits. At the end do not forget to summarize your presentation. It is better to use 3-5 key points that people can use as takeaways.

This is not the closing of the Webinar; it is the last part of the delivery of the Webinar, which is more or less done by the host to facilitate the question and answer. It is important to take the questions asked in the chat box first as a protocol before making the session open for asking questions on mic. Once all the questions are covered, it is time for the host to make a summary de-briefing to thank the speakers and all the participants.

When the webinar is over, many of us feel relaxed. In fact the work is not over yet. A successful Webinar is one that is shared well amongst the stakeholders.

What are the important steps to share the Webinar recording? For that, first you need to download or process the Webinar from the cloud for online sharing the link. If you upload it to a video platform or a Community of Practice (CoP), do not forget to tag the webinar with appropriate keywords. Tagging will help discoverability of the recorded webinar. Also, make it a point to send the link to the participants, who like to have a record. You can only do so, if you have a registration process for the participants, otherwise this is not possible. But this is a good practice to follow up. Sharing of the webinar link through social media also helps reaching more people and is a good practice of engagement for your organisation.

Measuring impact has become an essential part of our work. So, it is also important to have a strategy to measure the impact of the Webinar. This helps us in continuous improvement. We need to learn from what went well and how we need to improve. Measuring can take different forms and need different strategies. Of course, it is ideal to do the planning for measuring at the planning stage.

The easiest way to measure is to send a feedback survey link. This is normally called satisfaction level feedback. By doing this you can also get suggestions on new topics that can become future Webinars.

You can further measure at the level of engagements. You may like to provide a digital badge to the participants. This is possible, if you have their emails. Using available digital credentialing tools, you can also track the use of the badges and their sharing in different social media to understand engagements. Engagements can also be tracked, if you have a Community of Practice (CoP) and if there are online discussions about the Webinar. You may also like to track the social media engagements for the webinar, if you have shared the recording.

All the data collected can help us develop a matrix to analyse the impact of the webinar. Such impact measurement is useful in comparing how different topics were received by the stakeholders and see what more can be done. Also, we can justify value for money of the webinars in a year by considering all the

sessions organised and audience reached. While planning and undertaking impact analysis of Webinars, always remember the purpose, audience and efforts. Impact is always a result of multiple factors.

Here I reached the end of this presentation. In this video presentation, I have provided you some tips to plan, deliver, share and measure successful Webinar. We covered key issues in planning, such as choice of topics, host, marketing and scheduling. In delivery, I shared some tips to make your webinar engaging. In sharing and measuring, I highlighted some of the good practices that you can adopt in your practice. Do let us know, how this presentation helped you. Thank you for watching till the end.