

**Webinars That Work. Service That Shines.**



# **5 Common Webinar Mistakes & How to Avoid Them**



**BeaconLive, LLC  
6 Eastman Place,  
Suite 300B  
Melrose, MA 02176**

**(866) 638-2907**

**[www.beaconlive.com](http://www.beaconlive.com)**

# Introduction

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A BEACONLIVE WHITE PAPER



One of the more popular portmanteaus in recent memory is the word "webinar," the combination of web + seminar. It's been around since approximately 1998, but it wasn't until last year--2008--that Merriam Webster added it to its new word list.

While holding a seminar on the web makes perfect sense in this fast-paced, 24/7 world in which we live, the steps needed for holding an *effective* webinar is something that still stymies people, even a decade after the word was invented. And the truth is, as more and more webinars proliferate cyberspace, not to mention our daily work calendars, it's essential that those of us who hold them "get 'em right."

Why? Well, consider this: according to an article on FastCompany.com entitled "Top 3 Sustainability Trends for 2009," "Nowadays when it comes to travel, the conversation is not just about environmental impact and costs, but inconvenience, security lines, delayed flights and bad weather. All this will result in more [video conferencing](#) of meetings and even expos/conferences. The future consists of webinars instead of seminars."

Not only that, but a business wire report on Forbes.com states, "The worldwide SMB market for conferencing solutions--including [audio](#), [web](#) and [video](#) conferencing--is forecast to increase from US\$1.8 billion in 2006 to US\$2.6 billion by 2012, a compound annual growth rate of 5.9%."

Webinars are here and here to stay, so it makes sense to understand the strategies for developing and presenting the very best webinars possible so that businesses and consumers get the biggest bang for their buck...and their time invested.

The good news? Creating those engaging webinars that businesses love to present and that people love to attend is not as hard as you might think. In fact, if you learn the key mistakes most companies and webinar presenters make and how to avoid them, you'll be well on your way to creating webinars that earn rave reviews--and customers.



## Mistake #1: Presentation Overload

When you hold a webinar, you're asking people to "listen and look" for a period of time that's usually a minimum of 30 minutes. Think how easy it is for viewers and listeners to get distracted. Emails might come in, someone might ping the person on IM, and then there's always the temptation to play a round of Scrabble on Facebook--yes, while *your* presentation is happening.

This is why you need to remember the rule of simplicity and the concept of "less is more" when creating your presentation slides. Don't overburden participants with too much to focus on or too much to remember, because they won't or they can't. They already have too many potential distractions vying for their attention, as mentioned above. Don't give them an excuse to give in.

Instead, show high-level info only. Talk about the details. With this strategy, you're much more likely to keep people focused on the info...and even to retain it.

### Here are some other good "slide creation" practices:

- Make sure you have a healthy balance of text and images. You don't want to have cluttered slides, but you don't want a text heavy slide, either, or one that's nothing but pictures.
- Use standard fonts. This is not the place to experiment with Wingdings or "Jokewood" (yes, that's a real font type).
- Keep it readable with 12-point at the minimum, and, ideally, 14-point / 16-point.
- Make sure colorific doesn't turn into horrific. Use colors smartly and sparingly. At a loss for what colors to use? Opt for the ones in your logo (it's a subtle way to brand your company or organization during the webinar).
- See how your slides will look in action. Work with a webinar company that allows you to upload your slides any time prior to the live event. This will give you a good feel for when you've gone overboard with information.



## Mistake #2: Forgoing Rehearsal

Remember, the best defense is a good offense. And good offensive measures take practice, right? Which is why a rehearsal--a *real* rehearsal--is important. In fact, make sure you work with a vendor that insists on these rehearsals or "tech runs."

When it comes to the actual rehearsal, here are some things to keep in mind. Do not rehearse from the beach, your mother-in-law's lakeside retreat, or your client's parking lot. Do not simply "read" the words on the slides and go through the motions. Rehearse the webinar in the room you'll be presenting in, on the computer you'll be presenting on, and on the phone or VoIP you'll be presenting with. That's the only way you'll be able to experience potential "issues" like the rattling window, the office neighbor next door who has regular coughing fits, or just how loud the intercom overhead really is.

**And we can't stress this enough:** don't use a cell or cordless phone during the rehearsal *or* the live event (because of potential echoes and battery problems). In fact, during the rehearsal, you should really practice on

the phone you're going to use for the live event. This helps operators, too, since it will ensure they have the correct number, extension, etc.

By anticipating potential issues, you can avoid them, right? Get someone to fix that window, make sure your office neighbor is aware you're on a webinar call, and see if you can mute the intercom during your presentation. The time to be dealing with these issues is NOT during the actual live webinar.

Rehearsals are especially important when you have a guest presenter. It's essential that you have your guest presenter rehearse in the room/place he or she plans on conducting the live webinar.



### **Mistake #3: Forgetting Murphy's Law**

The adage is true: if something can go wrong, it will. This isn't pessimism, it's realism, and better you be realistic--and prepared--than to go into your webinar thinking happy thoughts, only to have everything blow up in your face (figuratively, that is). The best way to prepare is by asking what-if questions...and having an answer.

**Q:** What will you do if you lose your Internet connection during the presentation?

**A:** Have a hard copy of your presentation handy so that you can continue on without missing a beat. Also, consider working with a webinar vendor whose tool is flexible and "built" for these situations, meaning the moderator or other presenter can easily take control and move the slides until your Internet connection is restored...and your audience will be none the wiser.

**Q:** What if your throat gets dry and itchy?

**A:** Have water on hand.

**Q:** What if you need to cough, despite the water?

**A:** Know where the mute button is and how to operate it (test it during your rehearsal). Make sure you're working with a webinar vendor whose moderators are trained for these types of situations. A well-trained moderator will not only anticipate any potential issues, but also respond to existing ones. For example, if your presenter coughs or has connectivity issues, the moderator should step in and explain what's going on to the audience and fill the time so there's no "dead air."

**Q:** What if you're interrupted?

**A:** Disable call waiting, put a sign on your office door, do whatever it takes to eliminate interruptions that are within your control.

No doubt, you'll think of more what-ifs that apply to your particular presentation or location. It's okay for the what-ifs to exist, as long as you have answers for them.



## **Mistake #4: Expecting Too Much from Your Audience**

You're the one conducting the webinar. It's up to you to engage, enlighten, and delight. Don't depend on your audience to rescue a mediocre presentation, or to enhance a good presentation, with thoughtful questions.

In fact, don't depend on audience members having questions at all. While it's likely they will--especially if you do your job right--you should always have stock "questions" in the queue that you can rely on when you open up your webinar to Q&A.

Keep in mind that if you have a webinar moderator, he or she should have copies of these questions so that he or she can turn to them should no "real" questions come in...or if the real questions are too vague, unclear, or off track. Good moderators will also be able to take cues from you and the audience. They should be able to work well with pre-defined questions, and they should be adept at selecting relevant questions from the audience during an open Q&A.



## **Mistake #5: Not Following Up**

So you've avoided mistakes 1 through 4, and you've delivered a kick-butt webinar, if you do say so yourself. Guess what? You're not done yet. At the very least, each participant should receive a thank you email from you expressing your gratitude for his or her attendance and participation (yes, the thank you serves as a way to continue marketing to the attendee, but it should be genuine and it should not include hard selling).

If you decide to archive your webinar on your website, this email will be the vehicle you use to give participants--those who actually attended as well as those who didn't--access to the full webinar through a designated URL.

Another thing you should consider post-webinar is a survey. The way to improve your webinars is by getting real audience feedback, and an anonymous survey will help with those efforts. Consider working with a webinar vendor that has easy-to-use and immediate polling and survey features that direct attendees back to your website.

Whatever you decide to do, the take-away is this: think about it in advance and plan some sort of follow-up action.



## Webinar Success: Next Steps

As you can see, more goes into a successful webinar than a PowerPoint presentation and an Internet connection. Work with a webinar vendor that understands this and that can provide you with the customer service you need-- prompt account managers, skilled producers, and adept moderators--in addition to superior conferencing technology. Make your next webinar the best that it can be.

### [About BeaconLive](#)

BeaconLive is a single-source provider of superior audio conferencing and web conferencing technology. With almost 20 years experience, "high-touch" customer service, and over 10,000 live events produced, BeaconLive is the leader in delivering content with the highest quality. For more information on how you or your organization can experience the power of BeaconLive for your next webinar, visit us on the web:

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6 Eastman Place, Suite 300B  
Melrose, MA 02176  
866-638-2907 / [www.beaconlive.com](http://www.beaconlive.com)

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