

Using Webinars To Engage Prospects

A Webinar Success Whitepaper
By Ken Molay

Key concepts and guidelines on how to engage prospects
in sales and marketing webinars

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The Presentation Is Not The Beginning of Engagement

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking about “engaging your prospects” as something you do during your presentation. But you actually engage people at many points before they ever hear your voice. Although your audience thinks of themselves as being engaged by the presentation content and delivery, you need to consciously consider all the planning and production steps that move them along the path of engagement to that point and beyond.



Early Teaching Points

Lesson #1: Interaction Can Be Fun

In online sessions, I usually start by asking people to enter their first names in the chat area. I then read off some of those names, acknowledging the audience members and showing that we really are engaged in an interaction. **It's nonthreatening... People lower their defenses that I might pick on them,** target them for sales talk, or similarly discomfit them. They get used to putting their hands on the keyboard and being an active participant.

Lesson #2: First Names Are Powerful

Using first names is a powerful tool for building a sense of personal engagement. We are conditioned to respond to our own first name, but barring that, hearing other first names carries a promise of true interpersonal attention. It also helps people believe that you are talking directly to them, rather than just reciting a generic script.

Lesson #3: Shared Experiences Resonate

I often use popular movie references in my online presentation, such as Star Wars. The majority of people in the audience have seen this movie and it **has a generally positive and fun psychological connotation. I'm working** within a shared experience we have had, which encourages empathy and helps to bring us together.

Lesson #4: Get To The Action!

Get into your subject as quickly as possible. Your audience knows why they are there. Give them something of value up front to grab them and make them pay attention. Think like a James Bond movie... You get an action scene BEFORE the opening credits, not after. I launched right into a set of practical tips in my presentation and in this paper... Not a long introduction, establishment of pain points, discussion of my company, or any other background information. One of the most important things you can do during your slide preparation is to go back and read the promotional materials that went out for your webinar. Make note of what was promised **as a benefit to "hook" the audience. They** have registered and attended expecting to get that information, so get to it quickly.

Lesson #5: Talk To The Individual

In an online session, I constantly speak to the audience on an individual basis. Instead of saying "Can anybody tell me what will come next?" I ask "Can you tell me what comes next?" The use of "you" translates to a personal engagement. It doesn't matter if I know there are 1000 people in the audience. Each person relates to me as if I am talking directly to them.

Lesson #6: Challenges Engage Your Audience

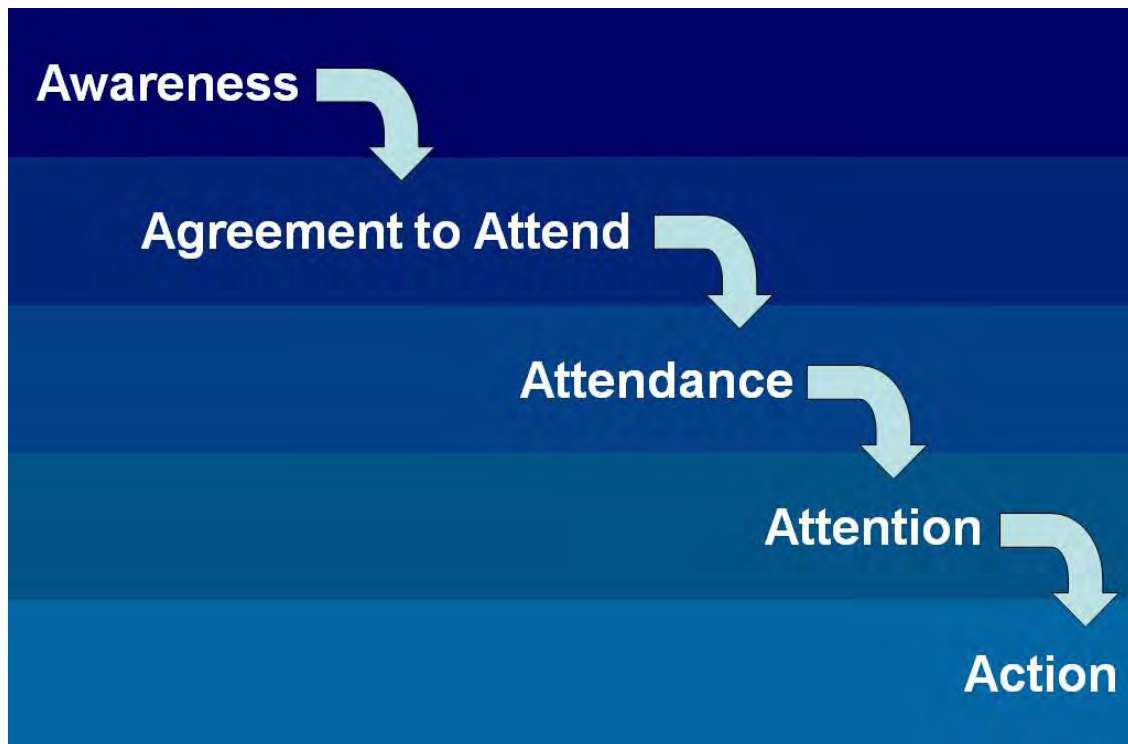
I don't just launch into a set of bullet points with the facts I want to give my online audience. I challenge them to think about the points I am about to make, based on the limited interaction we had had so far. "Can you guess what I have demonstrated so far?" This stimulates full mental engagement and makes each person a more interactive participant in the information transfer.

Lesson #7: You Can Communicate Without Bullet Points

You don't need bullet points to communicate information. Your voice, a slide title, and some supporting graphics do the trick quite nicely. People can read and hear at the same time, but they cannot adequately interpret and comprehend simultaneously from both channels. Give them the opportunity to interpret what you are telling them while supporting it with an interesting and subject-related picture. If you limit yourself to one picture/topic per slide, it will force you to move through more visual changes during your presentation, which improves visual engagement and keeps people focused on you.

Your Audience's Engagement Points

We'll now move into five specific areas where you have the opportunity to engage your audience.



Drive Awareness With Marketing

The first area of engagement is getting people to pay attention to your promotional announcement or invitation and to care that you are offering a webinar. This applies equally to large public webinars and to small private presentations. **The tactics are different, but the purpose is the same... You need your prospective audience to notice you and want to attend.** When you send a personal invitation to three decision makers at a company you have been wooing, you are doing marketing – **It's simply a more personal form of marketing** than sending an email blast to 20,000 addresses.

Audience Self-Interest Is Your #1 Weapon

Although you must clearly define for yourself your goals and reasons for **putting on your event, these don't necessarily translate to audience engagement.** Identify your target audience and "step into their shoes." What are their interests and goals? The interplay between what you want to accomplish and what your audience wants to get out of the event determine your content.

Write down your goals and the audience's interests, along with a brief description of what you will offer. Keep this handy for reference during production of marketing materials and presentation content.

Frame Your Event With Audience Benefits

From your earliest planning, throw away titles and phrasing that talk about your information content, and replace it with the appeal points for your **target audience.** The fact that your product has new features isn't appealing to your audience. It's how those features help them that counts. The fact that you want to encourage adoption isn't an interesting goal to your audience either.



You may need to change your message for different targets. In our software product example, developers want to know how the new release makes their development process faster and easier. But executives want to know why using the new release is beneficial for company profitability. Find these value points for your various targets.

Appeal To Self-Interest In Webinar Promotion

Once you have the selfish interests of your targets identified, you can use them to create compelling invitational materials. Remember, this applies just as well to a three-person sales demo as it does to a 1000-person marketing webinar. You need to lay out the reason your audience should be interested in attending.

When the first Superman movie came out with Christopher Reeve, the marketing for the film concentrated not on the story or the actors or the big budget, but appealed directly to audience interests with the phrase "You'll believe a man can fly." They spoke directly to us as individuals and promised a specific new and exciting experience if we came to the theater.



Drive Agreement To Attend With Easy Processes

Once you have captured your targets' attention, you need to get them to make the commitment to attend your session. Again, the tactics and technology used are different, but the concept applies to large and small meetings alike.

Invitation / Landing Page Is Critical

Before you start promoting your event, figure out what people will see when they express interest in your promotional message. A landing page gives more detailed information about your event when you can't put all the details in a marketing channel. For instance, you may use a small display advertisement or a one-sentence search ad with a click-through to the information page. Many landing pages also work for email invitations sent as full HTML content. There are many factors that determine whether a landing page or invitation is likely to be successful. One of my favorite reference works is **The Landing Page Handbook** available from MarketingSherpa. It costs \$500 but is worth every penny in improving registration rates.

Here you can see the use of a speaker portrait, multiple prominent registration buttons, time and date information clearly displayed at the top, the ability for recipients to virally spread the word, and the use of bullet points to summarize key benefits of attending.



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PASS IT ON
Do you know a friend or co-worker who would be interested in this webinar? Do them a favor and forward this invitation. You will have a chance to review and edit the email message before sending it.

[Forward Invitation](#)

ABOUT MONTAVISTA SOFTWARE
[MontaVista Software](#) is the leading provider of Linux for intelligent devices and telecommunications infrastructure. MontaVista delivers a commercial-quality Linux operating system, easy-to-use development tools, expert support, design and migration services and a complete ecosystem of more than 400 partners. Headquartered in Santa Clara, California, MontaVista has operations in 15 countries.

Featured Speaker:



James Ready
CTO, MontaVista Software

Mr. Ready possesses over 25 years of experience in the embedded systems and real-time software industry. He founded MontaVista in 1999 to provide the Linux operating system to the embedded systems market.

Keep Registration Simple

Be careful not to make registrants jump through too many hoops to register. Each additional data field acts as another barrier to entry. Even non-required fields can discourage people. Consider carefully each and every input field you ask for. This information will be used for initial contact after the webinar. Will you be calling them, or simply sending out emails? Are you going to separate responses by territory at this point?

Register for Our Webinar:

* First Name: * Last Name:

* Email Address: State/Province:

Phone:

* How did you hear about us?

Your Website Address:

Gross Annual Sales Volume

How long have you been in real estate?

The agency you are affiliated with:

* Indicates a required field

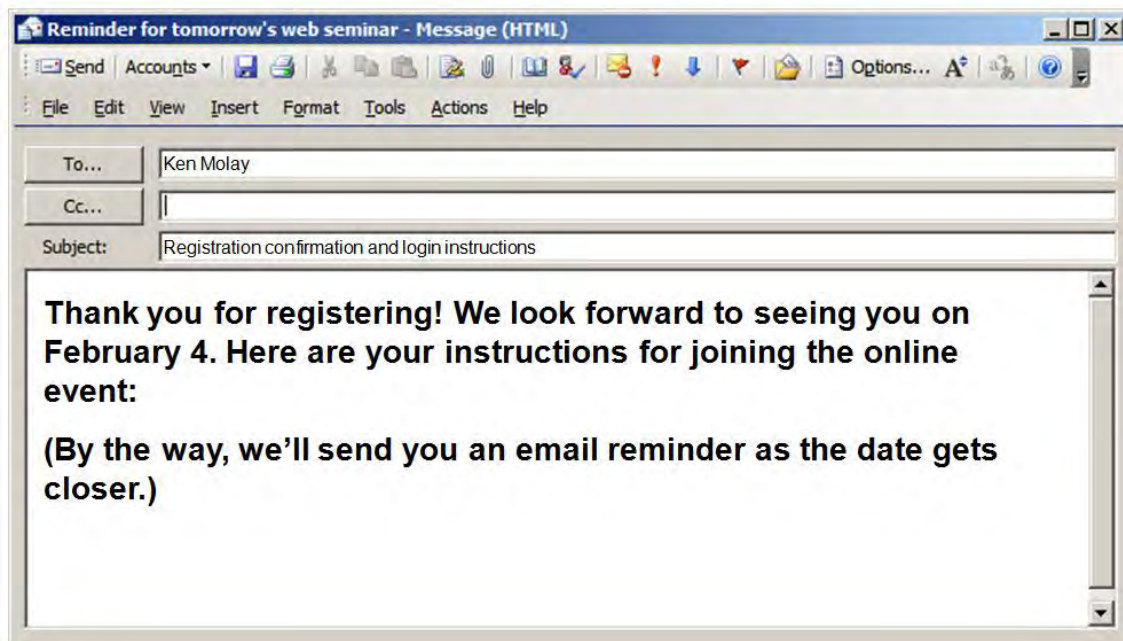
Many companies try to satisfy two goals in the registration process. They are both marketing an event and trying to advance the sales process with qualification questions. Audiences recognize when they are being treated as targets and are likely to create a defensive wall that reduces the impact of your messaging and later communications. See if you can treat introductory webinars as "giving" to your audience, with the task of "selling" left for a later activity.

Collect RSVPs For Small Presentations

Small pre-planned demos and presentations usually don't need formal landing pages and registration forms, but you should use an Outlook meeting request to collect a tangible RSVP. Otherwise it is too easy for your prospects to ignore your invitation. You want them to make some kind of proactive interaction up front to get them engaged in the idea of attending. The simple act of clicking an "Accept" button on an invitation can achieve this goal.

Confirm Registration To Cement Commitment

Don't forget to send your registrants a confirmation message. This starts a "responsive dialog" with them and acts as the first outbound response to their actions. Let them know that you'll be sending an email reminder later. This sets the stage for permission-based communications going forward.



Drive Attendance With Pre-Event Communications

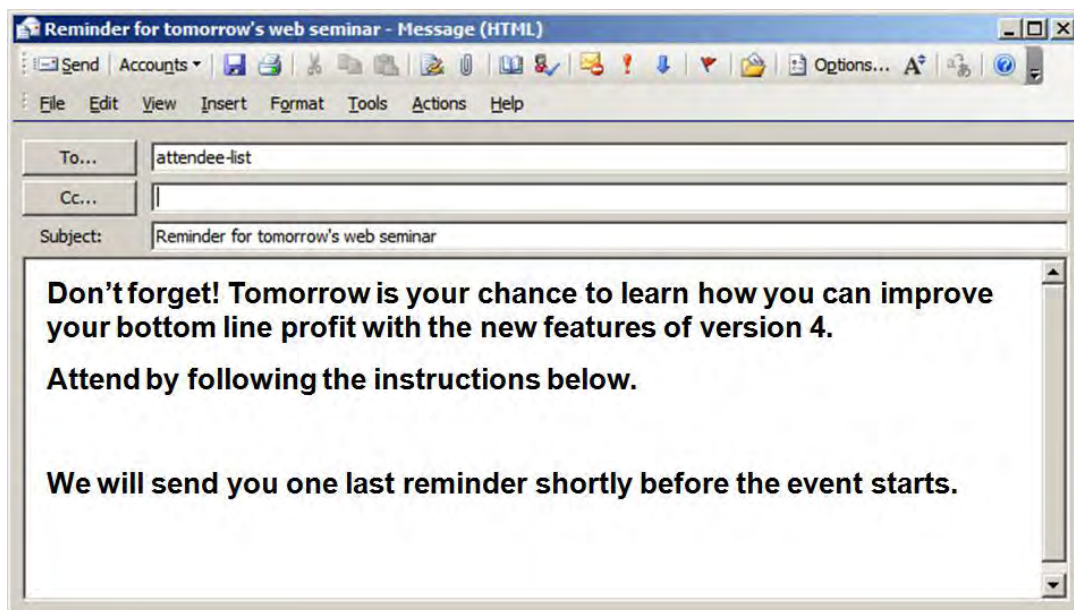
You need to work on engaging your registrants to get them to honor their commitment and actually attend the event.

Encourage Participation

A great way to boost attendance is to appeal to self-interest once again. Ask your registrants to tell you what content they want to see. They will show up to see if you answer their question. Now they have a personal stake in the material. **Some companies choose to add a "submit a question" field on the registration form. Some send a link to a "submit question" form in the confirmation email that goes out. And some companies simply encourage sending in questions via email.**

Reinforce Benefits In Your Reminders

I like sending a reminder 24 hours before the event and from 1-3 hours before show time. Try to reinforce the key value proposition for your **audience in a single sentence. Keep hitting the reason they should attend...** From their viewpoint, not yours. Remember that it may have been quite a while since they saw your original promotional materials and list of benefits.



Drive Attention With Delivery Technique

We finally made it back to our starting point! How to engage your attendees during the session itself.

Remove Boilerplate Slides

Remember that I told you up front to think like a James Bond movie and quickly deliver on the information you promised to provide. One of the mistakes companies often make is to include a standardized set of “Corporate Backgrounder” slides at the start of the presentation (often produced by a corporate marketing department). If your audience doesn’t care and doesn’t expect to hear about how many offices you have around the world and what year you were founded, all you do is frustrate them and diminish the power of your message. They quickly see that the presentation was created for your benefit rather than theirs.

Manage Reference Information Appropriately

Lists of reference information can make people tune out. There is nothing they can do with the data while listening to you, so why even include the details in your presentation? Let your audience know that the resources exist. Then more importantly, let them know why they should care! How will the resources help them? Supply the details and data in a separate file or handout that they can reference after the online session is over.

Plan Ways To Interact With Your Audience

Make sure to plan for interactions with your audience. Create polls or surveys if your conferencing software allows it. Have some questions ready to ask during your presentation that invite your attendees to type responses in the Q&A box. Plan some seed questions to stimulate discussion during the Q&A period in case things go slowly.

Don't cancel out the advantages of conducting polls and other interactive devices by using them purely for your own needs. Everything you ask the audience to do should be framed in a way that lets them think it is for their benefit. If you merely ask a series of intrusive marketing demographic questions, they feel badgered, rather than a part of a dialog. Always appeal to their self-interest.

Public vs. Private Chat

Almost every web conferencing utility has a way to let the audience type in questions for the presenter. They vary on how they manage “public” versus “private” chat... In other words, whether attendees can see comments typed by other audience members.

Keeping an open chat session visible to all leads to a greater sense of community involvement and sense of a group activity. It can also help **stimulate more questions, as people tend to feed off other people’s interests.**

Unfortunately, large public webinars may include unscrupulous attendees who use your chat area to promote their own products and services. You might face negative comments from dissatisfied attendees. And people can **potentially get into “flame wars” where they start arguing with each other** instead of concentrating on your presentation.

Keeping chat privately moderated gives you more control as a presenter. You can choose which questions you want to address and in what order to address them. Your audience faces no distractions from your presentation. And you can easily insert pre-planned “seed” questions as if they came from the audience.

I often choose public chat for smaller presentations and private chat for larger public webinars.

Reinforce Key Points

“Is this going to be on the test?”

Your audience may not be that blunt, but they want help in knowing what are the most important items out of all the material you throw at them. Help by occasionally reinforcing and highlighting the particularly important items. This also helps to refocus **your audience’s attention. When you tell them to pay attention to an important topic, it pulls them back from their extracurricular activities and gets them to concentrate on you again.**

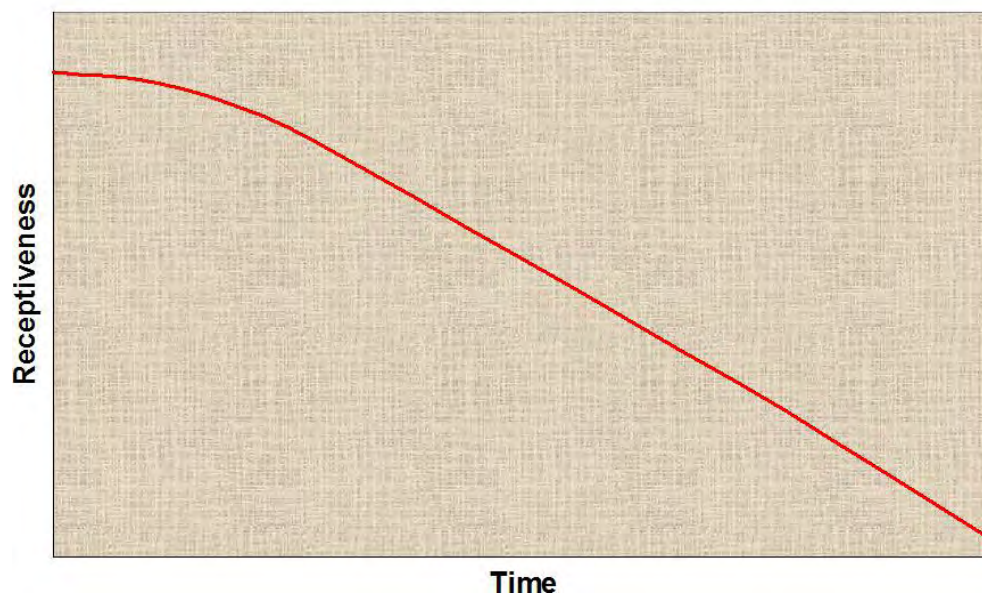
Drive Audience Action

Your final engagement point is getting the audience to take the action that you want. This is the key that satisfies your own selfish goals for holding the event. Action may be nothing more than accepting a followup sales communication. It may be getting them to visit your website or download a white paper. Or it could be anything up to placing an order.

Quick Follow Up Is Imperative

You have a very short window of opportunity after your webcast to engage your audience. If people get something of value from you, they briefly lower their defenses and are willing to talk to you or follow up in some other way. But that feeling goes away quickly, and within a week or two they mostly forget about the benefits they received from your session.

Audience Receptiveness After Webcast



Have Materials Ready

Don't wait until after your event to create handouts or extra materials. Have them ready for distribution or download immediately after the event while interest is still high. That is when people are most likely to look at the materials and possibly forward them to other interested parties.

Drive Participants To The Next Step

If you have other events planned, make sure the next one has already been scheduled in your conferencing system and that you can direct your audience to the registration page for it. Give them useful URLs in an easy to use format. Reduce long URLs by registering a short domain name and using a redirect or by using tinyurl.com. This lets your audience help you to virally spread the information to their colleagues.

Use Surveys To Boost Participatory Engagement

Getting feedback from your audience after the event is a useful way to continue your engagement and dialog, but keep in mind the issue of relevance and self-interest from THEIR viewpoint. Why does filling out the form help them? Instead of simply asking for satisfaction with content and satisfaction with speaker, ask them to help you pick subjects of greatest interest and benefit for future webinars.

Be Ready To Respond

If you are engaging in a lead generation activity, tell your sales team it is coming up, let them know when, and tell them you will be farming out hot leads immediately afterwards for quick follow up. Then do it! Cherry pick attendees who asked for additional information or submitted questions about your products/services and get a salesperson to contact them right after the webinar. This has much more power than adding the names to a CRM system at the bottom of a contact list. If you are the presenter, schedule time on your calendar for the afternoon or evening of your webinar. Use that time to immediately respond to submitted questions that needed additional follow-through.

Recapping The Process Of Engagement

From initial awareness of your event and registration, through the active presentation, to post-event follow up, your actions determine how your audience views you and your material. The number one thing to keep in mind is the expectations and interests of your prospects. Everything you do and everything you communicate should be framed in terms of serving their interests.

More Information

Here are some additional web sites that can offer you tips, guidelines, and assistance in creating better webinars.

The Webinar Blog – www.TheWebinarBlog.com

I keep this blog updated with all sorts of information related to webinars. I include reviews of technology, announcements, best practices, and opinions.

Webinar Wire – www.WebinarWire.com

This blog includes not only my own tips, but articles submitted by professionals across the entire web events industry. You can submit articles as well if they are of general interest and educational value for the webinar community.

About Ken Molay and Webinar Success

Ken Molay has been producing and delivering business webinars since 1999. His background in public speaking, stage acting, and corporate training has given him a unique perspective on what it takes to create and deliver compelling and effective presentations.

In more than 25 years of professional experience, Ken has presented public sessions at numerous industry conferences, as well as presenting information to customers, sales prospects, industry analysts, and the press.

Ken served time in the corporate trenches as product marketing manager and director of marketing for a Silicon Valley software company that went through three acquisitions, one IPO, and five name changes in the space of five years.

Ken offers consulting services through his company Webinar Success. He is also a prolific blogger on the subject of web conferencing and its applications in The Webinar Blog and Webinar Wire. He has been quoted in the Wall Street Journal and industry publications as well as making frequent public presentations on the topic of more effective webinars.

Webinar Success (www.wsucess.com) assists companies in all phases of web seminar preparation, delivery, and follow-up. Services include webinar coordination and production, presenter training, on-air moderating, and creation of on-demand lead generation presentations. Webinar Success is headquartered in North Carolina with services conducted via remote communications throughout North America. For more information, contact info@wsucess.com or call (919) 372-1937.