# Missed Opportunities:
# Why Webinar Attendees Leave

A 1080 Group, LLC survey | Sponsored by Citrix GoToWebinar | January 2013

Webinar content creates value in two ways that are critical to your mission:

- Content gets attention. To the degree that your audience **perceives** it as valuable, they will "become a lead" to access it.

- Two, to the degree that content **is** valuable to your audience, they will consume it fully, take action on it, even share it.

Of the many different ways to deliver your content online, web-based seminars (e.g., webinars, webcasts, virtual events or classrooms) uniquely include a real time human element. Like any other medium involving speaking, the speaker, trainer, or subject matter expert brings something to the equation. In short, they influence the audience (good or bad) beyond the content itself.

Unlike a tradeshow, however, a webinar attendee's "investment" in being there is low, so while it's cheaper to get them to attend a webinar than an in-person event, it's also easier for them to leave.

The problem: If they leave, you miss an opportunity to educate, inspire, and influence.

This study surveyed 407 professionals worldwide exploring two audience content "consumption" questions: *What types of webinars do you attend, and how frequently?* and *Why do you leave (if you leave early)?*

The objective: Learn how we can optimize our webinars to improve their impact.

Not surprisingly, the number one reason cited for leaving was "content not as advertised." What you will find herein, however, goes beyond the simple and obvious to look for insight into how we might transform webinar delivery into something more compelling and sticky.

Done well, the "real human" element of webinars means that they can and should hold a unique and powerful place in your content delivery mix.

Here's to jumpstarting your next level of success,

– Roger, Greg, & Mark

Roger Courville, Greg Anderson, & Mark Jackson
1080 Group, LLC

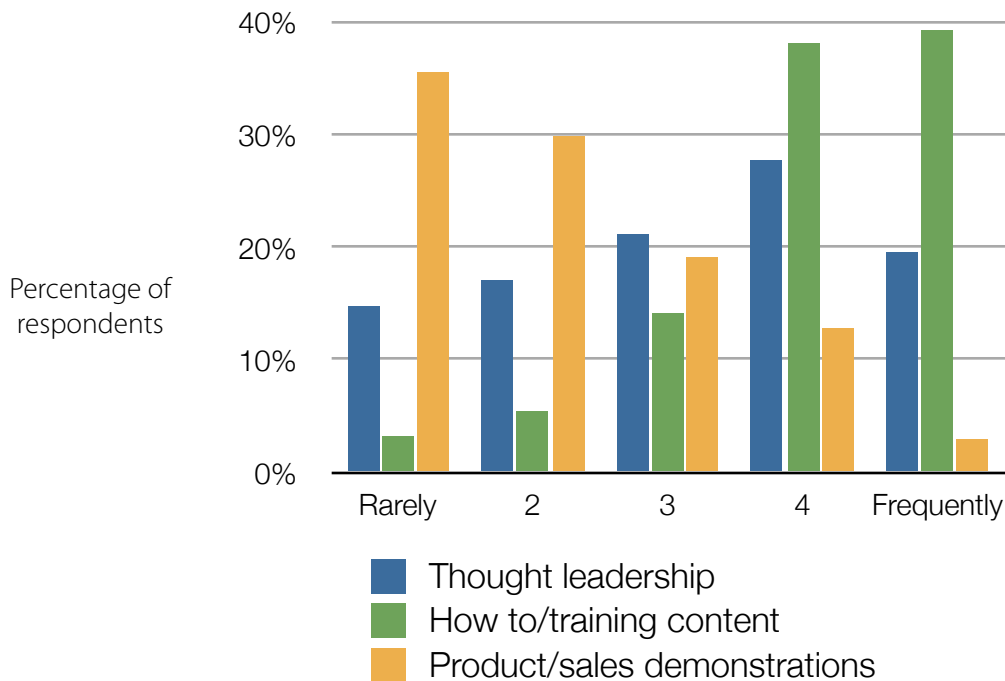# What types of webinars do people attend, and how frequently?

The survey asked respondents to note how frequently they attended webinars of different types. This survey confined those webinar types to events *external* to the organization (as opposed to internal meetings or training sessions) and defined those types of webinars as defined in the following table:

| | Webinar type | Description |
|---|---|---|
| | Thought leader | Presenter is a luminary, analyst, author, etc., most commonly these are lead generation events for the sponsoring organization |
| | How-to/training | Most prevalent for post-sale learning, sometimes used for marketing |
| | Product/sales demonstrations | Direct presentation of the organization's solutions |

On average people attend how-to/training webinars (mean = 4.0) more frequently than thought leadership (mean = 3.2) or those where an organization's products are discussed (mean = 2.2). 94% of the 407 respondents noted that they attend all three types of webinars listed in the survey.

We believe this data is consistent with how people more generally "consume" information: We look for content "to help us do our day jobs more effectively" more frequently than other types of content, but that doesn't mean that we aren't also involved in evaluating/purchasing.

### When you attend a webinar hosted/sponsored by another organization (not an internal meeting/session), what type(s) do you attend?



Percentage of respondents

Thought leadership
How to/training content
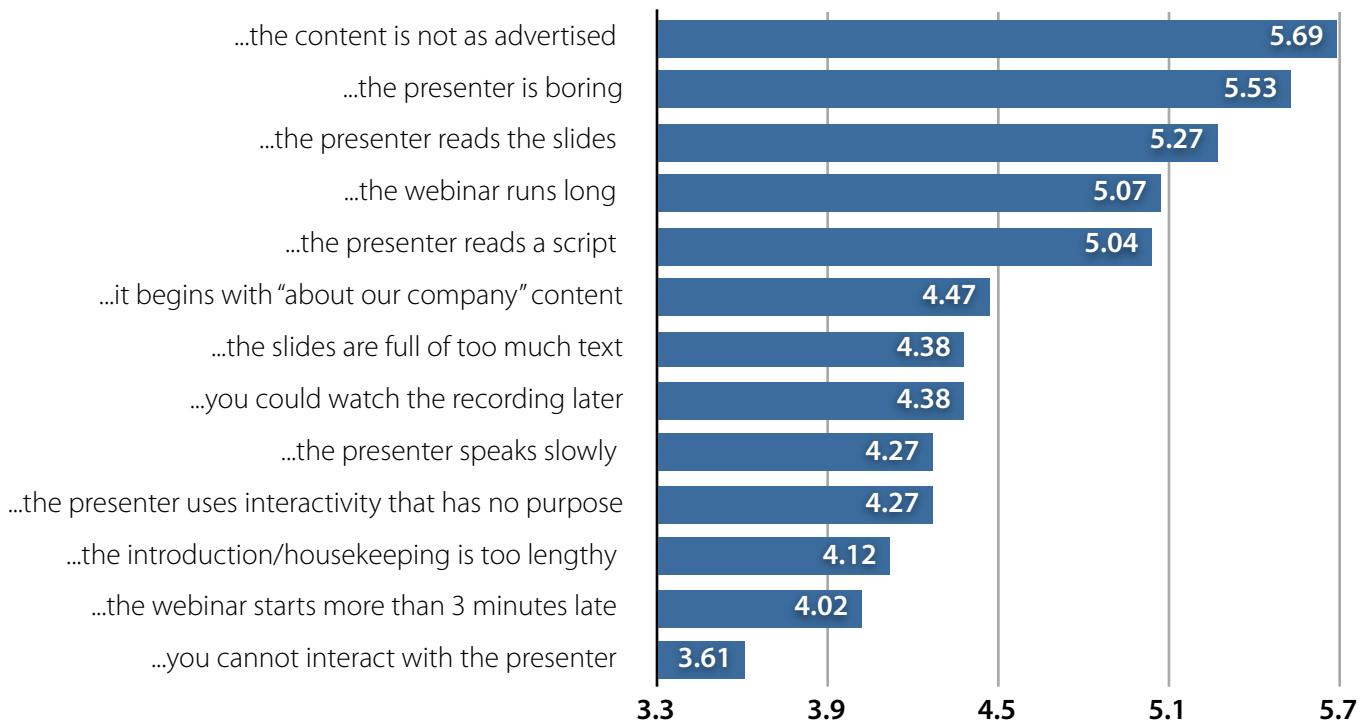Product/sales demonstrations

# People will leave your webinar early if...

Given that the purpose of this survey was to help readers evaluate and prioritize what to do to improve webinars, we evaluated potential survey responses based on two criteria:

- Is the response reasonably concrete so you can take action on it? For instance, we chose "slides full of too much text" instead of "slides are ugly."

- Is the element in question something you can do something about (as the webinar leader)? We therefore avoided responses such as "...my internet connection is slow."

## How likely would you be to leave a webinar early if...

| | |
|---|---|
| ...the content is not as advertised | 5.69 |
| ...the presenter is boring | 5.53 |
| ...the presenter reads the slides | 5.27 |
| ...the webinar runs long | 5.07 |
| ...the presenter reads a script | 5.04 |
| ...it begins with "about our company" content | 4.47 |
| ...the slides are full of too much text | 4.38 |
| ...you could watch the recording later | 4.38 |
| ...the presenter speaks slowly | 4.27 |
| ...the presenter uses interactivity that has no purpose | 4.27 |
| ...the introduction/housekeeping is too lengthy | 4.12 |
| ...the webinar starts more than 3 minutes late | 4.02 |
| ...you cannot interact with the presenter | 3.61 |

3.3    3.9    4.5    5.1    5.7

*How likely would you be to leave a webinar early?*
*(1 = Never, 7 = Always)*

# Three analysis insights

## Every pain on the list is an issue for *some* part of your audience

It would be easy to look at the chart above and draw erroneous conclusions. Remember that the average response on a seven-point Likert scale is four like the one used above, and every response except one scored higher than that. The lowest-ranked option ("cannot interact") scored closer to four than three.

It is important to remember that **every** response category, even "cannot interact," had some respondents rate it at a six or seven. It would be misguided to ignore any of the potential reasons why your audience would leave your webinar. Use the survey data to guide how you prioritize which issues to address first.

## Audience preferences vary by role (job type)

We cut the data to see how a respondent's organizational role affected their responses. The resulting data sets were small enough so that we aren't entirely comfortable with making statistical claims across the board. Some roles do, however, have higher or lower overall propensity to leave your webinar early. For each role, the table below notes their top pain points.

| Highest overall propensity to leave your webinar (lowest tolerance of annoyance) | |
|---|---|
| Role | Pain points |
| Technical audiences (e.g., engineering, IT) | Webinar begins with "about our company'"content; Presenter is boring; Introduction/ housekeeping is too lengthy |
| Customer and professional services | Presenter reads the slides; Presenter uses interactivity that has no purpose |
| Financial/legal/ administration | Slides are full of too much text; Introduction is too lengthy |
| **Lowest propensity to leave your webinar (highest tolerance of annoyance)** | |
| Role | Pain points |
| Operations | Starts more than 3 minutes late; Cannot interact with the presenter; Runs long |
| Multiple (HR, sales/ business development, marketing) | Presenter reads a script |

## Audience pain tolerance varies by type of webinar being attended

Additional analysis was conducted to evaluate the correlation between audience preferences and webinar type. The following chart shows those audience pains which demonstrated some tendency by webinar type.

| | Thought leadership | How-to/ training | Product/sales demos |
|---|---|---|---|
| …the content is not as advertised | ↓ | ↓ | |
| …the presenter is boring | ↓ | | |
| …the presenter reads the slides | ⇓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| …the webinar runs long | | ↑ | |
| …the presenter reads a script | ↓ | | ↑ |
| …it begins with "about our company" content | ↓ | ↓ | ⇑ |
| …the slides are full of too much text | | ↓ | ↓ |
| …you could watch the recording later | | ↑ | |
| …the presenter uses interactivity that has no purpose | ↓ | | |
| …the introduction/housekeeping is too lengthy | ⇓ | ↓ | |
| …the webinar starts more than 3 minutes late | ↑ | | |
| …you cannot interact with the presenter | | ↓ | ⇓ |

### Legend

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ⇓ | Statistically significantly more likely to leave early | ↑ | Somewhat less likely to leave early |
| ↓ | Somewhat more likely to leave early | ⇑ | Statistically significantly less likely to leave early |

# Three keys to improving webinar audience retention

## 1. Adjust your approach based on the webinar's purpose

By analogy, you wouldn't hand a new employee a white paper from your organization and say, "This is how we write around here." You write differently for press releases, training manuals, sales letters, and on and on, even if the medium of communication is the same. Similarly, it would be a mistake to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to how a webinar should work.

The top pain point overall was "content not as advertised." Can you use webinars to sell your products or services? You bet. This survey's evidence bears out that webinars serve multiple communication needs well. The takeaway is that you should use different types of webinars for different purposes.

| Webinar type | Poor practice | Better practice |
|---|---|---|
| Thought leader | Lowest tolerance for long-winded introductions and boring presenters. Highest overall propensity to bail early. | Highest tolerance for lousy presentation and running long. Focus on engagement first. |
| How-to/training | Low tolerance for wordy slides and reading presenters - if they could read the stuff, why do they need a presenter? | More likely to stay with you even if they could watch the recording; want to interact |
| Product/Sales demonstration | Want to interact, don't use a presenter who can't answer questions. | Want to learn about you, this is an okay time to talk about how your company, product, or service might be of benefit. |

## 2. Train your presenters or your message may be missed

In many other forms of verbal communication we readily accept that *how* something is said is as important as what is said. 407 survey respondents are clear: They don't just want content; they want engaging presenters, too.

This survey only looked at leaving; as in exiting the webinar. But you've got a similar problem if the audience shows up but they are not engaged with relevant content and interaction. We know from other investigation that *many people plan to simply have the webinar on in the background while they do other things*.

By analogy, acting is acting, right? Not when you consider that some actors who are successful on Broadway struggle with transitioning to television or movies successfully (or vice versa). Want your message to cut through the noise? Just because a presenter rocks the stage does *not* mean they'll engage an online audience.

**407 survey respondents are clear: They don't just want content; they want engaging presenters, too.**

Help presenters adapt their face-to-face presentation skills to presenting online. Rehearsal is critical.

## 3. Plan interactions that fit naturally

Nobody is sitting in your audience hoping you will interact with them (unless, perhaps, you're a celebrity). The bottom ranking of the "cannot interact with presenter" response bears this out.

However, we know from science that people do engage and remember better when their experience is active versus passive.

Your audience may not be sitting there waiting for you to use a poll or equivalent means of interacting, but it's a proven means of increasing attention and message retention - when used in a manner that fits for the presentation.

Webinar audiences clearly value authenticity over perfection. Avoid using a poll (or equivalent) just to be interactive. It actually drives people away. Plan interactions that fit naturally.

| Three steps to better webinar interactions |
|---|
| **1 . Start with the presenter**<br>If the presenter were speaking to an in-person audience, where would they ask for a show of hands? Pause for questions? Respond to someone who makes a comment from the audience? Help them to adapt those offline interactions to the tools in web conferencing that will facilitate similar interactions? |
| **2. Decide who will share responsibility for interacting**<br>Delivering a responsive, interactive experience doesn't mean the presenter has to take care of everything, including behind the scenes engagements. Use a team to interact with the audience throughout the webinar. |
| **3. Adapt to your tools - naturally**<br>Professional web conferencing and casting solutions have multiple ways to facilitate audience interactions. Once you've answered "What type of interactions?" and "Who will help interact?", now select the features that help you accomplish that in the webinar. |

# The bottom line

Survey respondents expect you to promise only what you will deliver and deliver what you've promised. But they are also quite clear that it's not just *what* is delivered; *how* it is delivered has a lot to do with whether or not they stick around.

If you want your message to educate, inspire, or influence your audience, take your time planning a webinar filled with valuable content and natural opportunities for engagement. The wise communicator will ensure that the work that goes into "filling the room" doesn't go to waste.

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**About 1080 Group, LLC**
1080 Group, LLC is a training and research firm that helps organizations design and deliver interactive webinar, webcast, and virtual classroom programs. The collective team experience includes hundreds of clients, thousands of web seminars, and more than a million web seminar attendees. Contact 1080 Group at info@1080group.com, +1.503.476.1080, or www.twitter.com/1080Group. Roger Courville's blog, curriculum vitae, et al can be found at www.thevirtualpresenter.com. Subscribe to 1080 Group's newsletter and get a free bullets-to-visuals tutorial here: http://bit.ly/cyKZUJ.

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# GoToWebinar

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