

Your Simple Project Plan for Engaging Webinars

Webinar Handout | Roger Courville, Chief Aha! Guy, 1080 Group, LLC

If you're like most of the rest of us, webinars hold the promise of being an awesome part of your communication strategy...and they can also be a bit unnerving.

The good news is that webinar software like GoToWebinar is easy to use. The hard part sometimes is getting to the answer of a very frequent question, "How do I engage an audience that I can't see?"

Remember, a webinar is an event, and events have a before, during, and after. In other words, engagement with a webinar has a lifecycle, and it's exactly this that we explored in Your Simple Project Plan for Engaging Webinars, kindly sponsored by Citrix.

This document isn't a word-for word recap...since we were delivering an interactive experience, no document would do that justice. Nor would having a copy of the slides. Live desktop demos, Q&A, and other elements of the webinar mean that I'd encourage you to watch the recording if you weren't there. If you did attend, this'll will be be a good memory-jogger for you.

And you might just even print off the checklist at the end of this document for your next webinar.

Best of luck to you as you grow your webinar mastery!

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"The polling feature of GoToWebinar is really, really effective. At the end of the webinar, we can ask attendees, 'Which program are you interested in?' And then we can call them within 30 minutes and sign them up, because we already know their needs. We also use polling to gather data from our clients to use in research afterwards."

—Shannon VanDeByl,
Client Services Manager,
Teneo Results

Setup: Choose *your* best day and time

There is no perfect time for a webinar. Most of them happen on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays because that's when businesses tend to hold them. You might find that a Monday night is best for the group you need to reach, teach, or lead. In other words, the simple answer is that the best day and time for you to hold a webinar is when the majority of the people you want to be there can make it. Now the question is how do you figure that out?

Take Action

- If you don't have any idea about when to hold a webinar, try the middle of the week in mid-morning or mid-afternoon.
- Ask in advance. Do a simple survey (www.surveymonkey.com has a free version and works great).
- Ask during registration. Customize a multiple choice question in GoToWebinar.
- Ask using a poll or two during the webinar. One nice thing about GoToWebinar's polling feature is that you can limit responses to a single choice or open them up to "select all that apply."

Setup: Personalise registration to improve engagement

It's great that GoToWebinar make it easy to let invitees RSVP and sends them confirmation and reminder emails automatically. Consider, though, that the registration page could be more than a simple RSVP. You might find it useful to think about the lifecycle of your webinar and how you might increase engagement before, during, or after the webinar.

Take Action

- Think of your registration page as a mini-research tool. Even a little additional information gathered from invitees can significantly shape how you engage them.
- Here are a few examples:

- Ask for a social media ID.
- Pull GoToWebinar's registration report (before the webinar) and reach out to them to ask if there's anything they'd like to see in the webinar.
- Send a separate, personal welcome email. Automated reminders are awesome, but imagine how much more likely people will be to attend when you send a personal note. Powerful!
- Customise GoToWebinar's reminder emails (yes, you can!). Maybe you personalise the emails' subject line. Maybe you invite participants to download a worksheet you'll reference during the webinar.
- Create a multiple choice question that prepares you for follow up such as, "What day after the webinar would be best for me to follow up with you?"

Promotion: Emphasise something unique about your webinar

Have you ever gotten something like an email newsletter that looked interesting stashed it so you could get back to it in a couple days? And then found it weeks or months later because you never got around to it? That's what can happen with on-demand content, too (like a paper or webinar recording). An event, though, has a deadline — a time that it's happening, and deadlines are motivating if people want what you have.

Take Action

- Highlight, specifically, what you're going to do when the webinar is live (don't just say, "We'll be interactive."). Examples might include:
 - The opportunity to interact with a known expert on the webinar's topic.
 - An "ask anything" session during the webinar where even non-topical questions may be asked.
 - A drawing! Show up and you'll get a copy of the ebook (but only if you are there for the live webinar).

Design: Adapt your interactions

Presenting online isn't hard, but it is different. Besides what you will show (your webcam or what is on your computer desktop), one of the most powerful elements of engagement is when real people (the audience) interact with real people (you and each other). And this is what is often missing, because interacting in a web-based seminar (webinar!) is using a different set of tools. Here's a simple three-step process for how to get there.

Take Action

- Analyse: Start by thinking through all the things you do when speaking in an in-person session.
 - How do you kick things off? Establish rapport?
 - How do you handle questions?
 - How do you ask the audience to otherwise interact with you or each other?
- Map: Map those interactions to the tools you have in GoToWebinar.
 - Some will translate direction ("use a project to show PowerPoint" becomes "show PowerPoint from my desktop")
 - Some will take some modification ("show of hands" becomes a poll).
 - Some won't translate well at all. But that's true when you change the medium of communication in any context (you can show something in a movie that you'd have to describe differently in a book).
- Discover: Uncover what you can do differently or better online.
 - A new medium may lose something, but you also gain something. Example: Going around a room for 1-minute introductions for 20 people would take 20 minutes, and it'd be impossible with 50 or 500 people. Online, however, having people introduce themselves via chat would take just a few minutes.

NOTE: The following page has a host of ideas for adapting in-person experiences to webinars and virtual classes.

Stage	In-Person Experiences	Enabling Tool or Scenario	Maximizing Engagement
Prepare	Keep an eye on the whole room	Reconfigure your conferencing layout	Arrange the tools in your web conferencing control panel so you can glance at those most important to you (e.g., the participant list or a dashboard that shows participant attentiveness); HINT: This might even include undocking a tool from the panel
Deliver	Keep an eye on attentiveness	Attentiveness indicator, Questions indicator	Attentiveness indicators detect the active application on participants' desktops, and those who are "somewhere else" are registered as inattentive; look for this in a dashboard for whole-group indicators or on the participant list to see attentiveness by individual
Deliver	Use your facial expression and gestures	Webcam	Draw participants in by making eye contact with your webcam; occasionally ask participants to watch your webcam feed so you can show them something
Deliver	Whiteboard	Drawing tools	Use a pointer or a variety of highlighters and pens to direct attention; change up what you use to keep it interesting
Deliver	Project your computer	Desktop sharing	Consider dropping out of PowerPoint "presentation mode" to show something else; treat it like a participant is standing next to you and you've invited him or her to look over your shoulder as you show and tell
Interact	Ask for a show of hands	Participant "hand up" tool	Whether planned or on-the-fly, gauge participation and response by learning to see hands up "at a glance;" HINT: You likely can do this in more than one place such as the participant list or a dashboard
Interact	Participants can "lean over and whisper to their neighbors"	Chat privately	Active participants are less likely to wander away; enable private chat to let them more naturally chat amongst themselves
Interact	Participants engage in a group discussion	Writing: Chat publicly Audio: Unmute all or select individuals	While some presentations are about what the presenter has to share, often learning and engagement improve dramatically when participants can voice their questions and inputs
Interact	Maintain control of the flow	Mute/unmute all	As the presenter you lead the pace of the session, and at some point you need to get back to what you need to share
Interact	Ask for feedback that helps you understand how you're doing	Polling	Little is more engaging for participants than having the presentation catered to them; use polls to gauge their reactions and needs
Interact	Gauge how participants are learning	Testing	Tests enable you to gather feedback formally; consider not only testing after sessions, but during a session to assess comprehension; HINT: Plan a break to give yourself a few minutes to check the report
Interact	Establish rapport	Chat publicly	Many presentations benefit when participants have a chance to introduce themselves; another benefit is that you demonstrate early that you are live and expecting to be interactive in a normal way
Interact	Read a participant's name tag; call on him or her by name	Attendee list	People like to hear their names, but an additional benefit (especially with a large group) is that even participants you don't call on realize you are there and are personally vested in them

Rehearse: Practice for transitions and conversations

Any coach will encourage you to practice your presentation, right? Let me add a little context for your next webinar: focus your limited time on the transitions. You speaking and showing PowerPoint is about same online or off, so focus on the things you have to coordinate when using GoToWebinar to improve your confidence. Why? The value of confidence is that you'll *be* engaging instead of worrying about some little thing that feels big when you're on the virtual stage. Examples include:

Take Action

- *How will you start the webinar?* The presenters (Organizers and Panelists in GoToWebinar parlance) can log in early before going live in front of an audience. Who will push the Start button? Start the recording? Be the first voice that the audience hears?
- *How will you transition between speakers?* It's common that a moderator (or virtual emcee) introduces the speaker, but remember, you each will have a different set of clues for communicating when in a webinar. Is there a clear ending to the introduction so the speaker knows when to start?
- *How will you launch a poll?* The person making the presentation doesn't *have* to be the person who launches the poll (makes it live to the audience). It's useful to know who's doing what. Make sure you discuss what you will do during the poll (make small talk?) and how/if you intend to discuss the results.
- *How will you handle Q&A?* At planned times? Only at the end? Will you let attendees ask to be taken off mute so they can ask an audio-based question (using "hand up" works great for this!)?
- *How will the webinar end?* Make sure you give a clear signal that it's done so no one's left wondering. I like to say, "You may now disconnect" as the very final thing I say.

Present: Focus on virtual eye contact.

When presenting in person, what do you do? Engage with eye contact! To be fair, you do more than that, but let's address this one thing in the context of a webinar. Obviously people aren't sitting in front of you (which is what feels weird), but there here are ways to make technology your friend to improve engagement.

Take Action

- *Make eye contact with the webcam, not your desktop.* If you present in person, do you stare at your slides? (I hope not!). No, you glance at them and make eye contact with your audience. Online, this means being more like a newscaster who has to look at the camera. You don't have to stare at it 100%, but it's useful to not just stare at your slides —and have the audience staring at your forehead.
- Open your at-a-glance tools. In GoToWebinar, the Attendee List, the Questions pane, and the Dashboard are all like instruments on the dash of your automobile — you learn to glance at them and derive meaning.
- Use “virtual name tags” more frequently. Remember, your audience members are each sitting by themselves at their computer. Use their names more frequently online than you would. Hint: You'll see their “name tag” in the Questions pane or Attendee list.

Follow up: Continue engagement after the webinar.

To be fair, some presentations are only about the presentation itself. Many (or even most), however, are not — they're part of a bigger relationship that happens before and after the webinar. GoToWebinar is particularly good at making it easy to personalise follow up to improve how you engage each person after the webinar. Here are a few ideas:

Take Action

- Pull the final report. Use the one that captured everything in the webinar from registration to final event survey.
- *Share the recording.* It's simple to make a recording. Now just make sure you've included it in the follow up email.
- *Customise the follow up email.* GoToWebinar will automate part of this, but it's up to you to add a link (for example) that says, “Don't forget that next month's webinar is about <this>, and here's a link so you can register.”
- *Review and respond to the questions.* You may or may not have gotten to all the questions during the webinar, but this is a great source of ideas for blog posts, future webinars, or follow up conversations that start with, “Hey, sorry we didn't get to your question during the webinar, but I wanted to reach out personally to help.”

The Bottom Line

Webinars are awesome. But sometimes you want hands-on practice. Or coaching. Or diving in to the particulars of your need to reach, teach, and lead in virtual presentations — and you need to do it in a private setting with just you or your team.

If you'd like more information about workshops, coaching, and consulting, please contact Roger or one of his team.

About Roger Courville and 1080 Group, LLC



Evidence and Skills for Mastering Webinars and Virtual Classes.

Roger Courville is a speaker, author, analyst, and Chief Aha! Guy at 1080 Group, LLC. 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. The blog, curriculum vitae, and mailing list can be found at <http://www.thevirtualpresenter.com>.

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