

So, you want to run a webinar?

A webinar is an online presentation that uses visuals, the presenter's voice, and interactive elements to bring groups together in real time for training, information, and collaboration without the costs of travel.

The CSC has assembled these best practices from our research on webinars. Along with a look at the literature, we surveyed users to learn what makes a good webinar. Running your own is simple – just follow these 9 steps.

Step 1: Choose Your Platform

There are a wide variety of webinar platforms out there, with more emerging all the time. GoToWebinar, Adobe Connect, and WebEx are the most common. Whichever one you use:

- **Choose Early.** Every platform provider offers solid tutorials that can get you started, but you should give yourself at least a month to familiarize yourself before launching webinars of your own.
- **Avoid products that require users to install software.** Many workplace computers won't allow it without a password. Most webinar platforms use web-based interfaces that avoid this problem.
- **Get a platform that allows voice to be sent online (Known as VoIP).** This allows your participants to listen in without tying up a phone line. It also makes it easier to record the webinar with audio.

Step 2: Build your presentation

Most webinars are centered around PowerPoint or Prezi slideshows, and for good reason; while it is possible to share anything on your desktop, it can be frustrating for participants to wait while you load documents or web pages. There are a few principles to keep in mind:

- **Keep text to a minimum and keep the font sizes big.** The text should only be a guide to your remarks.
- **Use lots of big, bright visuals,** but ensure that they illustrate your point. Pictures of the presenters are an excellent idea, as they help build a bond with the audience.
- **Use lots of slides.** This is where webinar presentation slides differ from in-person ones. With slides your main way of conveying motion, using a few more will keep your audience's focus.
- **Don't try anything too complex,** especially the first time around. Webinars are better suited to clear, concise presentations of fact than they are to group discussions or complex skill-building.

Step 3: Think about timing

Webinars should be short and focused. Most of our survey-takers preferred an hour or less. That generally means about 40 minutes of content, 5 minutes of setup and explanation, and 15 minutes for questions. Be sure to include:

- **An explanation of how the webinar will work.** Keep this short – people don't like long introductions.
- **Time for questions** in the middle of the presentation, as well as at the end.
- **Think about a few questions that you can set up as polls** (where the audience clicks their vote). They'll give you structured feedback and get people involved in the talk.
- **Schedule your webinar earlier in the day and in the middle of the week.** We found the most interest in sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings and lunchtimes.

Step 4: Invite people

The "sweet spot" for doing this is between two weeks and a month before the event. A few things will help you maximize your audience:

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- **Keep your e-mail invitation short**, with a brief summary of the topic and a large, bold link to your registration page (which your webinar platform will help you set up) .
- **Be aware of the deadlines** for inclusion of your invitation on mailing lists. These lists are the way most of our respondents heard of webinars, but they often only go out every two weeks or even monthly.
- **Ask for as little information as possible when people register.** Their name, their e-mail address, and (possibly) their organization is all you should normally need. More questions will scare people away.

Step 5: Set up your space

You need to have the right physical and virtual space to run a webinar well. Here's what you need:

- **A room. With a door.** You will need to have a quiet space to work from when you are presenting.
- **A wired internet connection.** Wireless networks can sometimes drop connections or cause fuzzy audio.
- **A clean virtual desktop.** When you turn on the webinar software's desktop sharing, the users will be able to see everything that's on your screen. Make sure to close all windows except for your presentation files.

Step 6: Find a partner to moderate

The moderator takes questions and handles any technical troubles, letting you focus on your voice and your slides. Ideally, the moderator should be in a different space, using a different internet connection. This ensures that if one connection has problems, someone will still be there to interact with the participants.

Step 7: Practice

It is very important to do a "dry run" of your webinar well before the presentation. Ask a few friends to participate, ideally using different kinds of computer and internet browsers. Have them alert you if they notice:

- **Audio problems.** Some breakup is inevitable when sending audio online, but things like beeping noises on login or overly quiet vocals can be solved, either by calling the teleconference provider or moving the mic closer. When in doubt, err loud – people can always turn the volume down, but can't always turn it up.
- **Interface problems.** Make sure they can always see the space for typing questions.
- **Delays** when you click from slide to slide.

Step 8: Present

On the day of the webinar, log in early to make sure everything is up and running and that you are there to welcome the participants. The most important thing you can pay attention to during the presentation is your voice.

- **Speak loudly and vary your tone.** Your audience can't see you, so your voice has to hold their attention.
- **Speak slowly.** Especially over VoIP, vocals get a bit garbled. Slowing down your speech a little bit helps.
- **Answer questions as they come up.** This keeps the audience engaged. If you can't get to a question, set it aside to answer after the webinar is over.
- **Check in with your audience;** asking them questions directly will focus their attention on the presentation.

Step 9: Follow-up

Post-webinar contact is very important, especially if the webinar itself was a one-off event. You need to:

- **Answer any questions** you didn't get to during the presentation.
- **Send out a link** to an archived recording of the webinar as soon as possible. Our respondents loved having access to this.
- **Send out any additional resources** you mentioned in your presentation.