

## **Tips, Tricks and Best Management Practices for Planning and Conducting Effective Webinars**

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### **Introduction**

Extension has shown that webinars can be impactful and are an efficient and cost-effective method to reach an audience (Allred & Smallidge, 2010; Rich et al., 2011; Formiga et al., 2014; Pulec et al., 2016). Successful webinars require planning, but there is limited guidance available in the literature to assist Extension professionals in putting on webinars (Robinson & Poling, 2017; Dettenmaier & Locklear, 2018). Through my ten years of experience conducting over 175 webinars I have discovered the following tips, tricks and best practices when it comes to conducting webinars.

### **How Do I Begin?**

- Use a checklist. Establishing a to-do list allows you to keep track of all the tasks and items to complete, ensuring that you do not miss a step or make a mistake. The checklist allows you to be efficient and can help ensure the presenter and audience have excellent experiences.
- Choose a relevant topic. The topic you choose will be the biggest factor in the number of people who participate in your webinar. Choose topics that are current and solve problems or meet the audience needs. To determine topics for your webinars consider polling your audience post webinar, pose questions through social media, poll your email lists, or use your website or social media analytics.
- Preparation rules. A lot of presenters feel nervous about presenting a webinar. Taking the time to work with the presenter on presentation development and practicing with the technology will ensure that on the day of the webinar they will be able to focus on the audience and concentrate on the finer details of presenting, such as pacing, and delivery. Communicate with the presenter frequently prior to the webinar. Establish and share presentation guidelines. Schedule a familiarization session to go over expectations, test audio connects, and to give your presenter a chance to become familiar with the webinar software.
- Invest in equipment. Head phones and quality mic are a must because poor audio quality will drive your audience away. By utilizing quality equipment that has noise cancelling mic will help ensure a high-quality audio experience for the participants. One can also improve the audio quality by muting all mics but the presenter.
- Check the presentation prior to the webinar to ensure high quality. Remember your audience will be viewing the webinar via computer screen, tablet or smart phone. Slides should be high contrast, black text on light background. Limit the text to six lines per slide, using san serif font set at 20 point or larger. Use compressed images.

- Know the technology. Practice using the technology so that when a glitch occurs you know what to do. Nothing is more frustrating to the participant than a glitch in the technology. Develop FAQs and other helpful hints that you can share with the participants so they can address their technology issues.

### **Time to Go Live**

- Lay the ground rules. At the beginning of the webinar go over the ground rules with the participants. Common rules to remind the audience about include muting their audio and that chat messages should be focused on the webinar topic. If you will be engaging the audience with polling questions or other features of the software consider doing a quick reminder on how these features work. Also remind them of any logistics necessary to wrap up the webinar, such as quizzes that maybe required to earn continuing education credits.
- Accept your talking to a computer. When we present to an audience, we rely on visual cues for feedback on style, timing, and their understanding of the material. Webinar technology today offers tools for providing audience feedback, such as emoticons or chat capabilities. Utilize the tools so the audience can provide feedback.
- How fast are you going? Remember not everyone is on high speed internet. Internet speed can be a limiting factor in what is delivered via a webinar. Demonstrating software, or showing a video can be impacted by the bandwidth of the audience. Many places have limited internet speed, resulting in webinars that show videos or demonstrate software difficult to watch because of the delays associated with the downloading of the audio and video streams.
- Get Engaged. Your audiences often have distractions and competing tasks, such as email and work reports, right at their fingertips, when participating in the webinar. Webinars do not have to be a one-way street. Utilize the tools such as polls, chat, and emoticons to keep the audience engaged. By engaging the audience every few minutes, you will help them focus on the information your presenting.
- Be Truthful. If you advertise a 1-hour webinar, be prepared for a 1-hour webinar. Not having enough material and falling short on timing is one thing, but over running the time on the webinar is another. People expect one to meet what they market. Over running timing on a webinar is not fair to the audience who maybe joining during lunch or between meetings.

### **It's All Over, Now What?**

- Get feedback. Feedback on the program is a must. Collecting information on the quality of the program and initial impact data can help in adjusting future webinars to be more effective. In a post survey gather information on the quality of the webinar, ideas for future webinar topics and impact data related to knowledge gained and aspirations. Remember, by engaging with your audience following the webinar to see if they learned anything or have further questions may keep them engaged with your extension program.

- Determine the impact. Quality of the webinar is important, but the real outcome to look for is the impact one has with the information they provide. Consider conducting an evaluation six or more months following the webinar to determine the webinars effectiveness and impact. Use online survey tools to gather and summarize the evaluation data that can then be used to determine if the program is effective, shared with the presenters and used to meet reporting requirements for your organization.

### **Conclusion**

These guidelines are effective in saving time, reducing costs and creating positive experiences for your presenters and participants. By using these guidelines, you can develop and deliver webinars that are impactful and cost effective; ones that will result in a positive experience for all involved.

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### **Abstract**

Webinars have been shown to be an efficient and effect way to deliver Extension programming, but limited guidance is available on how to plan and conduct impactful webinars. To make it easier for Extension professionals to develop and deliver webinars the following tips, tricks and best management practices are being proposed based on the author's experience of conducting

over 175 webinars. By implementing these guidelines Extension professionals should be able to minimize the challenges associated with delivering effective webinars.

Keywords

webinar, best practices, program delivery