

## Developing an Engaging Online Event (using Zoom)

### Event Design:

You have many options to deliver an online event, much like you do for live events but there are some key factors to keep in mind that are unique to creating an engaging online experience.

**As always, consider your goals/desired outcomes and how best to present your content.**

- **Moderated one-on-one** – Rather than just having a speaker presenting to your audience on their own, consider having a moderator asking your speaker questions. It feels more connected and might encourage the audience to think up their own questions. Consider keeping it short so people are encouraged that it's only a 20-minute commitment. You might see your attrition rate go down.
- **Panel Discussion** – A panel discussion is one of the most popular styles of live events and is still great for online delivery. It's important to keep in mind that the larger the panel, the less time each panellist gets to speak and share their expertise. Try to keep your panel size to a maximum of three experts and one moderator. For online delivery, a script is critical for any style but is especially important in this case because you don't want people jumping in and cutting others off while speaking. The moderator should ensure they are specifically addressing who they are asking to answer each question. For example, the moderator could lead into a question by saying, "Joe, what do you think of xyz? Can you give us an example?" It's best to plan ahead and let your speakers know which questions will be addressed to them. This also allows special guests valuable prep time. It's best to also set your time parameters (such as two-minutes) for each of those questions.
- **Ask Me Anything/Ask the Expert** – For this style of event, it's also recommended that you have a moderator. A moderator's role is to field your audience questions. Sessions like this offer a great opportunity to use the "raise your hand" feature. It's encouraged that you ask your audience in advance to submit questions via the registration form and/or to come prepared to ask their questions in the Q&A box. During the session, you can then call upon them to unmute using the "Raise your Hand" feature. That's when you can facilitate a dialogue with participants. This ensures you have vetted the question in advance. Another option is to just take advantage of the chat box and having the moderator ask the questions on their participant's behalf.
- **Keynote** – For online webinars, a keynote should really be reserved for that one-of-a-kind marquee speaker; someone who is polished and attracts an audience by name alone. For example, Elon Musk could be sitting at his kitchen table and delivering a keynote presentation - no question. Someone with less experience on a live stage would struggle with the delivery and the audience experience would suffer. Keep the experience level of your speaker in mind because speaking into the abyss is hard. By asking them to host a virtual keynote, you're placing them in a challenging position: they'll be speaking to a crowd that they can't see or hear. It's a little like doing a stand-up comedy act without being able to feed off the energy of the crowd. If you aren't 100% confident that your speaker fits this profile, opt to have a one-on-one moderated session.

- **Case Studies** – Presenting material as case-studies are a great way to make your content and speakers relatable.
- **Town Halls** – Do you have an audience full of burning questions that need to be addressed broadly? This open forum demonstrates transparency and creates trust. Just make sure you know your audience and limit your attendee list.
- **Tradeshow Showcase** – Can you imagine a captive tradeshow audience? How great is that? There are so many ways to position the digital event – perhaps giving 2 minutes to each exhibitor to give their elevator pitch and invite attendees to reach out to them directly (perhaps through an appointment calendar like Google calendar with limited timeslots available) to dig deeper into their services, if it interests them. You can intersperse these pitches with 15-minute short presentations on hot-topics. If you provide the audience with a detailed (carefully timed) agenda, they can login during periods that are relevant to them.

### Event invitation/Description:

- Include the obvious – Date, Time and Location (Zoom Meeting)
- State your intended audience – Who would benefit from attending most
- Include three learner outcomes/objectives - What can attendees get out of the event
- Provide an agenda – It’s important to outline for your attendees what to expect, especially when the event will run longer than an hour (not necessary for 1-hour events)
  - Outline your expectations of the audience, no one likes surprises! Will the audience be on camera? Ensure they are informed.
  - Do you want attendees to submit questions in advance? If so, add it to your registration form – as a “not required” field.
  - Do you want attendees to ask questions verbally during the event? Let them know in your session description that verbal questions are encouraged. Suggested text: We encourage you to ask your questions in the chat box, or “raise your hand” if you are called upon and our team can have your microphone unmuted.
- If you have an active social media presence, include your handles in the invitation, and encourage attendees to reach out with questions
- Offer perks for attendees, such as downloadable pdfs relevant to your presentation, that they will receive when they register and/or at the end of your presentation. Popular examples include:
  - Checklists (i.e. what you need to know before signing a lease)
  - Templates (i.e. workbooks and gantt charts for goal setting, email templates, etc.)
  - Discounts/Giveaways (i.e. book your free consultation)



### **Audience Engagement:**

Your audience is sitting in front of their electronic device of choice and have many other distractions that make engagement strategies for online events of the utmost importance (they are not the same captive audience you find in a meeting room).

- Talk to them/welcome them/explain what they can expect along the way.
- Use polling questions throughout your presentation to make them feel included.
- Show polling results with them and share your thoughts.
- Use visuals throughout like short videos or PowerPoint presentations.
- Make sure your event is seamless and well-rehearsed.
- Create a "run of show" document as it's an important tool you can use to remind your speakers to speak to the audience and to explain everything they are doing.

### **Polling questions – ideas:**

- Ask fun questions that help your speaker(s) get to know the audience, like: where are you from? What industry? Etc.
- Ask something randomly funny for entertainment – even part way through your event – like: Are you still awake? Just checking...
- Maybe even throw in some test questions, to see if they were paying attention...
- Ask questions to help guide the conversation – you might be surprised that your audience is more interested diver deeper on a particular subject.
- Avoid asking yes or no questions.

### **Risk Management:**

- Always appoint back-up roles in case of internet interruptions – most importantly, ensure you officially select a co-host. In zoom, you can have two hosts and if one of you is disconnected the other can still run the event. This is especially important when you are recording to the cloud – it ensures the recording isn't disrupted.
- Always record to the cloud and not your computer, for the same reason as above.
- During your housekeeping instructions, ask your audience to refrain from posting links in the chat box. Links pose a risk to other audience members when you don't know the source.
- Ensure you have someone assigned to monitoring the chat/Q&A for suspicious behaviour and ready to delete/remove anyone, if necessary.

### Should I Record my Event? Ask yourself these questions, before you decide:

- Is your event private with sensitive subject matter?
  - Would it be relevant content to be shared internally, even if it is private?
  - Would it make sense to make your event available on-demand to generate more interest in your company/organization? In many cases, your audience might simply not be available during the timeframe you have scheduled.
  - **Did you know that you can record your event on Zoom and require guests to register to view the on-demand content? This provides you with the ability to track your online viewers for added ROI.** <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360000488283-On-demand-recordings>
  - **If you are recording your event and have speakers from outside of your organization, you will need their permission to record.**
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### Dry-Run/Speaker prep meeting:

- Try not to over-script your event; work with the speakers and moderator to determine topics for discussion and work to ensure you have a fairly equal amount of speaking time for each speaker. Let it feel like a conversation and have others jump in with their expertise, as appropriate
- Save time for Q&A
- Discuss polling options to keep the audience engaged
- Discuss the use of powerpoint or video to break up the visuals – not just talking heads
- Provide the speakers with an outline of the event and roles for each of them
- Assign a host to help the moderator with the chat and Q&A (not a speaker/moderator)
- Discuss tips for positioning their cameras
- How to change your background, if you are not familiar
- Test everyone's mics
- Do you want to record the session?
- If you do record, you will get a video recording, audio only recording, as well as, a written transcript
- Photo opp (screen shot) before you go live (so everyone can pose)
- Encourage them to click around the features to familiarize themselves (walkthrough how each feature works)
- If you have several powerpoints, best to leave the "share screen" to one of your hosts. This creates a seamless experience for your audience. Watching speakers fumbling to take their turn to share screens is not the ideal viewing experience.
- Lastly – set-up a calendar invitation with their personalized Zoom link for easy access. There is also a back-up phone number you can use in case your internet goes down.