



Donald H Taylor reflects on 8 years' hosting LSG webinars.

DELIVERING WEBINARS

I've been hosting and occasionally delivering webinars for the Learning and Skills Group for over eight years. Over that period I've had the good fortune to work with some wonderful, experienced speakers, and had the delight of coaching some first time speakers to deliver tremendously powerful sessions.

As well as the triumphs, I've also had my share of disasters – from the time the webinar service failed two minutes before we were due to start (and me in a New York hotel room in my pyjamas at 5am) to the time both my broadband internet feeds at my home office failed and we ran the whole thing through my mobile phone's Wi-Fi tethering. In all the hundreds of sessions I've been responsible for, though, I'm glad to say that only once have we been unable to get on the air

It's been an exciting journey, and the thrill hasn't gone yet. I still get butterflies before we kick off one of our Thursday LSG sessions, and still feel that buzz when a presentation and the ensuing Q&A have gone particularly well. People keep turning up, so I guess we're doing something right.

Over the years, I've put together a document to help speakers prepare for an LSG webinar, and I thought it was time to share it to a wider audience. So what follows – over the course of the next few issues of this magazine – will be 'How to be a Webinar Master' in serial form (yes, the title is a little too grand, I agree). If you can't wait to read the whole thing, there's a URL at the end of this article where you can request the document in its entirety.

STARTING OUT

Let's start at the beginning.

The essential point about online sessions is this: *the audience's only interaction is via their computer screen and speakers.* Obvious? Yes, but precisely for that reason, it is easy to overlook how wide the implications are.

Because each audience member is separate from each other and from you, three lines of non-verbal communication are removed, lines that we take for granted during a physical presentation. The audience cannot communicate with you non-verbally, nor with each other, nor can you communicate non-verbally with them. The result is that online presentations require you to think very clearly about how you will build

rapport with your audience, engage their interest and maintain it.

Online, without your body and face to help you, your voice becomes an important tool. It must be clear, varied and well-modulated. Using a set of wordy PowerPoint slides as a script for ad-libbing is a poor approach when you are physically in front of people. Online it is a disaster. To be a success presenting online you need compelling, well-structured content that involves the audience.

There is not a great deal that is new to learn, but any online presenter will have to remember *not* to use many of the habits, tricks and instincts built up over years of exposure to face-to-face delivery. The good news is that anyone can present online, and doing so enables you to do things you cannot easily do in the physical world.

It isn't very hard. In fact, I estimate that it's about as difficult as driving a car. If you can do that, you can present online with aplomb. Of course if you drive, you'll also remember how impossible it seemed at the beginning to co-ordinate everything: looking at the mirror, controlling the clutch, watching your dashboard. You'll also remember how you overcame all that to be the confident driver you are today. Practice.

Before starting on the practical 'how to' of delivering a great online presentation, let's establish some facts that will affect how we develop that presentation.

OUR NOISY INFORMATION CULTURE

'Information culture' may sound like an academic irrelevance. It isn't. From the way you watch TV to the way you interact with friends, we live in a noisy, multi-stream information culture. People increasingly

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expect to be on Twitter at the same time as they watch entertainment shows on TV, or to see multiple streams of information presented when they watch sport or business news. Whether it's live voting on talent shows, or TV screens simultaneously showing the results of three different sports while discussing a fourth, information-rich culture is now mainstream and, consciously or not, your audience expects it.

This profoundly affects the way people attend webinars. Many delegates are accustomed to dealing with plenty of information at once. Some even feel cheated or under stimulated without it. Almost none will expect – as their equivalents 20 years ago might have – to sit quietly and listen to a factual talk for 40 minutes. We will come back to this many times.

THE DELEGATES' ENVIRONMENT

Most delegates work in a noisy environment – both literally and figuratively. They are often attending webinars in open plan offices, with other applications as well as the webinar software open on their desks – including email. They may well be interrupted by work colleagues during the event, physically or via the phone. The advantages of webinars in reaching out to a distant audience come at a cost: the audience may not be fully engaged.

This noisy environment is something you will have to take into account when designing your talk. Your presentation will need to be engaging, clear and constantly on the move. Many of your delegates are only ever seconds away from reading their email.

THE SIX KEY ROLES

A final point. Although these articles are all about delivering great webinars, it is important to remember that delivery is only one of the roles essential to a successful webinar. I reckon there are six key roles. It is possible, even usual, for one person to fill more than one, or even all, of these roles:

- 1. **Presenter** – creates and delivers the content.
- 2. **Host** – facilitates the event, does introductions, Q&A, watches chat.

3. **Producer** – chooses the topic and presenter, schedules rehearsals, may edit content.

4. **Marketer** – ensures sufficient delegates turn up, and with the correct expectations.

5. **Administrator** – deals with technical issues.

6. **Delegate** – needs clear expectations and an understanding of webinar etiquette.

These articles concern the first of these roles, but remember that without the other roles fulfilled, the best presentation will fail.

FOUR STEPS TO A GREAT ONLINE PRESENTATION

There are four steps to a great online presentation. The most obvious is writing the presentation itself. Equally important, though, is the preparation – from your choice of topic to your rehearsal through to your delivery:

- 1. **What you say** – decide on the point you want to make and stick to it.
- 2. **Work with the audience** – structure your presentation to allow you to build rapport, engage interest and maintain it.
- 3. **How you say it** – use your voice well.
- 4. **Preparation** – this is usually the difference between online success and failure.

STEP 1: WHAT YOU SAY

Let's assume you are delivering a one-hour web cast. During this you may only be presenting for some 30-35 minutes, with the rest of the time used for housekeeping, wrapping up and Q&A.

How will you make those 30 minutes count?

Online you don't have body language to rely on and as a result your content becomes supremely important. In fact, it is the essential element, more important than your voice, than interaction, than beautiful slides. Content trumps them all.

In addition, because your audience is certainly not in the habit of sitting and listening for 30 minutes at a time, you have to be absolutely clear about what you're saying. So the key point of a successful online session is this: **have a point and stick to it**. By 'stick to it' I mean that every word of the presentation, every question, every



analogy, metaphor and piece of information should lead to or reinforce that point. If it doesn't, throw it out.

When William Goldman wrote the screenplay for the film *A Bridge Too Far*, the tale of the airborne assault on Arnhem, he knew British soldiers had won five Victoria Crosses (the highest British military award for gallantry) during the battle. He originally wrote each into the script then cut them all out. Why? Although each was a dramatic story, none played a part in the structure of the film he was writing. You have to be as ruthless when writing your presentation – for each point you make, ask yourself: how does this advance my thesis?

YOUR CONTENT

Of course, your thesis and your content will be useful and of interest to the audience, we take that for granted. So will the audience. It's why they turn up. Some considerations:

- If in doubt, have too much content rather than too little (but not so much that you'll have to rush it)
- The actionable, practical and real is always preferable to the theoretical
- Avoid hyperbole, spin or marketing

ASSEMBLING YOUR THOUGHTS

It's very common to have a general idea of what you want to say, but to be a little hazy on the details. If this is the case, the worst thing you can do is to start writing a script or building a PowerPoint slide deck – you will begin too far along in the creative process.

Instead, here's a process that will help you collect your thoughts and assemble them so that you not only know the key point you want to make, you also have the material to support it, and a clear benefit for your audience:

- 1. Brainstorm** – indulge in the pleasant activity of just writing down on paper everything that you can think of that's associated with the subject. I use a mind map for this.
- 2. Clarify** – now take the time to reflect on what you have written. Underline the most important thoughts, and as you do so your key point should become clear. You should also now be clear on the benefit for your audience in listening.
- 3. Synthesize and discard** – now that you know your key point and your proposal to your audience, you can begin to cluster together the headings and thoughts that best support them. For an online presentation, aim for 2-5 headings

SLIDE	TITLE	NOTES
1	Holding/title slide	Title, start & end time. Speaker photo and name. May also have a brief overview of tools available to delegates
2	Opening question	An open question relevant to the topic and the experience of the audience. Comment sensibly on the results
3	Agenda	The structure of the talk

supporting your main point. Discard anything superfluous.

4. Order and write – your cluster of thoughts will suggest an order. This might be for example: chronological, problem/solution, or cause/effect. Use this to order the headings you developed in stage 3). Now start writing your slide deck.

I would always recommend a question as your second slide: it makes people sit forward, it sets the expectation of interaction and it 'primes the pump' in the chat area. If an open question is asked early on, I find, the chat then continues unprompted. After the introduction, I would recommend 3-5 sections with the same basic contents:

4	Section title slide	A signpost: "Now we're going to talk about Topic 1 this is important because"
5	Content slide 1	Could be a diagram, a demonstration, a picture, a quote or just words (but not too many)
6	Content slide 2	Ditto
7	Content slide 3	Ditto
8	Question slide	Summarise this topic or lead to the next

5. Edit and write again – while you are rehearsing your presentation, you will find many ways to improve it, in terms of running order and content. Edit your presentation accordingly.

STRUCTURE

In the past, people sat through sermons and plays, listening to rapid delivery, and took it all in. (*Romeo and Juliet* in Shakespeare's time was supposed to require just a 'two hour traffic of the stage'. Today it's more likely to last three.)

Nowadays people are less aurally practiced, so once you have your point, break it into parts or topics, and signpost each one to the audience, verbally, and with 'signposting' slides. In other words, stick to the old adage:

tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em

tell 'em


then tell 'em what you've told 'em.

Ideally, the parts of your presentation will all include at least one question, including the introduction. Here's an example three-slide introduction (see panels above):

The slides can be in any order, with the question slide before or after the title slide. I have three content slides here; you may have more or less (but if you have more than five, build some interaction in). Although this looks prescriptive, it is only a guide. The only two things you must have in your presentation are questions and structure. I have hosted and run successful webinars of 50 slides and 5. When we had 5 slides, each was an assertion which we discussed together as a group. Each slide served as content, question and structure. Focus on questions and structure and let common sense be your guide to the rest.

In the next article, we'll examine questions more closely in **Step 2 – Working with the audience**. How can you build rapport quickly and maintain both trust and interest through interaction, variety and visual interest?

Donald H Taylor is chairman of the Learning and Skills group. He blogs at www.donaldhtaylor.co.uk for a copy of the paper this is based on, visit <http://bit.ly/DHTWebinars>



In Part Two of his three-part series on running engaging webinars, Donald H. Taylor advises on building trust and keeping up the interest.

YOU AND YOUR WEBINAR AUDIENCE

In Part One, I looked at some of the lessons learned from eight years of delivering webinars for the Learning and Skills Group, including how to build your story and structure your webinar. In this, the middle part of a series of three articles, I consider working with the audience. How can you build rapport quickly and maintain both trust and interest through interaction, variety and visual interest?

STEP 2: WORKING WITH AN AUDIENCE

Working with your audience comes in three parts, whether you are online or face-to-face:

- Build rapport
- Engage the audience

- Maintain interest

Let's consider each in turn...

BUILDING RAPPORT

Rapport with a physical audience is won or lost very quickly – usually in the first minute (or less) on stage. The first impressions of a speaker are based on how they are introduced, their body language as they step up to the stage and begin to speak, and the manner in which they deliver their first few sentences.

An online rapport is never as strong as one developed in person, but it exists, and is built by ensuring that your audience feels that they are in expert hands. You can foster this trust by ensuring:

1. There is a holding slide before the title, stating the presentation title and start time – so that as soon as they are online they know they are in the right place
2. You have done a proper technical rehearsal to ensure no software glitches
3. You start on time
4. Your voice is enthusiastic, at the right pace and confident. Online, your voice is your body language, dress sense, posture and smile all rolled into one. Use it well (*more on this in the next article*).

For all these reasons, it is a good idea if you are new to online presenting to have a facilitator or host presenting with you who can deal with any technical issues that come up, and who can – if necessary – be



watching out for questions and text chat while you talk. This will enable you to concentrate on presenting. With experience you will find that you can simultaneously be talking, using a keyboard or mouse and responding to points brought up in text chat by yourself.

There are good reasons for having a question as your second slide. It sends two messages to the audience immediately: you are in control, and this is an interactive presentation. They have to sit forward.

ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Do not spend a lot of time talking over your holding slide. By all means chat to your audience using the text chat box – a great place for rapid interaction between members of your audience – but do not expose your voice too early, except perhaps to say, “We’ll be starting in five minutes.” The risk of speaking without a presentation or script – especially if you are new to the medium – is that you may ramble. That would reduce your chances of building rapport once you begin presenting.

On the other hand, if you have a facilitator, they may choose to engage with the audience verbally before the webinar starts. This is my role in the Learning and Skills Group webinars, where I usually begin by asking people where they are from, and what the weather is like where they are. This innocuous task lets new participants get the feel of using text chat in a completely risk-free way – both expressing themselves and interacting with other members of the audience.

When you begin the webinar (bang on time), put up your title slide and introduce yourself, your background and your topic quickly.

It is essential at this point to be concise.

Cut your own profile back to a few points that establish that you’re worth listening to. As for the topic, avoid empty statements such as “this is really important” unless you can back them up with solid facts. Early arrivals could already have been online for ten minutes or more, and they don’t want a further two minutes on how wonderful you or your company is – they want to get going. Simply handle the basics in 20 to 30 seconds and move on. The easiest way to do this is to have a script, or detailed notes, prepared for your introduction. This is the right point to establish your credibility, but do it with hard facts and in the fewest words possible.

POWER OF THE OPEN QUESTION

I do not recommend stating the benefit of attendance to the audience yet. You might miss the mark slightly; after all, you can’t see them, nor have you chatted with them as you might do in a physical event. Wait until you have some important information from them first – after the next slide, which should be your first question.

There are good reasons for having a question as your second slide. It sends two messages to the audience immediately: you are in control, and this is an interactive presentation. They have to sit

forward. This is not a time for them to catch up on their emails. Also, if it is an open question (and it should be) then you’ll find it primes the pump for activity in the text chat area. After a few answers, people start responding not just to the question, but also to each other. The result is a glorious flourishing of interaction as people engage with, and contribute to, the session.

All this from one open question.

Typical open questions to begin a session might be:

- *How are you using mobile content delivery in your organisation?*
- *Can you give an example of a time when you...?*
- *How are you evaluating learning in your organisation?*

You get the idea. Ideally, the questions should be open, personal and relevant to the topic. Asking “What are you hoping to get from today’s session?” might sound like it fits the bill, but in my experience it’s too vague.

Being specific helps people focus and respond. Be quite clear in your instructions, verbal and written, about how you expect the audience to respond – in this case by typing in the text chat area.

This clarity ensures that people spend their time engaged in the topic, not in wondering what you want from them.

A word here on writing questions on slides. Speakers often ask me if they can just ask a question verbally, and the answer of course is yes, and dropping questions into the presentation *ad hoc* should be encouraged. However, if you really want a response (and at the beginning of your talk you certainly do) then you need to present the question clearly using the written word, probably on a slide. Say it once, and many people will miss it, and then it's gone. Write it down and the most distracted delegate will see what is expected.

As with any question, respond intelligently to the answers given. "That's interesting" will not do. Try something like "I can see that a lot of you have reported problems with the ABC software package in the past. That's more than I would have expected. Let's look at that now..."

Remember to credit people by name. They've exposed themselves to public scrutiny by delivering an answer to their question. Acknowledge the value of what they've shared.

Don't spend too long on the question slide and the answers. Perhaps 30 seconds to a minute. Reflect on the answers, and then move on. My golden rule is: whenever you ask a question, the following slides should effectively provide your answer.

For this, the first question, you're preparing people to hear about your next slide – your agenda. Establish the link verbally from one to the other, as you pull up the agenda slide. If you can't establish the link naturally then you're probably asking the wrong question.

On the agenda slide, refer back to the answers already given. You might say something like "A few people mentioned that demonstrating value was difficult, and we'll be examining why towards the middle of today's session. First, though I want to establish why it's so important. As Amy pointed out"

As with any presentation, the aim of this is clarity. The audience now knows what you're aiming to achieve and they are ready to listen and engage because they have already started thinking about the topic, and chatting with each other about it.

The agenda slide is the final piece in engaging your audience's interest. It will list the 3-5 key headings that you decided on when assembling your content and you will repeat the slide at each point section

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break, to remind people of where you are in your talk.

MAINTAINING INTEREST

Once the audience understands why you and they are there, ensure they maintain their interest. Here are two ways of doing this:

- Ask questions – prepared and *ad hoc*
- Make your presentation visually interesting – with diagrams, pictures and movement

USING OPEN QUESTIONS

Active involvement is always more interesting than passive, so use questions liberally, throughout the presentation.

As noted before, whenever you ask a question, *acknowledge the answers*. If you were in conversation at a party and someone kept ignoring what you were saying, you'd quickly lose interest in them. The online audience is no different. You can acknowledge the answers in different ways. One of the best is to use it to run into the next slide, e.g. "So while Bob and Ahmet thought that was unimportant, Jill and Perry thought it was vital. That's a pretty common debate running through our industry. Let's examine it now."

A NOTE ON SURVEYS/POLLS

Surveys are in some ways great for involving the audience – for example, everyone can contribute without exposing their opinions, or having to type. On the other hand, because it typically takes a minute or two to gather all the responses, they can easily slow down a presentation. You risk losing your audience as it waits for the results to be shown and discussed. After all, it only takes a moment to click a response and typically at least a minute to wait for the results. During that minute, the inbox will be beckoning your audience increasingly loudly. Use surveys sparingly, and only when you really need a numerical answer.

VISUAL INTEREST

Slide builds: Keep it simple. It's easy to go overboard with slide builds – but because your audience is likely to be on a mixture of internet connections, you cannot guarantee how well the builds will render. Try keeping slides without builds, using

separate slides to construct an effect.

Use graphics: You can make a presentation more interesting by using diagrams, screenshots, photos, and Flash animations if you have them. In fact, you should. No presentation should consist purely of words. At the same time, however, no presentation should consist entirely of pictures. More than once I've seen an audience engagement fade as a presenter talked for several minutes over a slide consisting of a single picture. This works great face-to-face, where the attention is on you as you talk. Online, they can't see you and unless you're an absolute genius with the spoken word, either add some text to the pictures (just a handful of words will do) or keep single-image slides very brief.

Use movement: Movement keeps attention. In particular, if you have some software to show, seeing it live is always more interesting than seeing a screen shot – indeed this is true for pretty much anything on the internet. Recently on an LSG webinar, Rob Hubbard asked an audience of over 100 to complete a Survey Monkey survey, and then, on the fly, constructed a Wordle word cloud of the free text answers. This was a great example of engaging content (the survey) and movement (the business of constructing the word cloud, which we all watched) and a great visual pay-off in the world cloud.

Use the mark-up tools: When presenting the slides, use the available mark-up tools to highlight key words, images and parts of diagrams as you speak. If you don't, they are in effect watching the radio. Practicing how to do this is an essential part of rehearsing your presentation.

In the third and final article in this series we'll look at what you say – how to use your voice and your choice of words. I'll also consider preparation: what do you need to do to perform at your best, and how can you prepare to ensure you avoid the worst.

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HOW TO SOUND YOUR BEST

The final part of Donald H. Taylor's three part series on running engaging webinars.

This is the last in a series of articles drawing on eight years of hosting and delivering webinars for the Learning and Skills Group. In it, I consider how to use your voice and choose your words to best advantage. I'll also look at how to prepare yourself for a live webinar session.

STEP 3: HOW YOU SAY IT

Before we talk about your voice, there's one caveat to bear in mind: substance is more important than style. British readers will be familiar with the eccentric, sometimes distracting, delivery of TV financial journalist Robert Peston. Yet, he continues as a leading light at the BBC. Why? Because he has total command of his subject. What you say – your content – is crucial. Of course, in these articles I assume that you are an expert in your field, too. Given that, it does no harm to put good content over in a compelling way.

YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS

The best way to say the right thing in your webinar is to rehearse beforehand. A lot. It really is that simple.

The question is – what's the best way to rehearse? Do not fall into the trap of looking at a presentation and *describing* what you will say on each slide. Telling yourself "On this slide I'll cover our eastern district sales, and on this slide I'll look at how we're expanding the market in the southern area," is not rehearsal. It does not force you to choose the best words to articulate your message.

The only adequate rehearsal is to verbalise what you will actually say. That way you'll find the right words to express your point clearly, to hone your script and move it from good to great. How can you ensure that you've chosen the right words? Here are some tips.

- Don't use platitudes, cliché, or redundant phrases. In a classroom or a conversation, they pass unnoticed. Online, with no visual distraction, they are deadly dull. When thriller writer Stephen King has finished a manuscript, he cuts it by 10% before submitting it. The result is a more

compelling read. The same is true for your presentations, particularly online, where every word counts

- Don't treat the audience as a mass (e.g., by saying: "some of you may find..."). This is an intimate medium. Treat it as a phone conversation with an individual, but respected colleague (so say instead "If you've ever found..."). US President Franklin D. Roosevelt was a master of this in his radio fireside chats, even though he was talking to millions
- Don't just read out bullet points unless you're going to add something to them
- Do get to the point. Fast. Practise this by writing a script first and cutting out redundant words
- Do keep it short
- Do keep any anecdotes to the point. Stories are among the most powerful presentational tools – when used correctly. For maximum impact, practise them, strip them down, and if necessary script them. Aim to use no more than 150 words per anecdote
- Don't do a sales pitch for yourself, your product or your company. The audience will silently file out

How can you check for all this in rehearsal? Try articulating what you will actually say in your presentation several times. As you do this, you'll find that your talk starts to come almost automatically. At this point you can begin to develop the vital skill of every good presenter – to talk while simultaneously listening to yourself critically.

After improving your talk this way, do the difficult thing. Ask a friend to listen, too. That can be tough, especially if they are honest, but if you want to choose the best words for your presentation, nothing else will do (*for more about rehearsals, see 'Preparation' below*).

You should now know *what* you are going to say. The question is: how will you say it?

YOUR VOICE

You don't have to be Richard Burton or James Earl Jones to do this job, but there are a few simple things you can do to make your voice more interesting. First, pay attention next time you listen to the radio news and hear how newscasters make their voices more interesting by stressing every third or fourth word. This is not natural, but it enlivens the voice. So, too, does varying other aspects of your voice: the pitch, the pace, the range of tone.

Listen to a confessional chat show host like Tricia or Oprah and compare their variation of tone and pace with their guests'. Then ask



yourself: which would you prefer to sound like?

Some other tips:

- Smile as you talk (yes, the old cliché 'The radio hears a smile' really is true)
- Warm up before speaking. It might sound silly, but three minutes with some tongue twisters will warm up your mouth and tongue, and make your voice clearer and more interesting. Here are some that I use:
 - "Peggy Babcock's mixed biscuits"*
 - "She's not the Kerry who you used to know"*
 - "Red lorry, yellow lorry, red leather, yellow leather"*
 - "Who wears Wainwright's white rainwear?"*
- Stand up as you speak. Many top sales people stand to talk on the phone because they recognise that it makes their voice more alive, by freeing up their lungs and allowing their voice to resonant fully

KEYWORD SCRIPTS

One great advantage of speaking online is that you can use a script and nobody knows. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that you should read every word laboriously from a script.

Instead, I suggest a 'keyword script'.

You can build a 'keyword script' as follows. First, print a hand-out of your script with enough space for notes (allow three slides per page). Then, articulate what you expect to say word for word. As you speak, write keywords next to each slide. These should be

prompts that will remind you of what you want to say on each slide.

Pay particular attention to creating smooth, meaningful transitions between slides and to key concepts. Do not under any circumstances simply read the text on the slides. If you find it difficult to move easily from one slide to the next there's something wrong with the structure and you may need to make a change. For example, split one slide into two, insert a new concept or delete some slide text. You will be left with a script consisting of slides on one side of the page and key words and phrases on the other.

Now go back to the beginning and do it all over again. Repeat the process until the words flow naturally, with the keywords acting as prompts.

Building up your script this way means you do not have to write a full script from scratch only to re-write it several times. On the other hand, it still requires rehearsal time. If you want to shine online, there is no substitute for that.

There are two points at which it is a good idea to have a fully written-out script: when opening, and when closing. In your opening two minutes, you will establish your authority with the audience. Those minutes are vital. It is very easy to ramble through a long introduction about yourself while the audience just wants you to get to your subject matter. If you write down what you intend to say, you have a better chance of making an impact and preparing your audience for the main part of your presentation.

When closing, you may be so relieved at having reached the end that you fail to finish with a bang. Remember the 'primacy and recency' rule – the first and last things you say will be remembered. So, I suggest writing out a script for your closing two minutes, including everything you need to say and ensuring you include whatever Call to Action you want the audience to take.

STEP 4: PREPARATION

When facilitating online, I always de-brief the presenter immediately afterwards, and am struck by how frequently they describe themselves as 'exhausted'. This is a common reaction to doing a webinar for the first time. My impression is that it comes from having to deal with several new things simultaneously, and – importantly – having to do *without* the presenter's normal gauge of success: visual feedback from the audience.

How many hours have you spent presenting to live audiences face-to-face? However many or few, from your schooldays onwards, it is almost certainly many more hours than you've spent presenting online. During those hours you have built up a repertoire of methods for everything from dealing with nerves to understanding your audience and pacing delivery.

You do not have to learn all these again from scratch when presenting online, but some of them will need to be adapted, and it is essential to build up your familiarity with the new medium. Whatever webinar platform you choose, practice using it until the basics become completely familiar, and you can concentrate during your presentation on giving a great delivery.

Whatever you do, do not be fooled into thinking that because you are at your desk, with a script in your hand, that it is enough simply to read what you have written. That you do not need to *present*. You do. For presenting face-to-face, rehearsal is important. For online presentation, it is essential. So much else of what you are doing will be unfamiliar that your words at least must come easily to you.

One key benefit of rehearsing is that while doing it you will build up your keyword script (see above). A further benefit is that it will give you more time to say what you actually want to say, because you won't be hesitating or saying "um..." and "er..." those little filler words that naturally take up as much as 10-20% of normal conversation.

Because you won't be hesitating, you'll sound more authoritative, and your audience will be keener to listen and participate. And finally, you'll find you have more to say, because additional points will occur to you during rehearsals that you'll

If you write down what you intend to say, you have a better chance of making an impact and preparing your audience for the main part of your presentation.

want to add (and you'll have time to say them because you won't be 'umming' and 'erring').

Once you've built up your script, you can carry out an on-line rehearsal of your material. Ensure that you have a private area online with the actual platform that you will be using. Go through the entire presentation until you feel comfortable with the interface. If you are new to the medium, do at least one rehearsal with someone else present online to judge your performance.

There are three types of rehearsal you should consider:

- 1) **Script-building rehearsal** – where you pace up and down repeating your words until you are happy with your keyword script and the flow of content, as described above.
- 2) **Technical rehearsal** – where you test the beginning, the end and the sound on the same equipment you will be using when you go live.
- 3) **Dress rehearsal** – a complete run through of your talk. Recommended for all events until you are fully confident with the medium.

BACK-UPS

If you do enough online presentations, something will eventually go wrong. Here's a check list of some of the back-ups that will rescue you when that happens:

- Have a back-up machine logged into the event with speaker privileges – if the one you're using fails, you can transfer to it with minimal fuss
- Have more than one point of internet access
- If you are working with other speakers, make sure you have a way to contact them without using a computer (e.g. their mobile phone number)
- Ideally use the telephone for sound rather than VOIP (voice over IP). That way, if your computer fails, you can still talk to your audience
- Always have a 'host' present with presenter rights, and with access to the presentation. And always have your presentation printed out with the final version of your keyword script. If your computer fails completely, you can ask the host to move to the next slide, while you present over the phone

- Get online 30 minutes before your webinar starts and check everything. If you have already carried out a technical rehearsal, this gives you time to fix any last minute glitches. You'll seldom need all 30 minutes, but when you do, they are invaluable

VITAL, EXCITING AND FUN

Being able to stand in front of an audience and talk has been a vital skill for as long as human beings have had language. Whether it is to persuade, to make a case, to tell a story or to organise others, we have always needed to do it. Nothing has changed except the medium.

The old imperatives – of being engaging, of knowing your audience, of being prepared – still hold true. The age of the internet has simply put an unfamiliar gloss on them.

Unfamiliar they may be, but mastering them is essential for anyone wanting to communicate today. It is also, it has to be said, tremendous fun. Since starting the Learning and Skills Group webinar series in 2007, I have looked forward every other Thursday to engaging with our audience, to chatting with them and to learning together.

And every time I finish a webinar, I'm left with that familiar buzz and an urge to do it all over again. I hope that after reading these articles you, too, will enjoy presenting through webinars, and that you will find the same energy and excitement in using this vital modern medium of communication.

Happy presenting!



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