Best Practices For Virtual Presentations: 15 Expert Tips That Work For Everyone

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In today's COVID-19 world, virtual meetings and presentations have become the norm. While many presentation skills and best practices apply to both in-person and virtual presentations, expert virtual presenters understand the importance of adjusting their approach to match the medium. With in-person presentations, you more or less have a captive audience — you still need be engaging, but your audience is kind of stuck with you for the duration. But with virtual presentations, your audience has a greater opportunity to stray. You now have to compete for their eyes, ears, hearts, and minds against diminished attention spans, increased home and work life distractions, and conflicting priorities.

Here are 15 expert tips to set you up for success in your next virtual presentation:

1. **Get the Lighting Right:** As a presenter, it is essential that people can see you well. Make sure you have good front light—meaning the light shines brightly on your face. If your back is to a window, close the shades. While natural light is often the best choice, if your home office doesn't have natural light and you do a lot of virtual presentations, consider purchasing supplemental lighting to enhance your image.

2. **Choose the Right Background:** Try to use a background that enhances your professional image and is aligned with your message. Avoid a cluttered background or anything that can be distracting. Learn whether your presentation platform enables you to use virtual backgrounds (like Zoom) or whether you can blur your background (like Microsoft Teams). Your background can either add to your professional presence or detract from it.

3. **Know the Technology:** Nothing kills a presentation faster than a presenter who fumbles with the technology. This is a performance, so make sure you know how to make it work. A dry run is essential so that you're comfortable with the platform features. It's best to have a co-host (or producer or moderator) assist you with the technology so that you can focus on your presentation. Make sure you practice with the same technical set up (computer and internet connection) that you will use when you deliver the presentation.

4. **Play to the Camera:** When you are the one speaking, **look directly into your computer's camera**, not on the screen or at the other participants. This takes some practice, but it makes the viewer feel as if you are looking right at them. Some presenters turn off their self-view so that they aren't distracted by their own image. **Put the camera at eye level**. Try not to have your camera too far above or below you. If it's too low, then you run the risk of creating a double chin. A camera too high makes it difficult to maintain eye contact, as you may find your gaze dropping as you speak. If you are part of a panel or a team of presenters, make sure you are aware of when your camera is

on. If you are not speaking but your camera is on, make sure you look like you are paying attention! Powerful presenters understand the importance of making eye contact with their audience, so this means you have to simulate the same effect virtually.

5. **Get Close (But Not Too Close).** You want the camera to frame your face, neck, and shoulders. People are drawn to faces, so you don't want to lose that connection by being too far away, but you also don't want your face to take over the whole screen like a dismembered head because, well, that looks weird. Practice your positioning and distance.

6. **Stand Up:** If possible, use a standing desk or position your laptop so you can stand at eye level with your computer. Standing up provides a higher energy level and forces us to put our body in a more presentation-like mode. If you have to sit, lean forward as you would if you were presenting at a real meeting or as if you were a TV news anchor. Avoid slouching away from the camera, as that sends a signal that you are disconnected from the audience.

7. **Be Animated:** Just like in a live presentation, you want to present with a little energy and animation. Too slow or too monotone in your voice makes it easy for folks to disengage and tune out. Keeping people engaged virtually requires you to actually be engaging.

8. **Pace Yourself:** Without real-time visual audience feedback cues, getting the pacing right can be difficult. Even though you want to infuse some animation and energy into your presentation don't pump up the speed too much. If you tend to be a fast talker in real life, practice slowing down just a bit. If you're a slow talker, you may want to speed up just a bit.

9. **Do A Sound Check:** If your sound is garbled, people will tune out. While people may forgive less than perfect video, if they can't clearly hear you, they will leave. Practice with someone on the other end of the presentation platform. Make sure your sound emits clearly. Sometimes headphones or external microphones work better than the computer audio, sometimes not. Every platform is different, so make sure your sound quality is excellent every time. And again, you should practice with the same technical configurations and location that you will use for your presentation.

10. **Plug into Your Modem:** If possible, plug your computer directly into your modem using an Ethernet cable. This will give you the strongest signal and most stable internet connection. The last thing you want to happen during your presentation is to have a weak or unstable internet signal.

11. **Incorporate Redundant Systems.** If using slides, make sure someone else (another webinar co-host or producer) also has a copy of the slides just in case your internet goes wonky and you have to present by calling in. If you are using slides, make them visually appealing. Use high-quality graphics and limit the amount of text on each slide. It's your job as presenter to deliver the content. The slides are meant to enhance your spoken words, not replace them.

12. **Engage Your Participants.** Just as if you were doing an in-person presentation, craft your presentation to engage the audience. Incorporate chats, polls, raised hand features, etc. Try not to speak for more than ten minutes without some sort of audience engagement. Use the participant list to interact with your participants by name. Have people chat or raise a hand if they want to

speak. Keep track of the order of people and then call on them to invite them to turn on their mics or cameras.

13. **Let Someone Else Check the Chats.** Don't get sidetracked by the chats during your presentation. You'll be shocked at how distracting it is to your train of thought if you attempt to read the chats while speaking. Instead, have your co-host or producer monitor the chats. If you ask people to chat you answers or comments to a question you've posed, then pause your talking and engage directly with the chats by acknowledging them, reading them out loud, and commenting on them.

14. **Evaluate and Enhance:** If possible, record the session and take the time to play back and look for areas that worked well and areas that you might want to improve upon. Great presenters, whether virtual or in person, understand the value of continually honing their craft. Be sure to acknowledge your strengths as well as your areas of improvement.

15. **Be Yourself and Have Fun:** Again, just like in face-to-face presentations, audiences connect to authenticity, so be yourself! Let your personality show through. Have fun. If you look like you're enjoying the presentation so will others. Research shows that happy people retain information better than bored or disinterested people, so model the energy that you want to create. The audience takes its cue from you.

Remember, whether you are presenting in-person or virtually, all presentations are performances. And all performances are in service to your audience. Their time is valuable, so honor that time by delivering the best presentation you can. No matter what kind of presentation you are giving, you must find ways to create authentic audience connection, engagement, and value.