15 BEST PRACTICES FOR Rockin’ Webinars
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By Cory Miller
StartupSofa.com
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Intro: 6 Benefits for Using Webinars in Your Business

I’ve been doing webinars since 2008 and have had a blast with them as I’ve used them to build my business -- support my customers and marketing to new ones -- and honing my communications skills along the way.

Here are some of the highlight benefits of doing webinars for your business or organization:

• **Offer educational marketing** -- teaching is the new marketing. Sharing your experience and expertise with your followers, audience, community reaps benefits as they look to you as the trusted resources.

• **Be human and give a personal touch** -- for a long time, we ran an online product business and therefore did not do phone support. Having regular webinars allowed our community and customers to hear us talk about what we do best. It made us human and not just a website to them.

• **Reach a worldwide audience** -- Webinars are cheaper than traveling and JUST as effective. As you know travel is extremely expensive and doing webinars allows us to reach global audience. Letting our customers stay in the comfort of their own homes or offices while you present your subject to them or show them a walkthrough of your products via screen sharing.

• **Fill a training void** -- if there's a lack of good, quality and affordable training in your niche, you can offer outstanding opportunities for your prospects and customers to learn from YOU -- the expert.

• **Work smarter, not harder** -- you're bound to be getting common questions that you could produce as a webinar, then record and give to clients. Now you've multiplied your time and impact.

• **Crystallize your presentation skills** -- doing webinars makes you a better presenter in-person and online. It forces you to think about your subject, organize your thoughts and then communicate it effectively to your audience.

So with all these great benefits in mind, let’s get into some of the best practices for creating rockin’ webinars we’ve found in our time doing them!

--Cory Miller
1. Stop Procrastinating Already!

The hardest thing about webinars is actually scheduling and doing them.

So go schedule your first webinar TODAY!

What I mean to say is ... your first webinar will be your hardest. You’ll procrastinate about it. You’ll be gun shy.

So here’s my first best practice for webinars: Schedule your first one today.

Yes, today, don’t wait. Do it now. Go signup for your webinar software of choice and DO IT.

2. Remember time zones

Remember that one of the huge benefits of doing webinars is that your prospects and customers can join in anywhere in the world (as long as they have a computer and Internet connection).

What that means though is ... time zone mania.

I’ve found that most people are not used to converting time zones. (And by the way, some may not even know what time zone they are in -- which was all of us at one point!)

I highly suggest you schedule ALL of your webinars in YOUR time zone (unless of course the majority of your customers are grouped in one area and you, for some odd reason, are based in another one and not many are in your local time zone).

On the registration pages, GoToWebinar now has a “Show in my Time Zone” link that will convert it for your guests, but here are a couple of ways to help your audience find out when your webinar starts:

Use Google’s Local Time feature

To use this, simply Google “time [your location]”

i.e. “time oklahoma city”

In the top search result, Google shows the local time in Oklahoma City.

I often will put a link in my registration post that says “Check Local Time Here” and link to that search result.
Use the World Clock’s cool features

World Clock’s Home page
http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/

Time Zone Converter
http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/ converter.html

Meeting Planner
http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html

3. Do a test run

Practice makes perfect.

Schedule a webinar BEFORE your first webinar and test it out. Make sure you’re familiar. Have someone login with you who is not in your home or office.

This is for the crickets only ... and for the butterflies in your stomach.

4. Test audio and video an hour out

For your first webinar, be sure to start your webinar broadcast well before the actual broadcast begins. I usually suggest a minimum of 30 minutes out but to be safe, try an hour.

(It’s OK to let the broadcast start beforehand but please note, some people will show up early.)

To test, I ask someone to logon remotely also and tell me (whether through the Chat feature or by phone or Instant Messenger like Google Talk) if they can hear me OK and see my screen.

This gives you time to scramble if something goes wrong.

I ALWAYS start the broadcast 15 minutes before it begins and start welcoming people to the broadcast.
5. Have a backup plan

Prepare for the worst. Always, always have a backup plan. Something invariably does happen.

Have a backup plan for everything, including:

- Backup your presentations to another computer and stored somewhere else.
- Plug your laptop to a GOOD power source.
- Be ready if the power goes out (Mother Nature has tested us before)!
- Have a backup recording plan (I can’t tell you how many times a recording has failed for some reason).
- Have a landline ready to call if your Internet audio is bad.

6. Have good Internet or die

Seriously. Webinars are done over the Web and take up a lot of bandwidth. So if you don’t have a good (fast) Internet connection, upgrade, or find somewhere else to host your webinar from, ESPECIALLY if you’re using the computer audio option.

7. Do a countdown to launch

Whenever you start your webinar broadcast, people will start showing up. Like any computer user, some will freak out and wonder if it’s working and could sign off before you ever get started.

I highly suggest you use a verbal countdown.

Every couple of minutes (and as you see people signing on), unmute your mic and give them a countdown, saying something like:

“Hey everybody, welcome to [webinar title], my name is [your name], [title of whatever company]. We will start the official webinar at [time] in [whatever time zone you’re in]. The current time is [local time]. So we’ll start in [XX minutes]. Thank you!”

8. Always, always start on time

If your registration time says 11 a.m., then start at 11 a.m. SHARP. Don’t doddle. Don’t laugh and cutup.

You want your participants to realize that their time is valuable to you. Start on time!
9. Offer a group chat

Although GoToWebinar and other services offer chat and question functions, I think they are terrible.

Offering group chat is great for a number of reasons including:

- **Participants help other participants** -- Often, you are presenting and can’t immediately answer a question, or you might not want to interrupt the flow of your presentation.

- **It’s social proof** -- you want your participants to see other people chatting and participating in the webinar ... it’s like restaurants ... do you want to go to the one with a TON of people, or the one with no people?

- **You can review the chat log later** -- I’ve found that a lot of ideas for refining my presentation come from these group chats. Having them for review later means I improve my webinar product and get ideas from those who participate.

We use and recommend CBox for group chats at http://cbox.ws/

Their plans are affordable (read VERY cheap) and offer good private group chats.

10. Have a webinar assistant

Sometimes simply hosting a webinar can be overwhelming.

After all, to host webinars, you use software. And these pieces of software can sometimes be like flying a helicopter (tons of levers and switches and blinking lights).

You want to be sure the audio is good, video is showing and that you know how to run the webinar software ... oh, and then, you need to actually do a good job with your presentation!

So I suggest you recruit or hire a webinar assistant to help you run the show and make sure everything is going to plan.

11. Deliver the gold, then dump more of it on them

Often, people are scared to give away their prime and valuable content in presentations. I always tell them that’s the opposite view of presenting good webinars. You WANT to give away the GOLD in your webinars.

- It sets you as an expert.

- It tells the audience they have invested their time wisely.

- It sells whatever you are doing.
So deliver the gold ... then deliver it again and again.
Under promise, and over deliver. It's a good formula for effective webinars.

12. Record and post for those who can’t make it

Without fail, every time I have ever announced a webinar someone has emailed and asked if there is going to be a recording.

Not everyone can make the exact day and time you’ve scheduled your webinar, so make sure you are going to record it and make it available for them later.

We have a post and video tutorial on how to record webinars at StartupSofa here:
http://startupsofa.com/how-to-record-a-webinar/

13. Use a quality microphone

If you’re using the built-in computer audio options, then make sure you have a quality microphone for your webinar.

The last thing you want is for people to show up and have a hard time hearing you.

We suggest the Blue Microphones lineup of quality microphones:
• Blue Snowflake -- a great portable mic for laptops
• Blue Yeti -- a big, stable microphone (I use this one!)

14. Stick around for questions

Although you want to start and end on time with your scheduled and posted webinar times, if people are hanging around and still asking questions, I ALWAYS find time to answer them.

Think about it .... your customers and prospects are taking precious time out of their day to listen and watch through your entire presentation and then sticking around to ask more questions!

That’s a captive audience. Make the most of that time and the questions asked to improve what you’re doing and sell your products and services.

15. Expect less than half to actually show up

Since we’ve been doing webinars, we’ve found that typically less than half of people who registered for the webinar actually show up to watch and participant in them.
But don’t be discouraged if no one shows up at all or 5% or whatever show up.

Do the webinar anyway and record and post it on your blog or website. You’ve already spent time preparing for it, so why waste that time.

**BONUS: Be passionate**

OK, this really should be THE No. 1 Best Practice for all webinars but I decided to break it out as a bonus because frankly it deserves its own section.

I’ve found that enthusiasm is contagious. If you’re pumped about what you’re talking about, people will pick up on it and get excited too.

I’ve seen otherwise terrible presentations go extremely well, simply because the presenter was passionate and excited about their subject.

Now ... I don’t mean that you should be disingenuous about it.

**ALWAYS, ALWAYS** be authentic and genuine in your passion.

And if you’re authentically passionate, it doesn’t matter if your screen goes blank, or your slides freeze and fail miserably, or a train is passing by your office window ... people will usually like what you offer (or give you a pass on the breakdowns).

Charles Wesley had a great quote about passion that I live by (in life and on webinars), he said (paraphrased a bit):

“Light yourself on fire and people will come watch you burn.”

**Be passionate about what you’re doing and presenting ... and people will come (and return) to watch the show!**
Appendix A: What is s Webinar, Anyway?

The definition of a webinar is fairly simple and straightforward.
A webinar is simply an online seminar or presentation.

The words web (how a webinar is delivered) and seminar (a presentation) were combined to produce the word webinar.

A webinar is presented similar to how you would deliver a topic in-person through a workshop or seminar only it is broadcast online through a computer and the Internet using an online service like GoToWebinar.

Webinar can be used in many different ways (like for online team meetings and one-on-one sales pitches) but primarily it is used to share your computer screen with your participants.

Participants sign up for your webinar just like they would at an in-person workshop, allowing you to track important information about your registrants.

Participants use their computer speakers or call in to a special phone to hear your presentation and log on to your webinar with special free software to see your screen or presentation.
Appendix B: What Happens If No One Shows Up?

By Lindsey Miller

So you have planned your webinar, created your presentation, emailed your list and rehearsed your presentation. You are 100% ready to share with the world your knowledge and expertise. What happens? Your worst nightmare.

_No one shows up. What do you do?_

Here are 3 things to do:

• **Don't get discouraged** -- I know it is disheartening when no one attends your webinar. It's happened to me!

• **DO THE PRESENTATION ANYWAY** -- Act like you are presenting to the group of people that you thought would be there. You can use your recording later. No one but you knows how many people heard it live.

• **Use the recording to get people to attend your next webinar** -- Post it on your blog, tweet it out and then email it to your list. It will be a perfect way to showcase your expertise and show everyone why they should be in your next webinar.

If you follow these steps your future webinars will likely have more attendees. Remember there is no such thing as an overnight success.
Appendix C: 5 Tips to Remember During Your Webinar Presentation

By Lindsey Miller

We are all guilty of focusing on the pre-presentation process. Getting our topic, making our slides and then worrying about marketing and getting our webinar ready. BUT there are a few things to keep in mind when doing your presentation.

I have been sitting in many webinars lately, and it seems that no matter how prepared the presenters are they are forgetting some key components, so here are some quick tips:

• **Speak loud.** Don’t make your listeners adjust their volume. No attendee should have to stop the presentation to ask you to speak louder. So ensure that your audio is clear and loud and you’re speaking with voice.

• **Go slowly.** Do not run quickly through your slides. Some people are listening to you, others are reading, some are doing both. Make sure your attendees have ample time to see and read your slides. This also means if you’re showing something on your screen (like software overview) that you need to slow down how your mouse moves around the screen. Think slow motion mouse movements!

• **Start on time.** One thing your attendees will not forgive you for is being late. Even if it is 3 minutes. I sat through a webinar this week by a major company and they were 5 minutes late. **Big mistake.** My time like your audience’s time is money.

• **Make time for Q&A.** Make sure you leave ample time for questions and answers. If you have so much information then you need to make your webinar a two or three part series. Make sure your attendees have time to get their questions answered. After all, you have a captive audience.

• **Show gratitude.** Make sure you thank your attendees for taking time out of their day to listen to your presentation. There is nothing worse than a presenter for a webinar I am in to make me feel like I should be grateful they are taking time out of their day for me. It is the other way around.

Do not get too caught up in your preparation to forget these simple tips for your webinar. They may be small, but they are essential in hosting a successful webinar.
Appendix D: Our Recommended Resources for Running Webinars

Here are the recommended resources for producing great webinars ... some of these are broader than simply webinars but must-haves for making the best use of webinars today:

Books

Content Rules -- this is THE definitive guide to content marketing. See the chapter on Webinars specifically but the whole book is worth 100 times its weight in gold.

Software

GoToWebinar

Video hosting

Vimeo, Viddler, Wistia -- video hosting isn't cheap, but check out these quality sources

Screen recording software

Camtasia (PC or Mac) and Screenflow (Mac)

Microphones

Blue Snowflake (very portable & good for screencasting) and Blue Yeti (big and stable)

Website hosting

HostGator -- best in the business, hands down!

Email newsletter services

Aweber, MailChimp and EmailBuddy (WordPress plugin)

Essential Ingredients to Running a Website with WordPress:

iThemes Builder -- build great WordPress websites easily

Backup Buddy -- make sure your site has a good backup AND restore plan in place

Gravity Forms -- easily add forms to your site, from simple contact forms to advanced registration forms
Appendix E: Recording Your Webinar

by Elise C. Alley

At iThemes, I am often charged with recording webinars lead by other presenters. We have seen this as a challenge for a number of people and wanted to give some tips on how we have refined our process for maximum performance.

There are a number of different programs you can use to record your webinars. I recommend Camtasia and Screenflow. I can use both programs on my Mac; Camtasia also works on PC. Recording in these programs is very similar and very simple. You can edit your footage in both as well.

Obviously, audio is going to be an important aspect of your recording. In both Camtasia and Screenflow, you can select how the audio is recorded. You can use the Built-in Input or you can use a program like Soundflower (Mac only). By selecting Built-in Input or Soundflower, you’ll only be recording the sound coming from your computer. This means if there is a noisy game of foosball happening down the hall, it won’t be heard on the recording. If you are the presenter, however, you’ll select Built-in Microphone or the name of the external microphone you are using (such as the Yeti Microphone). You’ll need to select the same audio in GoToWebinar as you select in your recording software, whether it’s Built-in Output (input in the recording program, output in GoToWebinar), Soundflower or the external microphone you are using.

When it comes to editing, I prefer to use Screenflow or iMovie (Mac only). If I’ve used Camtasia to record, I typically export it as an .mp4, then import it into iMovie to edit. Both Screenflow and Camtasia are more than sufficient for recording and editing. I prefer to edit in Screenflow or iMovie because the user interfaces are easier for me personally to work in. Also, the user interfaces are very similar, so switching between Screenflow and iMovie for editing is most comfortable for me. This is just a matter of personal preference, however, and you should work in which ever program you feel the most comfortable.

All of these programs allow you to export directly to different video hosting platforms, such as YouTube and Vimeo (Screenflow and iMovie only). Being able to do this isn’t a must in your recording software, but it does eliminate a step for you in the posting process. By default, Camtasia exports as a .mp4 while Screenflow and iMovie export as .mov files. Both file types are accepted by YouTube and Vimeo.
The actual recording process is simple and should include the following steps:

- **Create a test recording.** When recording a webinar, I highly recommend that you create test recordings before the start of the webinar, multiple tests. Typically my process for recording starts at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the webinar. I create a test recording while either playing music or a video on YouTube just to make sure that I’m picking up both the audio and the visual.

- **Create a second test recording.** Once the presenter starts their verbal countdown for the users (hopefully about 15 minutes prior to the start), I record at least one of those to ensure, again, that I’m picking up both the audio and visual, this time from GoToWebinar.

- **Begin your recording early.** I begin my actual recording at least 5 minutes prior to the start of the webinar. This way, if I’m presenting, I don’t have to worry about starting on time and starting the recording all at once. If I’m not the presenter, I don’t want to miss anything if they begin the presentation before I’ve started the recording.

There are a couple of other things you should keep in mind, too.

- **Don’t be afraid to edit.** Obviously if you start the recording 5 minutes before the actual webinar, you are going to want to edit this off. No one is going to sit through 5 minutes of dead air in hopes that the presentation is worth the wait. But it also doesn’t hurt to cut out any dead air you may have within the presentation.

- **Make sure you have adequate storage space available on your computer!** This is something I’ve learned (the hard way) doing webinars. Recordings can be exceptionally large files. The last thing you want is for your recording to stop 20 minutes into the webinar because you don’t have the space for the recording. You then have to scramble to delete old files and restart your recording. This also adds a lot to your editing process. This is bad enough as the webinar assistant. You can just forget about it as the presenter - the show must go on!

    Recording your webinars is a simple but often daunting process at first. But one that will pay off greatly for you and your users.
About The Author

Cory J. Miller has had a lifelong passion for writing and entrepreneurship. Before becoming a full-time entrepreneur, he spent more than a decade in the newspaper, magazine and communications industries, working as a newspaper reporter and editor, freelance writer as well as a director of communications for several organizations.

Having maintained his own website since 1998, in 2006 he began writing a professional blog on nights and weekends in his career niche at the time. Through the process he started to learn more web design and began a part-time freelance business.

In January 2008, he took that momentum, experience and exposure in blogging and web design and started iThemes to offer professional website templates for WordPress, a free online software to manage your own website or blog. Starting in his home office, as the business grew, he started recruiting and hiring a team of designers and developers to build easy-to-use templates, selling to customers all over the world.

Through his up and down journey of entrepreneurship, he now leads a team of over 20 professionals around the globe, with headquarters in Oklahoma City, more than 4 major brands and thousands of customers. In March 2011, he co-authored WordPress All-in-One for Dummies (Wiley).

On the side, he helps other aspiring entrepreneurs on their own journey of entrepreneurship, primarily through StartupSofa, where he regularly blogs and offers online training, and on helping others achieve career happiness and work-life alignment at PurposefulPaychecks.

In addition to being a passionate entrepreneur, he is “hubs” to Lindsey Anne Miller and when not riding their Honda and Yamaha scooters all over Oklahoma City, they are humbly serving at the requests of their two spoiled dogs, Franchesca and Scooter.

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