Make your virtual events effective, engaging, and interactive!

1. Use the right software: Find a good webinar/ video-conferencing software that meets your needs. Questions you need to ask while choosing such a software:

- How many hosts and participants does the software allow at one time and for how long?
- Does the software have a free account and/ or a trial version?
- Are there any geo-restrictions with the software that will likely prevent participants/ hosts from certain parts of the world from accessing webinars hosted in that platform?
- Does the software allow access from multiple platforms (PC, phone, download, etc.) and integration with social media platforms, such as live-streaming on YouTube or Facebook Live?
- What level of interactivity and collaboration does the software offer? For example, does it allow for interaction and collaboration among hosts and participants through secure file-sharing, break-out sessions, live polls, chat function, live gathering of feedback, whiteboard, or other collaborative tools?

2. Make your session interactive: Consider some of the following ways to make your session more interactive:

- Ask your participants to introduce themselves through audio/ video or the chat function in the beginning of the session. This can be done if it is a small group of participants.
- Ask questions every 3-4 slides – don't answer your own question even if there are a few seconds of an awkward pause; let the participants answer.
- Use live polls for real-time feedback gathering from your participants.
- Use breakout sessions and give specific tasks to breakout groups with clear outputs.
- Use whiteboards and encourage participants to use them as well for breakout sessions and other group discussion tasks. Collaboration tools such as whiteboards are integrated with some webinar software.
- Have more than one presenter, invite experts, and guest presenters, if the session design allows it, to break the monotony and engage audience interest.
- Gamify your session if the training material allows for it. Use quizzes, brainstorming games, and simulations.

3. Pre-event audience engagement: It is important to not only understand your audience, but to also let them excited about your event. It may be a good idea to conduct a short pre-event poll/ survey to, firstly, gauge the level of subject matter expertise among your audience for the topic you are going to discuss in your presentation so that you can tailor the content of your slides accordingly. Secondly, a survey will help you get a sense of how adept your audience is at using technological tools, such as webinar software; this will help you tailor the various interactive elements of your training design to their skill-level.

4. Have a moderator on board: A webinar moderator is somewhat like a co-presenter who helps answer questions on chat while the presenter is presenting, administer live polls, gather real-time feedback, and moderate breakout sessions, as and when needed. This could be a colleague who has worked closely with you in developing event materials, an intern who is tech savvy, or a team assistant who helped organize the meeting.
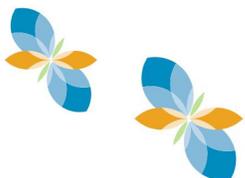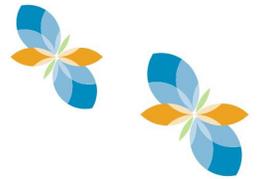
5. Give your audience time to absorb information: Pause from time to time to give your audience time to absorb and digest new information and take notes. Put up an online clock/ timer on screen, if needed.

6. Prepare and rehearse: Have a rough script or outline of your event. Do a few dry runs to make sure that you pace yourself and time various components well.

7. Continuously engage with participants: This includes engaging with them through social media while the event is going on, for example, through live-streaming on YouTube or Facebook Live, and engaging with them after the event is over, for example, by making available the recorded video on social media, sharing it with registered participants through email, seeking their feedback through post-event surveys, and encouraging them to follow you on social media, or sign up for your newsletter or news alerts.

Additional resources on webinars:
1. https://blog.marketo.com/2011/05/how-to-manage-successful-webinars-a-checklist.html
2. https://www.vfairs.com/checklist-planning-guide-for-webinars/
3. https://www.searchenginejournal.com/webinar-planning-best-practices-guide/231301/#close
4. https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/2391/10-Best-Practices-for-Webinars-or-Webcasts.aspx
5. https://www.readytalk.com/products-services/webinars/best-practices/in-webinar
6. https://elearningindustry.com/14-tips-to-create-and-present-a-highly-effective-webinar