

19 Web Presentation Questions and Commonsense Answers

A White Paper co-authored by

Communispond™

and

GreatWebMeetings.com

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Introduction

Do you find you have to present virtually, but haven't had the training or practice to feel comfortable about the online environment? You're not alone.

Judging from the overwhelming response to Communispond's recent webcast ["Why Good Presenters Struggle Online- and How to Get Over It,"](#) there are many people looking to learn how to get the most from today's online presentation tools.

Not only did the webcast have a record number of registrants, but we had more great questions from the audience than ever before—so many in fact, that we couldn't take them all in the time allotted. This article answers a number of the most important ones, distilled from questions that managers, trainers and sales professionals have asked about presenting via WebEx, GoToMeeting or any of the 127 (yes really!) web presentation platforms available today. Most of them focus on whether the skills that have served us well in the face-to-face business world can be transferred to the new world of virtual presenting?

We urge you to take the time to play the recording of the webcast or participate in a future event. Meanwhile, we hope this paper, co-produced by Communispond, the leader in business communication skills training for over 40 years, and our strategic partner, GreatWebMeetings.com™ helps you make the adjustment to presenting via technology.

A word about technology

Presenting is stressful. Add online technology and it's a bit like trying to give a speech while programming your DVR. It takes something already tricky and adds a level of complexity few of us enjoy.

Add to that a shocking statistic. According to web platform providers, almost 90% of people expected to present virtually never get any training or coaching beyond a short demonstration of the platform. No wonder even good presenters dislike conducting webinars. It's like learning to drive by taking your parents to the airport; it's doable, but it's not fun and no one will be in a hurry to do it again.

In this article you'll find presentation basics that apply to any online presentation or meeting you might need to conduct—regardless of the platform.

Now for the questions...

1. If I let people chat, won't I lose control? This is a very common concern of nervous presenters. Chat is no different from the live interaction in a classroom. A little is good, and it's a way of keeping people engaged and letting some human connections develop. If it gets out of hand, handle it like you would in a meeting or class—ask people to stay on topic and behave. Usually they will. Allowing people to chat actually makes you look more confident and in control.

2. How do you prevent technical problems from ruining your presentation? Technology has gotten so much more user friendly over the years. There are three things to consider that will help prevent problems:

- Practice with the program under a variety of conditions;
- Figure out what you really want to do and how well your platform is equipped to handle

it (e.g., if you want to show video clips, make sure you have the bandwidth available);

- Choose just enough technology to accomplish your purpose; for example, maybe a simple phone conference will accomplish your goal.

3. What's the real value in polling and similar tools? Think of polling as the kind of normal interaction you'd have in a meeting or classroom. Want to check the mood of the room? Test understanding? Keep them on their toes so they don't fall asleep or start answering their email? That's what polling and other interactive tools do. Frequent, but always appropriate, use of these tools also helps participants overcome barriers, such as technophobia or resistance to participating virtually.

4. I always use more "umms" and "errs" when I speak online than when I present live. How do I fix that? "Umms" and "errs" are common online. Here are some simple tips:

- Pause frequently and just let your brain catch up to your mouth.
- Write out your transitions from one visual to the next, so that you know what you want to say.
- If you're a Communispond graduate, you're familiar with the concept of "Eye-Brain Control®." Look up from your computer screen, imagine at least three people in front of you and pretend to make eye contact with each of them as you speak. I have three spots on the wall I use for this.
- Don't talk and move the mouse at the same time. Say what you're about to do, pause, move or click the mouse and resume speaking. If you try to talk and move at the same time, your brain will default to the physical action and you'll lose track of what you're saying.

5. How do you keep your energy up during a long online presentation? Presenting online is

even more draining for the presenter than it is for the audience (which is saying something). Here are some simple tips:

- Speak one “notch” louder than you normally would. This automatically makes you work harder.
- Use a headset so that your hands are free to gesture.
- If at all possible, don’t do all the work yourself. Work with a co-presenter, take questions from the audience or check the chat for comments and questions.
- Have fun! Don’t be afraid to use appropriate humor. Quit stressing about being perfect; people will forgive imperfection, they won’t forgive having their time wasted.

6. What are some tips for rehearsing a web presentation? Rehearsing does NOT mean flipping through your PowerPoint muttering to yourself. A good rehearsal means you log on to the platform you’re going to use and test out all the features you want to incorporate (white boards, recording, videos, etc.). Also, make sure you have someone on the rehearsal who is on a computer on another network. That person can give you feedback about how the audience will receive the presentation. Testing it on your own network won’t tell you whether there will be lag time or connection issues.

7. I hear that having multiple voices during the presentation is a good idea. Is there such a thing as too many voices?

Different voices help, because we re-engage every time the speaker changes. I don’t think there’s a limit, but you have to be clear about who is speaking

at any one time. Go with two or three presenters for a “presentation webinar;” on a meeting, everyone should be able to contribute as logistics allow.

8. If you ask people to submit questions via chat, do you worry they’ll feel ignored if you don’t answer right away? If you’re going to solicit questions, people expect you to respond. The trick is to set expectations. Tell people to get questions in queue so you can get to them eventually. If you’re presenting solo, beg the audience’s indulgence by saying that since you only have two eyes and two hands, you’ll do the best you can in getting to all the questions. Also, encourage people to send off-topic questions by private chat instead of in public.

9. How often should you pause to check for understanding? There’s a limit to how much information people can take into short term memory; then they have to process it or lose it forever. Break your content into small, logical chunks of no more than 5 minutes or so and see what makes sense. For example, if you have a 3-step process, check at the end of each step; otherwise by the time you get to step three, people may be lost and you’ll have to waste time going back over what you’ve already covered.

10. Are there differences presenting to Baby Boomers as opposed to Gen Yers? These days there is plenty of data about that subject, but the short answer is yes. In general Gen Y and the Millennials (a larger, even scarier group) are not intimidated or impressed by technology. They have shorter attention spans and are natural multi-taskers. They will be more likely to vote on polls, chat and interact if they find the topic engaging. Boomers may need to be introduced to the technology and encouraged to participate.

11. What are some tips to keep people from putting you on mute in a training session? The trick isn’t so much to keep them from putting you on mute (do you really want to hear their

dog bark or the guy on the phone in the next cubicle?) as it is getting them to participate fully in the session. Because training, in particular, needs to be interactive and engaging to be effective, it's critical that you set ground rules and then enforce them. Make sure all participants understand how you plan to take feedback (chat, raising a hand and unmuting the phone when called on, etc.) and then give them plenty of opportunities throughout the presentation to comment or ask questions. Here's the thing: many presenters say that they want their presentations to be interactive and then proceed to actually limit interaction. Model good facilitation skills, call on people you haven't heard from and keep it up throughout the webinar, not just during Q&A.

12. What does a good outline or script look like? You want to make sure your presentation is tightly constructed and laser focused. At the same time you don't want to write out your presentation word-for-word or you'll wind up reading it and boring (not to mention insulting) your audience. As a rule, you can create a very effective script/outline by using the "Notes" section of PowerPoint. For each visual, put in your first sentence to introduce the topic, use bullet points and lots of white space to jot down the key points you want to cover (full paragraphs and blocks of text will confuse you and make it hard to find your place). Add notes where you want to ask a question or engage the audience (I write something like "do a check-in question here" in the margin of my outline). Finally, it's a good idea to write the last thing you want to say about each visual, as well as what you'll say to transition to the next visual.

13. What is the right length for an online presentation/webinar? There is no hard-and-fast rule, except to say it should be long enough to be worth the trouble of scheduling and logging on (so probably at least 20 minutes) and no longer than a human being can stand (definitely no longer than 90 minutes). Do not simply take your half-day live program and spend 4 hours presenting it online.

Basically for a marketing webinar or announcement, one hour (35-40 minutes plus 15-20 minutes of Q&A) is becoming standard. For training, short modules (under 90 minutes) are proving to be more effective than a long training session. You can go longer if you are sure people are engaged and you build in biology breaks, but you'd better have a darned good reason.

14. Is there a difference between a webinar, a presentation, and training? The terminology is sketchy, and nobody has completely defined it, but let me share my thoughts:

Webinar is a catch-all term for anything presented live online via WebEx, GoToMeeting or some similar online platform. The word 'webinar' became shorthand for 'web seminar,' and it usually means some sort of learning or information sharing will take place.

A web presentation might be a sales demo, an announcement from HR about signing up for benefits, or a large-audience event. Most of the time is taken by the presenter in a one-way transfer of information; any interaction is usually only Q&A.

Training is focused on developing new knowledge or skills. Training involves assessment of current knowledge or skill levels, introduction of new knowledge or skills, and the processing of the new information or the practice of the new skills. Good training contains discussion, questions, practice, and evaluation to measure what was learned. Making 100 people sit for an hour with no

interaction or practice is NOT really training. For example, we limit most of our training classes to 10 participants so that everyone can participate, learn and be engaged.

15. What is involved in “practicing” a virtual presentation? Practicing an online presentation does not mean flipping through your PowerPoint slides muttering to yourself. The only way to become ‘consciously competent’ with the technology, and thus a comfortable presenter, is to log on, practice everything you’re going to do during the presentation (all the polling, annotation, video or other functions) and get feedback from another person. It is really helpful if that other person is on another network so you can get a glimpse of what the audience will experience, and determine whether you’re going to have issues, such as lag time, connection and firewall problems, or screen freezing.

16. Do you think the outcomes of a web meeting or training can be as good as those for a live event? Online presenting is not as good as its proponents think, or as bad as some people want to believe. The trick is to choose the right tool for the right reason and then use it well.

What research now shows is that online is especially effective when:

- The information is knowledge based;
- When it is delivered just in time and in short modules;
- When it’s interactive and participants are actively engaged;
- When you cannot afford either the time or money that a live meeting or training session would cost.

What online doesn’t do so well is give people the intangible extras of live contact or allow practice with specific equipment in a specific location. In particular, online training lacks the social component that many learners really benefit from.

17. Should you send visuals ahead of the presentation? The rule I follow is: if I would do it for a live presentation, I will do it for an online one. Normally, I’m not a fan of giving people the handouts of presentation in advance unless they have to do research or refer to it throughout. This is because I want them staying with me and not jumping ahead. I much prefer to do the presentation, then offer the visuals as reference. You can send them as an email attachment after the event, but most presentation platforms allow them to be downloaded directly (a very handy feature!).

18. What’s the right number of slides for a 1 hour presentation? Again, there are no specific rules. In general, though, you want something to change onscreen every 1-2 minutes (this includes annotation or animation). Because there is less to engage the eye, it is helpful for a web presentation to have more visuals than a live, face-to-face presentation. If there isn’t something new for your audience to look at, distractions will take over. The Communispond webinars are usually 35-40 minutes of material with a 10-15 minute Q&A session, and they average 38 slides. Of course, the final number is going to depend on what you’re presenting.

19. Do the same platform tools apply if you’re presenting from a Word doc, for example, and not PPT slides? There’s nothing sacred or unique about PowerPoint. It’s simply a way to visually organize information for easy understanding. Any time you are sharing something visually with the audience, whether a PowerPoint slide, a document you want to work through, or an application you’re demonstrating, some guidelines apply:

- Tell the audience what they’re looking at before diving in. Whenever what is

on the screen changes, there is a moment of adjustment for the audience as they make sense of it. By telling them what they're looking at, you help them focus on what's important. (For example, "Now you're looking at the log-in screen. Notice that....")

- Use annotation tools to focus attention. Almost every web presentation platform has a number of tools to draw attention, add visual interest and help the audience retain what you are working so hard to tell them. Highlighting, text tools, circling or using arrows to point out critical information or steps in a process all help participants focus on critical information and retain it. They also make the presentation less boring to sit through.
- Clean the visuals up before presenting them to the audience. It's tempting to take existing material and just throw it online. After all people have been doing that with their live presentations for years. I'm sure we've all had to sit through a financial presentation, trying to make sense of tiny numbers on spreadsheets. Take the time to eliminate visual information that can clutter a screen and distract your audience.
- At the very least, tell the audience where to look. If you can't clean up your visuals for some reason, use annotation tools to direct the audience's attention to what's important. For example, focus the audience by saying something like "I know this is a very busy slide, but what I want you to

see is here on line 7;" then visually draw their attention to line 7. In its presentation skill programs, Communispond calls this "clearing a visual." Simply put, you want to help the audience quickly focus on the task, or information, at hand.

I urge you to think about your webinar as a presentation first, then consider how delivering via online technology affects that presentation. You'll find that your well-honed presentation instincts kick in and you'll be more relaxed, effective and confident when presenting online.

About the author



W. Wayne Turmel is a leading voice in the field of online presentation skills. He's president of GreatWebMeetings.com™ and author of books including *6 Weeks to a Great Webinar*, *10 Steps to Successful Virtual Presentations*, and

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He's also the writer of one of the world's best resources for managing and presenting in the new world of virtual teams and remote management; you'll find his insights at www.theconnectedmanager.com.

GreatWebMeetings.com™ is the strategic partner of Communispond. Wayne serves as Communispond's resident expert on webinars and online presenting. He's also been a proud part of the Communispond faculty and design team for almost 15 years and has a long relationship with Communispond's clients and partners.

How Can GreatWebMeetings™ and Communispond Help?

Communispond has been the gold standard in business communication skills training for over 40 years. As times change, so have we. We offer timeless presentation and communication skills training, as well as information necessary to communicate effectively in the digital age.

Our webinar-delivered training solutions include:

- *Communication Tips for Remote Teams*
- *Delivering Effective Online Presentations*
- *Selling in a Virtual Environment*
- *Why Presenters Struggle Online-and How to Get Over it*
- *Leading Online Meetings*

Contact Communispond for more information at 631-907-8010 or at www.communispond.com.

GreatWebMeetings.com™ is the world's premier resource for helping organizations and individuals learn to manage, sell, present and facilitate using today's web meeting and communication tools.

We focus on your organization's strategy, outcomes and immediate needs with platform-neutral information and skills training.

Whether it's training a team or an individual through one of our powerful webinar-delivered training and coaching programs or using our simple and effective consulting approach to help you ask the right questions before investing in a solution, we are eager to be of service.

GreatWebMeetings.com's online training programs include:

[Web Presentation Basics](#)

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For more information, drop us a line at information@greatwebmeetings.com or call us at 630-545-1934 and find out how we help our clients to not only present, but to communicate and connect.