How to Deliver a Virtual Meeting with Confidence



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Today, actually getting in the room with a potential client, partner or colleague is becoming more and more unusual. Is it a remnant of COVID-19? Are critical team members now spread across a bigger geographic area or simply working remotely? Are we just too lazy to jump on a plane or a train to conduct business face-to-face?

It doesn't matter. Whatever the reason, there seems to be an endless stream of virtual meetings. Many of them terrible. That's right. Terrible. Often, it is not the content. It is the delivery and the virtual "stage."

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Create your virtual stage

So, let’s start with the stage. During the past few months, I have been in virtual meetings where the background was someone’s unmade bed, a sink full of dishes and a backyard pool. None of them were professional, but the pool did make me want to go on vacation. Some individuals use virtual backgrounds with varying success to avoid less-than-desirable settings. As a rule, avoid busy backgrounds and keep it neutral. I believe your background should be about you- your company, your brand. It should not detract from your message. Instead, it should give the viewer a feel for your style and what you do.

Your camera should be at eye level. Don’t have an adjustable desk? Find some books or a box to raise your computer.

Lighting can be an issue. If there is a strong backlight, individual features are barely recognizable. Light that blasts from a window makes faces appear ghostly. This is easily fixable by closing blinds, using a ring light, or simply moving the camera to a better location.

The worst thing about meetings is poor audio. For those in an open office setting, it may be impossible to control extraneous noise. With a little planning, you might move to a conference room or other quieter space. At the very least, mute yourself when not speaking. If you work from home, try finding a room and closing the door.

Honestly, we have become more understanding of distractions, and that might be good to an extent. But I am personally tired of hearing barking dogs or home repairs going on throughout a meeting. I’ll say what many have on their minds- go to work if you can’t find a quiet place at home. One other thing to note: if you need to have high-quality audio, consider an external microphone.

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Communicate with impact

Now, on to the question of virtual delivery. The fact is that it is harder to keep attention in a virtual meeting. You have to amp up your delivery. Consider the length of an average meeting – generally 45 to 60 minutes. Some town halls and employee events are much longer. However, studies show that the attention span of meeting participants is less than ten minutes.

How do you compete? Communicate with confidence and impact.

To begin. Think in soundbites. A soundbite is a short, complete thought that is attention-getting and memorable. Most people wander around a topic and use way too many words. Think in bullets and get to the point quickly.

Stand up. You will have more energy. Nothing is worse than someone with great content who does not deliver it with energy. That also means looking and sounding energetic.

Eye contact is critical and very different in a virtual setting. For one thing, the camera sees you "up close and personal." If you roll your eyes in disgust, people notice. If you engage the camera directly, people feel as if you are in the room with them. You don't need to stare at the camera, but you do need to maintain good eye contact.

Expression is also amplified in a virtual setting. If you look bored or disinterested, people tune out. Your expression should mirror the content. If the news is good, please smile. If it is concerning, so should be your expression. Think about how movies and television use a close-up shot to convey a feeling or set the tone. Studies vary, but experts agree that 70-93% of communication is nonverbal. That's why eye contact

and expression are important for grabbing and keeping attention.

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Engage your audience

Let’s face it: even the best communicator can lose a virtual audience. There are a few tricks that can help bring them back. Use bold graphics and animations to emphasize key points. Please don’t write out full sentences. Use pictures and text to add to the presentation.

Get interactive. Technology allows you to take a poll and have people raise their hands. You can put up a quiz and solicit answers. You can divide large groups into smaller ones using breakout rooms and provide discussion questions.

One technique that I use is sharing the spotlight. It is tempting to think you can carry a meeting, but bringing in others to share a story or cover pieces of the content has huge benefits. Think of subject matter experts who can contribute a different or more in-depth point of view. Just having a different face and voice present creates interest. Of course, they do need to be prepared and energetic.

Another option is to use pre-packaged videos or animated pieces. This additional content offers more visual interest than a “talking head.” Keep them short and visually appealing.

The bottom line is this. If you want more attention, be more interesting.

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