Pro Tips to Up Your Video Call and Presentation Game

Make your video presentations more appealing and professional.

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The global crisis has upended what it means to have a meeting and to communicate with key audiences. Whether it is Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, or even Facebook video calling, gathering together to communicate these days is *all about* online video meeting solutions, as well as video distribution of corporate messages using channels like Vimeo and YouTube.

With video now so suddenly prominent and fully in the mainstream, this is the time for professionals to raise their video game. By now, we're all used to seeing the offices and homes of our favorite reporters, celebrities and colleagues, and there's even a cottage industry in rating people's virtual backgrounds, along with explainers on looking good on video conferences.

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And since showrooms and offices are mostly closed, companies are jumping into online video for promotion and b-roll, as

well as creating pandemic-centric ads. However, the quality isn’t great, and even the slickest TV ads are focused on repetitive “we’re all in this together” tropes. As a former television professional, I know we can all do better when it comes to the production basics, not to mention content, to make our video presentations more appealing and professional. The following are some best practices for improving your videos, whether for online calls and meetings or for shooting your own b-roll, ads or promotional videos.

Video calls

Video calls are common, and it seems like we’re all just spending our days jumping from online meeting to online meeting and have thus achieved familiarity with the rumpus rooms and/or refrigerator magnet collections of our colleagues. And if you’re inadvertently displaying the ceiling above your kitchen table, a fast and fun change is selecting a free virtual background or picking your own images for your conferencing software. My personal background preference is the bridge from Star Trek’s Starship Enterprise!

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Yet even the coolest background image or the most elegant study won’t make up for bad framing or poor lighting. In addition, a few dollars invested in a video light can remove years from your online appearance and enable colleagues and clients to actually see your facial expressions. It goes without saying that professional attire and grooming are still required, as are pants. If audio is spotty, consider a headset, an upgraded lavalier microphone, or a more advanced set of Bluetooth headphones.

With those basics understood, the next and most critical element of your online video presence is framing your shot. If you’re recording soundbites, doing interviews, or just conversing with colleagues or friends, framing will make a big

difference. Some pro tips include:

- Consider the TV or computer screen as being divided into three vertical sections, and position yourself near the inside edge of the section on the left of the frame. Either side is acceptable, but left is recommended for most videos, which might need space for graphics, particularly if the video is to be used for a TV appearance.
- It also helps to visualize someone standing to the right of your computer screen, helping keep your eyes and body language focused on that person as if they were physically in the room, asking questions and reacting just off-camera.
- When it comes to deciding how far to position oneself from the camera, think about the *medium shot*, where one shows a view from approximately the bottom of the rib cage to about two inches above head, a framing that should work well for a majority of videos or interviews. And also learn to frame the *close-up shot*, positioning oneself to show from roughly the armpits to approximately two inches above the head, which is a suitable framing for delivery of more personal and less technical messages.
- The extra few inches above one’s head allows for space to move without having the top of your head disappear offscreen while you speak.

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Achieving a visually pleasing background, with well-framed and well-lit shots, along with good-quality audio is no more difficult than spending a bit of after-work time for testing and fine-tuning and implementing these no- or low-cost solutions.

B-roll and company video

When it comes to b-roll or promotional video or even ads for online consumption, some simple tips can help yield better results. Basic shots, including static wide shots, are good starting points for video editors, and in the case of shooting b-roll of an executive, a 20-second shot of he or she working on their computer will serve as good source material. These shots should be steady, with no zooms or pans, and ideally incorporating the use of a tripod. An over-the-shoulder shot is also useful for software demos, and taping another 20 seconds of video showing the software working can provide some effective detail. When shooting video, more footage is typically better than less, and remember to keep shots horizontal, not vertical.

It doesn’t take a lot to elevate one’s video from amateurish to professional or in some cases from awful to acceptable, particularly if one seeks to avoid clichés when it comes to copy and images. But since video has become the de facto tool for the “new normal,” it makes sense to embrace the idea of making it the best it can be.

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