

American Marketing Association and ReadyTalk Present:

Best Practices for Webinar Planning and Execution



A successful web event can help strengthen a company’s brand awareness, increase exposure in the market, and generate qualified sales leads. If done right, it can elevate an organization’s credibility and reinforce its position as an industry thought leader. However, running a high-profile web event can be intimidating and challenging.

In this guide, ReadyTalk and the American Marketing Association (AMA) share best practices, tools and samples for planning and executing a successful web event. Use this information-packed document as a supplemental guide to help make web events a great experience for you and your audience.

Planning and Strategy

Plan your event just as you would if you were meeting in-person.

Don’t skimp on planning for your web event – treat it with the same level of care as you would an in-person event. A well-attended, seamless, and high-quality web event requires advance preparation that begins at least 6 to 8 weeks before the live event. Items to address during planning include target audience, topic and content, date and time, event format, speakers, promotional activities, and follow-up strategy.

Task

Timing

Develop event plan

6 to 8 weeks prior

Finalize event topic, title, abstract and speakers

6 weeks prior

Setup registration and begin promotion

4 to 6 weeks prior

Send email invite

2 weeks prior

Draft of slide presentation

2 weeks prior

Full rehearsal and event dry-run

1 week prior

Final version of slide presentation

2 to 3 days prior

Send reminder email #1

24 hours prior

Send reminder email #2

2 to 3 hours prior

Pre-conference with moderator and speakers

30 minutes prior

Edit recording (if needed)

Within 24 hours after

Send follow-up emails and begin sales outreach

Within 24 hours after

Promote on-demand recording

Ongoing

Define the audience and deliver value, not a sales pitch

Clearly articulate the target audience for the webinar and don't try to reach too broad of an audience with a single event. What is their job function? What is their geographic location? What are their key pain points and business problems? Then, design the event from the ground up to meet the needs of this target audience.

Select a topic that will catch the target audience's attention and entice them to register for and attend the event. Position yourself as an industry thought-leader and deliver highly relevant content of value to the audience. The event should be more than a thinly-veiled sales pitch or product demonstration—events of this nature will be perceived as such and greatly decrease audience attendance and engagement.

Consider offering an additional value-add to encourage registrants to attend; for example, offer attendees a free research report or chapter from a book that is relevant to the target audience.

Create a compelling title and abstract

Take the time to craft an event title and abstract that will spark interest among the target audience. Use a "hook" such as a catchy event title if appropriate for your target audience. But, don't be too clever, make sure it is clear what the event is about. Keep the event abstract brief, punchy, and easy to read. Use bullet points where possible. Highlight the expertise of your speaker(s). Clearly communicate who the event is targeted at, what they will learn if they attend, and why they can't afford to miss the event. As a rule of thumb, target no more than 15 words for the title and 150-200 words for the abstract.

Promotion

Keep the registration form brief

Don't make the audience complete a long and tedious registration form. The shorter the form, the better conversion rate; statistics show that drop-off rates increase sharply as number of fields increase. Aim for no more than eight to ten fields on the registration form.

Take a hard look at the fields in your registration form and consider whether each one is absolutely necessary. For example, is the mailing address necessary if you don't plan to follow-up with a direct-mail piece? Would collecting state or country be enough to assign the lead to the appropriate sales rep? Where possible, include only fields that are required to get the registrant into the live event or that will support planned follow-up activities.

Register for this Meeting:

First Name*

Last Name*

Email*

Phone*

Company*

Number of Employees*

What are your organization's plans for conducting web events?*

We currently conduct web events

We are planning to start conducting web events in the next 3 months

We are planning to start conducting web events, but not in the next 3 months

We have no plans for conducting web events

Not sure at this time

Are you interested in receiving the monthly Web Seminar Series newsletter from ReadyTalk containing information about upcoming webinars and podcasts?*

Yes

No

I'm already a subscriber

*Required Field

[Register Now](#)

Think outside of the box for event promotion

Effective promotion can make or break a webinar. A good place to start is by sending an email invitation to your in-house database of customers and prospects. For best results, send the invite approximately two weeks prior to the live event. Another good place to promote the event is on your website. Post high-level event details and a link to the registration page on your home page and other relevant sections of your site.

But don't stop with an email invite and links on your web site! There are many free or cost-effective ways to promote web events. Take advantage of social media sites and engage with audiences before, during, and after the web event. For example, create a group on LinkedIn, post the event to Facebook, and promote it on Twitter.

Additional venues for event promotion

- Put out a press release announcing your event (www.prxbuilder.com/x2/)
- Submit the event to blogs and post to your blog
- Use the reach of your speakers' networks to extend invitations
- Set up a search engine advertising campaign (e.g. Google AdWords)
- Post events on EventSpan (www.eventspan.com) and other calendars
- Include an "Invite a Friend" feature in the email invites



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ReadyTalk
Audio & Web Conferencing

American Marketing Association
Marketing Power Media Gallery

Please join ReadyTalk and the AMA for a Live Webcast entitled:
How to Make Your Next Business-Critical Web Event a Success: Tips from the Experts

In today's challenging economy, organizations of all sizes are turning to web events to help them conduct business as usual while cutting costs like travel and downtime. But running a large, business-critical web event can be intimidating and challenging.

Melanie Turek, principal analyst at Frost & Sullivan, will explore the business drivers for web events and highlight where real-world organizations are using them to deliver value. In a lively panel discussion, experts from the American Marketing Association, Webinar Success, Frost & Sullivan, Rymia Technologies and ReadyTalk will share tales from the trenches and guidance to help you succeed before, during, and after your event. Then, get your questions answered by our panel of experts during a live Q&A session.

Don't miss out on this important web event. You can easily register online today!

Register for this informative webinar

Date: December 10, 2011
Time: 11:30amPT/12:00pm MT/1:30pm/CT2:30pmET
Cost: Complimentary

As a bonus, all event attendees will receive a **Free Web Event Best Practices Toolkit** compliments of ReadyTalk and the AMA.

Audio + Web Conferencing | Web Events + Professional Services | Recording + Syndication

Pre-event Preparation

Avoid Common Technical “Gotchas”

Don't be taken by surprise on the day of the live event! Know the limitations of your web conferencing platform and clearly communicate these to the moderator and speaker(s). For example, some web conferencing solutions require presenters to be on PCs vs. Macs in order to push slides during the live event. Others may convert slides into static images so that animations no longer work. Send out clear, step-by-step instructions on how to join the event to ensure that presenters who are not familiar with your web conferencing platform won't have trouble joining the rehearsal or live event.

Practice Makes Perfect

Don't leave the success of your high-profile web event to chance. Hold a live rehearsal and dry-run during the week leading up to the live event. Schedule it at a time when all of the key players (moderator, speaker(s), project manager, etc.) can attend. Items to cover during the rehearsal include:

1. Review how to use web conferencing platform controls
2. Discuss event timing and transition points
3. Do a complete dry run of the presentation
4. Address communication among the team during the live event
5. Plan for handling audience questions
6. Walk through a mock Q&A session
7. Set a contingency plan if something goes wrong
8. Let them know there are different instructions for joining a live event

In addition, take time for a pre-conference immediately before the live event. Everyone on the team should join the event approximately 30 minutes prior to the start time to review the game plan, test and resolve any technical issues, and answer any last-minute questions.

Things to tackle during the pre-conference include:

1. Conduct sound checks with moderator and all speakers
2. Load all slides and confirm that they uploaded properly
3. Set-up and test the event recording
4. Quickly review roles, timing and transitions
5. Highlight speaker best practices
(glass of water, no cells phones, etc.)

Audio Best Practices

To ensure optimal audio quality for the event, all speakers should:

- Use a handset if available
 - if not, use a headset
- Never use speaker phone
- Be on a landline vs. a mobile phone
- Mute the lines of speakers who are not actively presenting

Slide Presentation Best Practices

To avoid technical difficulties and clearly communicate information:

- Keep the slide template simple so the audience focuses on the content
- Use a single template even if there are multiple speakers
- Use common fonts to avoid conversion problems

Don't Let Your Audience Forget to Attend

Send at least one reminder email to registrants approximately 24 hours prior to the event. You can also send a second reminder 2 to 3 hours before the live event. Be sure to include instructions for joining the web and audio portion of the event. If you have the resources, also add in a reminder phone call to registrants the day prior to the live event.

Live Event Best Practices

Tips for Engaging Your Audience

To ensure optimal audio quality for the event, all speakers should:

- Present something that is memorable and that sticks
- Begin with a clear outline of what they will gain from attending
- Address housekeeping items (copies of slides, recording, Q&A, Twitter hashtag) early
- Include a picture of the speaker(s) on an introduction slide
- Design the theme so attendees' logical next step is your call to action
- Keep slide delivery under 45 minutes to retain audience and allow for Q&A
- Use slides as visual aids instead of visual points
- Use analogies and case studies
- Consider a different format (talk show, panel discussion, point-counterpoint, etc.)
- Set up a Twitter hash tag for the event
- Have presenters talk with enthusiasm and passion for the subject
- Use multiple speakers if possible
- Close with wrap-up slides with contact information and a clear call-to-action

Deliver What You Promised and Keep the Audience Engaged

Meet the audience's expectations during the live event. Ensure the content delivers on the promises made on the web event landing page and in other promotional efforts. Anything else could be viewed as a "bait and switch" that leaves participants with a bad perception of your organization.

Once the audience joins the event, use a variety of techniques to keep them engaged and interested throughout the course of the event. For example, consider creating a Twitter hashtag for tweeting during and after the live event. Using a Twitter hashtag tracks the topic discussion, allows attendees to pose questions directly to the speaker's handle, and allows for a forum-type dialogue between participants. In lead-generation web events, it helps to facilitate conversation and aids in the conversion process.

Be Prepared to Handle Chat and Q&A

Have someone from your organization join the live event as a panelist who can be 100 percent dedicated to monitoring chat during the event. They should have enough knowledge of the web conferencing platform to respond to basic participant questions during the call and sufficient topic knowledge to help identify good questions for the Q&A portion.

To jumpstart the Q&A portion of the event, it is best to be prepared with three to five seed questions that set the tone for the session and fill in gaps between questions from participants. Be sure the audience knows how to submit questions and encourage them to do so throughout the presentation, even if you will be addressing them at the end of the event. Remind the audience of how to submit questions as you kick-off the Q&A session.

If you don't get to all of the questions during the live event, tell the audience that you will follow-up directly on individual questions that were not addressed and then do it. This presents the perfect opportunity to engage with participants after the event in a way that delivers value.

Wrap-Up Your Event with a Call-to-Action

At the end of the event, thank attendees for their time and communicate a clear call-to-action. Provide email and phone contact information on the final slide so they can reach you with questions or to learn more about your company.

When you close the event, re-direct participants to either a relevant URL or a post-event survey. The post-event survey provides the perfect opportunity to further qualify attendees as leads or get their feedback on the effectiveness of the event. If you opt for a post-event survey, ask attendees to answer a few brief questions during the verbal wrap-up of your event.

Post-event best practices

Prompt Follow-Up is Key

Send follow-up emails to attendees within 24 hours after the live event. And, don't forget about people who registered for the event but were unable to attend. Research shows that leads quickly grow cold after a live event, so prompt follow-up is crucial to overall event success. In the follow-up email include anything you promised to attendees or registrants, such as a copy of the slide presentation, a link to the event recording, or other collateral. Also, use this opportunity to reiterate any special offers or calls-to-action and to remind them how to learn more about your organization or offering. Have a plan for additional targeted sales outreach or prospect nurturing and stick to it.

Leverage Your Recorded Content

Extend ROI beyond the live event by making the most of the event recording. Include a link to the recording on your website or embed the recording in your blog. Add the recording to social media sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook to reach new audiences. It's also a good idea to link to the recording of a relevant topic in other promotions; for example, if your company is sending out a newsletter that's geared toward market researchers, it's a good idea to add a link to the latest webinar you held on the topic of market research.

Measure Your Success

Track key success metrics, such as number of registrants and attendance rate and compare them to past events or pre-determined targets to gauge success. A good target for attendance is that 30 percent to 40 percent of registrants will attend the live event. By watching the numbers over time, you will quickly get a sense of which topics are most relevant to your audience and learn how to improve performance for the next event.

In conclusion

The AMA and ReadyTalk have produced hundreds of polished web events and have learned that the best results are achieved through advanced planning and treating web events with the same care traditionally reserved for in-person events.

About ReadyTalk

ReadyTalk is committed to helping customers successfully conduct audio and web conferences of all sizes – from ad hoc, collaborative meetings to large webinars. ReadyTalk combines ease-of-use with sophisticated marketing tools to improve audience engagement, ROI and meeting productivity. Unlike other services, ReadyTalk gives customers a full-suite of tools for training, collaboration, webinars and more. You always have access to the features when you need them, no need to upgrade to another product. Learn more at www.readytalk.com.

About the American Marketing Association

The American Marketing Association is the largest marketing association in North America. It is a professional association for individuals involved in the practice, teaching and study of marketing worldwide. It is also the source that marketers turn to every day to deepen their marketing expertise, elevate their careers, and, ultimately, achieve better results. American Marketing Association members are connected to a network of experienced marketers more than 30,000 strong. For more information on the American Marketing Association, please visit www.MarketingPower.com.



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