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Webinars Gaining More Marketing Traction *Optimize Attendance and Value with Marketing and Production Best Practices*

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With business travel costs mounting, sales and marketing budgets decreasing, a dispersed and varied mix of sales targets, and growing concern about our carbon footprint, webinars have become the increasingly popular go-to solution to connect companies with prospects, clients, and partners.

Capturing many advantages of face-to-face communication for a multitude of business objectives, this 21st century communication connection is a strong performer. A variety of recent event-related metrics all indicate that attendance at "on the ground" conferences and other events is diminishing. But relationships still drive business, and companies must still stay in close contact with customers and prospects.

That's why the frequency of webinars has skyrocketed as businesses start feeling the economic squeeze. The convergence of 1) jaw-dropping travel expenses; 2) the dampening economy; 3) rapid advances in dynamic and interactive technology; 4) the growing comfort level among computer users towards, and openness to, new online applications; and 5) the quality of today's "unpack and play" computers make webinars an obvious tactic for various information dissemination needs for both internal and external audiences. They've come a long way since their technology-limited infancy in the late '90s, and they integrate neatly into a suite of sales and marketing touch points, building critical relationships while impacting the bottom line.

Televerde and Netbriefings have collaborated on several occasions on the production (Netbriefings) as well as marketing and follow-up (Televerde) of robust, meaningful, solutions-directed, web-based events. In this article, we'll share some best practices. But first, know that while we believe nothing replaces the ultimate value of the human touch, the latest interactive high resolution technology gets very, very close to an in-person interaction. The influence of YouTubeTM and similar video networking environments has made people especially excited about engaging with online presentations and relationships. Like assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle, creating a successful webinar requires syncing all the right technology and marketing components to achieve, and even exceed, your specific branded event and customer experience needs.

Pick the Right Time and Duration

Prime webinar time is Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. ET for reaching a U.S. audience. For an international audience, it's 7:00 a.m. ET to reach an audience based in many regions throughout Europe and 5:00 p.m. ET to reach an audience based in many Asian regions. Financial institutions are most receptive to Monday afternoon and Friday morning webinars. Base the duration of your event on your audience and content. Product introductions or trainings should last no more than an hour while sales webinars can be presented over three days. Longer events often mesh live moderator presence with online components.

Grab Your Audience

Seems obvious, right? But companies with little or no expertise in dynamic technology or marketing frequently fall flat when it comes to creating compelling content. A high-level approach is key, with as

much quantitative, statistical information and research-supported trends as possible packed into each webinar. We recommend keeping each slide up for two minutes, with accompanying video or other supporting visuals, for optimal participant receptivity and engagement.

Needless to say, big name presenters (relevant to your subject-matter and audience, of course) are guaranteed to keep registrants engaged. The adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” is no overstatement when it comes to webinars. Video embedded within event marketing emails drives up registrations, and when embedded in the actual presentation, keeps participants engaged. But there are pitfalls of an over-produced presentation. For example, animated Microsoft PowerPoint® accompanied by streaming video could put the kibosh on the most well-intentioned Webinar if the registrant’s computer doesn’t have the required bandwidth. Know your attendees’ technical limitations.

Spell Out the Ground Rules

To engage and inspire an audience to participate, tell them at the outset of the webinar exactly what will happen throughout. Show them where the interactive chat box is and how easy it is to use throughout the presentation. Explain how easy it is to participate in the ongoing polling. Assure them that moderators are monitoring every question/comment that comes in, and if their issue isn’t addressed during the webinar timeframe, they will be contacted upon conclusion of the event. Webinars are a very democratic tool to engage a wide audience. And the anonymity of the chat function is appealing to participants who would otherwise feel uncomfortable posing a question in front of a large in-person audience. To stimulate interaction and avoid a possible lull, it’s best to “plant” two or three questions in advance. Consider including a teleconference bridge to enable phone-in questions.

Avoid One Talking Head

Three or four moderators or one moderator overseeing a panel of speakers is far more impactful than one speaker, especially for longer presentations. If appropriate and possible, include a customer representative.

Leverage the Webinar for Long-term Relationship-building and Benefits

Another important benefit of webinars is that viewership can be tracked, especially for archived versions. In the old days, who knew where shipped DVDs or CDs actually landed and worse yet, whether they were even watched. The best thing about webinars (in addition to marketing your expertise, establishing dialogue, and identifying potential leads), is that they are marketing packages that keep on giving for little additional cost. Post your recorded webinar immediately upon conclusion of the event on your Web site and encourage visitors to ask questions, post comments, and so on. Make sure the set-up features automatic notification each time there’s a new visitor so that you can follow up and begin that next new relationship. Best practice webinar hosts blast entire webinars up to six times to registrants, including no-shows, as well as to entire sales and marketing lists. Some webinars see a 70 percent rebound effect comprising those who viewed the live broadcast as well as new individuals.

Know Your Security and Bandwidth Limitations

A handful of webinar hosting services install servers on a client’s LAN, and with one IP address, all security issues can be controlled from behind their firewall. Note, though, that certain institutions don’t have the bandwidth to support more sophisticated webinars, so check first.

Minimize Drop-offs

Industry standard webinar drop-off rates are roughly 10 percent (Netbriefings’ drop-off rates are typically under 2 percent). The number one reason for drop-offs is a shoddy presentation. The second is a poor Internet connection or other technical issue. Provide at least two avenues such as live phone support and online chat to help with any technical issues. Bottom line? Make logging on to your event as easy as possible and, obviously, make participating interesting and worthwhile.

Gather ye Rosebuds

Once your registrants are logged on, try to capture any knowledge that you can from your engaged audience via polls during the event and a survey following the event. This information can open the door to product/service improvements as well as new sales.

Market Strategically

Webinar marketing is a little part art, a little part science. Here are some tips for success:

- **Call and e-mail prospective attendees one month prior to your event.** Call to follow-up and promote the event one to two weeks later and offer to register attendees while you are speaking with them on the phone. Webinars are an incredible way to harvest e-mail addresses. Make online registration as easy as possible: ask for a name, affiliation/company, and e-mail address. You can mine for additional information later.
- **Consider incentives to drive registration and minimize drop-offs.** Depending on your audience, offering free software or a gift card to the first group of responders can motivate registration. Or put all registrants in a drawing for a desirable prize. Some companies don't allow employees to accept gifts, so a choice of rewards could include a non-monetary award such as an exclusive white paper or access to your online resource center. Also consider survey-completion incentives upon conclusion of the webinar.
- **Once registered, send a confirmation e-mail that reminds participants to schedule the Webinar on their calendar or include a calendar appointment option.** Two days prior to the event, call and/or send another confirmation e-mail with the log-in information. We recommend sending it at midnight so that it's in the registrant's inbox when he/she gets to work. And on the morning of the webinar, send another note with a reminder of the log-in information.
- **Content is critical.** Your marketing message must be succinct and compelling. We advise using messaging that resonates with the target audience. For instance, executives want information that tells them how to save money, increase sales, and provide value. Consider touting product or service financing options, if available. Play up the fact that the event is only an hour long (if that's the case). Managers want information that helps them save time, makes their jobs easier, or makes them more productive. Use teasers in your marketing. For example, state if the webinar will provide a sneak peek or preview of a product or service. In every e-mail, provide all technical requirements and list contact phone numbers and links registrants might need should they have difficulty logging on or interacting with the webinar.
- **Follow-up and follow-through.** The value of follow-through cannot be overstated, and it's usually an area of weakness after the excitement of producing and marketing a webinar fades. The faster you follow-up post webinar, the better. Try to complete calls and e-mails to attendees, drop-offs, and no-shows within a week and a half. Obviously, each of these groups requires a different set of questions to continue engagement and help qualify leads. Promote the archived version of the webinar and its ongoing interactivity.

So, after all the hard work of producing your webinar and shaping your marketing plan, how many registrants can you expect to sign up? The three variables at play are topic, audience, and list quality. Executives are more difficult to hook than managers. Here's an example: if you want 25 executive-level registrants (a small audience), you should have a list of 500 people and be prepared to make at least 1,250 calls (three or four calls per contact). While these numbers may seem daunting, that's a 5 percent response rate, a very high number indeed in the realm of marketing. Don't take it personally if your attendee rate doesn't meet your expectations. After all, one of the primary reasons for any webinar is to

introduce your company to new people and potential customers, to initiate new relationships. You will now have a new cache of prospects to work your sales magic on.

About Televerde: Televerde is the premium provider of qualified sales leads, actionable marketing intelligence and integrated marketing solutions that collectively accelerate sales revenue and generate new customers in the B2B marketing arena. We have developed specialized expertise over more than 14 years of engaging in high-level dialogs with decision-makers in over two million companies. We deliver fully measurable ROI in a performance-based pricing environment by leveraging an unduplicated blend of market experience, deep data sets, best practices, innovative technologies, intuitive reporting tools and continuous training. Our solutions portfolio is designed to achieve complex and strategic customer acquisition objectives. Core services are focused on meeting end-to-end sales and marketing requirements, including lead generation, lead qualification, lead management & nurturing, sales optimization, market research & analysis, appointment-setting, event recruitment, data cleansing, inquiry management. Contact us at info@televerde.com or 1-888-925-7526. Visit us at televerde.com.

About Netbriefings: Netbriefings is a leader in large group webcasting. It provides professional-quality webcast services, with robust audio/video streaming to audiences in the 100s to 10,000s, designed for town hall meetings, CEO meetings, and multi-day conferences. Netbriefings also provides a solution for personal video messaging for enhanced sales, engaging marketing, and improved training. The company offers a full spectrum of services for large event, video, and audio production. Contact sales@netbriefings.com or 1-866-225-1532, or visit www.netbriefings.com.