

Best Practices in Online Video Webcasting

Looking to expand the reach of your message, differentiate your company and brand, and better engage your audience? Video webcasting may be the solution you're looking for.

Why Video Webcast?

Video can help you convey the strength and achievements of your organization and leadership team to customers, partners, vendors, investors, employees and the media. In an era of transparency and short attention spans, online video provides a personal, emotional experience that connects the presenter to your audience for the length of your presentation. On a video platform, you can also integrate other multimedia such as Flash animation, images and graphics to increase the comprehension and retention of your message.

Online video webcasting can enhance corporate communications initiatives, assist your leadership team in broadening their appeal, and differentiate and humanize your company and brand. As the leading webcast provider for the investor relations and corporate communications needs of more than 4,500 corporations worldwide—including 90% of the Fortune 500—Thomson Financial has compiled the top best practices we recommend when using video webcasts:

1. Have a strategy

Before creating your content, define the purpose of your presentation. What would you like the viewer to take away from the video? What will be the next step or call to action? The presentation will only be successful if it generates the desired response from the audience. Once you have developed a blueprint, determine how you will measure success (e.g. attendance, sales leads) and follow up with attendees immediately following the webcast with an online form or by email to capture feedback that can be used to refine future presentations.

2. Content is king

Poor content can't be saved, even by a great production team. Keep your content short and concise, be creative and stay on message. Consider your audience when crafting content—employees, customers, and the media each require a different approach. Break your content into sections that can be digested by your audience. If possible, keep the length of your entire presentation to less than ten minutes. Good videos engage, entertain or educate. Great ones do all three.

3. Don't overlook presentation

Make the video interesting, professional and polished by referring to graphics and charts, and using props for demonstrations. Multiple camera projects are usually more interesting to watch than a single camera event. In live events, make your presentations interactive with Q&A, demonstrations and polling. Ensure the quality of the video and audio services are top notch. The closer your video comes to replicating the quality of the television experience, the better. Think network news, not local cable access. Make sure you have good lighting that is prepared specifically for the Web. Brighter, well-lit sets tend to look better than darker ones.

4. Choose a reliable provider

When selecting a service provider, consider their full suite of products, customer service, reliability, scalability and industry experience. Choose a partner who understands your communication strategy, takes a consultative approach and, in essence, becomes an extension of your team. In corporate communications, one size doesn't fit all, and having a partner that can walk you through the process—from venue selection to post-event follow-up—will take the worry out of your Web communications. Selecting a single point of contact allows you to focus the sum of your resources on developing the content of your presentation. Also, make sure you use a vendor that knows the available video transmission options. They can develop and implement a solution to get your video signal from your venue to the encoders with the highest quality, at the lowest cost and by the most reliable method.

5. Choose talent carefully

Use engaging, energetic and professional-sounding presenters who can deliver your message while conveying excitement about your products and services. A charismatic sales executive may fit the bill better than your CEO, depending on the content and goal. Especially for product launches and consumer-focused presentations, you may decide to hire talent from an agency to deliver your message. Before you do, however, take a look within your organization—you may find that an existing employee has the skill set you are looking for.

6. Dress for success

Presenters should avoid extremes when selecting an outfit for a webcast appearance. Clothing with large areas of black or white, such as a classic tux, interacts poorly with video cameras. Loud pinks, blues and purples should be avoided as well. Instead, choose from a muted pallet of grey, brown, deep reds, blues and tans which read much better on screen. Fine stripes and patterns also should be avoided as they cause *moiré* patterns which appear to crawl or beat on screen, so stick with solids. Use a set appropriate for video; simple, bright and interesting backgrounds that are not too busy or moving work best. Make sure to inform the presenter(s) of the backdrop color so they can avoid blending into the background.

7. Gather strategic audience information

Consider how the registration content ties back to your overall communication strategy and select guestbook fields that help deliver the ROI of your webcast. For communication strategies designed for lead generation, which registration content will help qualify a good lead? For company-wide town hall meetings, does it help to identify the office location or business unit of each viewer? For investor communications, do you want to capture their stock ownership status? When requiring fields in registration, stick to less than five or you run the risk of turning people away. On the Web, your webcast has a global reach—be sure to familiarize yourself with your audience’s online preferences and sensitivities. Keep in mind that people in the U.S. are more willing to give up an email address than a phone number.

8. Get feedback

Especially if you are new to online video, capturing post-event information is an extremely important process that is often overlooked. A post-event survey may provide valuable feedback for your efforts and increase ROI. Develop focused questions with measurable answers. “Did you like the webcast?” will yield less valuable responses than asking viewers to rate each of the content sections using a Likert scale. Don’t forget to ask technical questions such as “Were you able to view this webcast?” or “Indicate a preferred format for this message in the future (e.g. e-mail, webcast, conference call)” to gain insight into how your audience would like best to receive your communications. To measure retention, ask the viewer to recall the key points of the message. Low scores on this question demonstrate a need to better organize and present your content.

Remember that audience collaboration does not end with a live event, but extends into the webcast archive. Consider posting a Frequently Asked Questions section to the webcast archive and offer an e-mail link or form for post-event inquiries and sales leads. Companies who do not get feedback from attendees put themselves at risk of repeating mistakes, and are slower to make small changes that can result in a more positive viewer experience.

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