

Best Practices in Webinars

They can and will provide great sales leads, if ...

PIXION **PictureTalk**

Corporate Headquarters:
Pixion, Inc.
4234 Hacienda Drive, Suite 200
Pleasanton, CA 94588-2721
(925) 467-5300 main
(925) 467-5310 fax

www.picturetalk.com

Webinars — Web seminars — are powerful and cost-effective tools that can deliver qualified prospects right into the hands of your sales people. But there are several “ifs.” They must be approached thoughtfully, carried out intelligently and the leads they produce must be properly pursued.

Following are some strategies for ensuring better results from your Webinar events.

Understand the value

Start by making sure everybody in your organization understands the importance of what you are about to do. Once they see results this will be easier. In the meantime they need to understand Webinars can deliver — if your company does them well. Your marketing, sales and technical people will all need to get behind the production. Put the same or more effort into your Webinars that you would put into any crucial piece of marcom. Your Webinars may become most of what a prospect knows about your company. They can be a very influential experience, for better or worse.

Think of your own experiences

What were the most interesting Webinars you attended? Why were they interesting? Did you drop off before the end? Why? Remember, you're not a lot different than the people you want to attract to your own event. You're busy — but if somebody is going to tell you something valuable, you just might make time, especially if you can attend while you're eating lunch and checking e-mail.

It's all about the content

As you examine your own experience certain themes will emerge. One is that good content is an essential foundation. Throttle back on your marketing instincts. Yes, the idea is to produce leads, but that won't happen if your Webinar becomes an infomercial for your company. Pick a subject that truly speaks to the audience you want to reach, and treat it as a chance to teach something of value. If it is of value the audience will come. So ease their pain. Tell them how they can solve a problem or four. The more useful and concrete the information the better.

Vendors

A Google search for “Webinars” produces something like 1.3 million hits. Most aren't vendors, but there are a lot of choices. Look for a vendor the same way you'd vet any important service. Ask colleagues. Attend a Webinar if you haven't, and ask the company that sponsored it about their experience. Keep in mind that some vendors will

handle everything as a turnkey operation, including reminding attendees of your upcoming event.

The main attraction(s)

Many companies believe it's a good idea to get a "name" speaker. But there are divergent theories on this, even among companies quite experienced with Webinars. Some believe it's the topic, not the name, that attracts the audience. Further, if you bring in somebody from the outside, you set him or her up as "the" expert. Why not use your own people, thus setting yourselves up as the expert? There's also middle ground. Even if you bring in a known quantity from the outside, you can still have your own people take part by mixing and matching. Many companies believe having two presenters is a better idea anyway. If necessary, you can offer to share leads with a presenter from the outside rather than pay them. If the speakers you really want are reluctant, invite them for a roundtable discussion instead of asking for a formal presentation.

The format

Keep it to no more than an hour, and keep it moving. Have your moderator welcome everybody and give brief biographies of the speakers. Consider having two subject matter experts, with each giving a talk of no more than 15 minutes, showing slides as they go but not reading from them. Then go for a roundtable discussion of maybe 15 minutes. This could cover live questions or questions submitted during registration. Asking attendees to submit questions during registration is a good strategy. Your moderators will love you for it because it gives them time to prepare, and it tells you exactly what your audience wants to know.

Regarding the slides, ask your speakers to submit them in advance for editing. Make sure they are not too marketing oriented – make sure they're going to advance the Webinar in the right direction. Use big type, keeping in mind people are going to be seeing them on their computers. Be brutal with the editing. No fluff, no marketing, nothing but real information. You probably don't want any more than 30 slides per entire hour.

Do at least one rehearsal, and consider doing two. When the big day arrives, assign one of your people to time the event. The moderator will flip slides, introduce speakers, and send instant messages to speakers who need any sort of prompting. It's not a good idea to let speakers flip their own slides. They tend to get mixed up. The physical location of your speakers is important as well. If they don't have a lockable office, have them use a lockable conference room.

Another option is prerecorded Webinars, which can be less stressful to conduct and less expensive.

Consider running a series of Webinars — each adhering to a theme, but related in some way that offers continuity while also keeping everybody's interest. A series of Webinars will likely pull more and better qualified leads.

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Some companies also schedule the same Webinar for twice or even three times in the same day, which makes attending more convenient.

Make provisions to have your Webinar recorded. It may well generate business on your Web site, and you can send those who don't make it to the event a link to it.

Picking a date and time

Be careful. If you chose the wrong date, weekday or time, people will be too busy. Eliminate the days directly before and after holidays. Mondays and Fridays are usually crazy — again, think of your own work week. What about trade shows or industry events? Having your Webinar before or after a relevant event could add interest, but during could be fatal. Be sure to factor in all possible time zones. If possible schedule the event between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. local time. People like to use their lunch for these things. It helps them feel as if they're doing a couple things at once.

Promotion – a cornerstone

The question of when and how to promote the event and to accept reservations is open for debate, but only open so far open. One generally accepted rule is to start promotion 30 days away. Go much longer and your prospects may forget or lose interest. If you go much under 30 days you won't have enough time to do the proper promotions.

Be sure to employ all your existing relationships. Trade groups, associations, affiliates, vendors and customers are all fair game. You may even find a co-sponsor among them. Maybe they have newsletters that can publicize the event. Maybe you can put a registration link on their Web site. Companies also try direct mail, with some reporting less-than-stellar results.

Determine how you can best merge promotion of your event into your normal marketing program. Often there is little or no additional cost. Also do some solo promotions. They can be simple and easy. As long as they mention the content in a way that stresses the value and provide an easy way to respond, they should help. You can even offer your audience some tips on Webinar viewing:

- Check with your system administrator, if you have one, to make sure a firewall won't block you from attending. This may not be necessary, as companies that host Webinars can often automatically assess whether you are ready to go when you register.
- If necessary, download what you need in advance.
- Book the time in your calendar so you don't forget.

Do not make the registration long or cumbersome. Quick and easy maximizes attendance. Get complete contact information, reinforce the value of the event, ask about the source of the lead and get a bit of qualifying information. All promotions should have the same registration page link so you're working with a single database.

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Here's an important tip that is often overlooked: send reminders. If you don't, the majority of your prospects may simply forget. First send a "thank you for registering" email prompting everybody to mark his or her calendars. Follow this with another email reminder about seven to 10 days before the event. You could even have somebody do a phone call reminder the day before, but if that's too much you might want to send a final email an hour before. Only you can decide if this many contacts consist of "overload" for your audience.

The wrap


At the end of the event ask everybody to fill out a quick survey, providing feedback and more qualifying information. Give this survey some thought. It can give you a lot of information about your attendees' interest, pain points, and future interests. If you see themes emerge in their suggestions, pay attention.

It was a success. Now what?

Put your Webinar in your Web site and send those who didn't make it an email with a link. Send everybody who attended a "thanks for coming" email.

What to do with those leads

Get the information to your sales force, and do not permit them to focus only on the low-hanging fruit. That is, don't forget about the people cannot or will not be immediately closed on. You should have in place a plan for pursuing everybody who took the time to respond to your promotion and give you his or her contact information. If they went that far they are good prospects. Have a plan for staying in touch with them.

Now you're ready to get the most out of your Webinars. Prepare properly and execute well and they'll work hard for you. 

Event Checklist

Event Date _____

Event Time _____

Name of Event _____

# of Days Until Event	Task Due Date	Responsible Party	Task	Comments
Prerequisite			Identify Target Audience	Assists in promotional targeting as well as selecting the appropriate presenter and presentation.
Prerequisite			Create Leads Management Process	Your system to manage leads must be in place.
Prerequisite			Determine lead generation objectives (quantifiable), as part of overall marketing objectives	Ultimately, this drives your costs associated with your web seminar.
Prerequisite			Secure internal presenter or third party analyst/presenter	
Prerequisite			Client to advise on internal project manager	The internal POC for event manager to contact.
26			Schedule presenter	Train speaker on how to use PictureTalk
26			Schedule Webinar Date & Time	Secure date & time with client.
26			Schedule web conferencing visual/audio functionality and establish meeting date within the platform; set up web conference with all details	Pixion will advise on web conferencing details. Regarding audio: ensure setup of both US and international phone numbers. NOTE: you will have to prepare all email communications at this time, including "thank you for registering" and reminder e-mails. DO NOT ESTABLISH URL UNTIL YOUR COPY TO THESE EMAILS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED, LINKS IN PLACE AND APPROVED.
26			Receive presentation from presenter	Need this at this time, as all promotional copy will assist in creating the content that will be delivered.
25			Request Speaker Materials	Speaker introduction, 200 word webinar description, canned Q & A questions, bio & photo of speaker.
25			Create HTML format for Webinar e-vite and (if necessary) design for printed invitation.	You need to have a graphically appealing piece.
25			Design landing page (mini-site) for attendees to view after event.	Visitors will go here for more information, download presentation, any special white paper offers, etc. You will be able to measure effectiveness of presentation. This is also where they can click on a link to listen to recorded presentation.
25			Define and secure offer	The incentive for targets to register.
23			Secure presenter approval of copy	Copy only at this time.
22			Secure all internal approval for e-vite and printed invitation copy.	Need client approval of e-vite copy.
22			Convert e-vite copy into HTML and lay out e-vite	Merge the copy with the layout for e-vite and printed invitation.
22			Create text e-vite from HTML invite.	Text version required for electronic email (not everyone will accept HTML mail).
22			Content for landing page is approved and posted	This copy should be short, compelling and in keeping with the rest of your company website.
20			Establish tracking code.	If Client has CRM system.
19			Secure list sources and lists	External and internal lists.
18			Check e-vites and registration links	Does everything work?

# of Days Until Event	Task Due Date	Responsible Party	Task	Comments
17			Notify third party mailing house	For sending printed invitations.
16			Prepare response e-mails "Webinar Don't Forget", "It's Today", "Thank You for Attending", "Sorry We Missed You" e-mails.	Send to registration management group.
16			Test e-vite mailing with online mailing system	For the internal list.
16			Send HTML to Sales team covering e-mail	You want the team to start promoting the event.
16			Prep Inside Sales: intent, content, objectives, follow-up and scripts	The group that will most likely perform follow-up.
16			Conduct mailings	Out the door
12			Process registrations	Begin processing
10			Evaluate: should another mailing go out?	Measure against objective
8			Create post-event questionnaire	For the post event questionnaire, you may want to consider the use of WebSurveyor (www.websurveyor.com). Regardless, have the post-event questionnaire focus on the user experience, the value of the content, gauge interest in your products/services, and request recommendations for future events.
7			Establish PictureTalk Technical Support for this event.	So if any attendee has a problem they can contact someone directly at Pixion.
7			Finalize and prepare audio questions or any polling questions	You want your audience's questions & polling questions to be set-up or frame the discussion for each section of the presentation.
7			Finalize your presentation	Put it to bed so that you are prepared to practice your presentation. Note: Your title page should include the audio line & technical support line at Pixion.
3			Presenter Preparation	Pixion will act as a facilitator so as to guide the activities of the presenter, and prepare the presenter for the webinar presentation. This includes: (1) Coaching & training the presenter(s): This includes review of presenter's content/presentation, advising the presenter accordingly, as well as review/advising the presenter as to webinar procedures, i.e., what to expect during the webinar. Pixion will prepare and walk the presenter through all aspects of the session. (2) Create opening and closing dialogue copy to be presented at the webinar session, and ensure delivery of this dialogue during the webinar session. This includes introducing the presenter and topic, closing out the presentation, delineating the call to action for the audience, introducing the Q&A session, and closing out the session. (3) Performing webinar set-up, preparation and managing the session: presenters are properly trained on web conferencing platform, audio is properly set-up, etc.
1			Conduct dry run	Work the kinks out of the presentation, and if multiple presenters, ensure presentation coordination. Pixion recommends two individuals run the event, and the other respond to online chat as well as manage the polling features. Ensure the presenter is comfortable with using PictureTalk prior to event.
1			Send out reminder email and don't forget to registrants	

# of Days Until Event	Task Due Date	Responsible Party	Task	Comments
Showtime			Three hours prior to webinar, send out the reminder e-mail	Ensure maximum attendance
Showtime			Assign a customer service representative to assist with your webinar.	PictureTalk Support - (925) 467-5353
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / PictureTalk Webinar Assistance	PictureTalk will set the pace of your webinar appropriately, which can be easily done using PictureTalk's feedback mechanism that let's the presenter know that everyone is in synch with the presentation.
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / Public & Private Chat Features	Keep your presentation interactive by using both private and public chat, messages can be sent with the click of your mouse without having to type each message.
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / Polling Questions	Create a poll to ask the audience, get instant feedback during the event. This will allow you to make any adjustments required to make sure you are getting the appropriate message to your audience. This is also going to be very useful information to have ost webinar and it will help keep the attention of the audience because they have an action themselves to take care of.
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / Annotation Features	Bring attention to important points in your presentation. When showing a PowerPoint slide use the annotation feature in PictureTalk to highlight important bullets that you want to make sure your attendees take notice. Or, place a check mark or star next to each bullet so the audience follows along. It's important to have a good speaker but also have action in the presentation to keep the audience engaged.
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / Share Active Content	Whether you are a software company that is releasing a new version of their software application that wants to demo it live to the audience or an author of a new book that wants to scan a few pages and read a few excerpts while the audience is following along as you are draggin the curser across the page. The more active you can keep the presentation the more likely you wil keep the audience engaged.
Showtime			Conduct Webinar / Record Webinar	Record the event - not everyone will be able to make the time you schedule but they may still be interested in viewing your presentation. Archive the seminar and make the recording available for future playback. Recordings can be managed for playback directly for the PictureTalk server and tracked in the same way as the live event or can be recorded in either Windows Media or QuickTime format that can be accessed from webpage or even distributed on a CD.
Showtime			Monitor Attendance	Periodically monitor the attendance online so as to determine presentation "staying power".
Showtime			Send "Thank You for Attending" e-mail with the event questionnaire	Follow-up with phone calls
Showtime			Send "Sorry We Missed You" e-mails with link to review presentation	Follow-up with phone calls
Postshow			Link to recording of presentation (if appropriate) given to webmaster.	Link tested on web-page.
			Process Offer	
			Evaluate cost per lead against objectives	
			Evaluate cost per meeting against objective	