WEBINAR AS AN IMPORTANT INTERACTIVE TOOL

The Internet, from the late 1980's when it acquired its modern form, has introduced considerable improvements in all sectors of human interaction, education, technology, communication and online entertainment, provided it is used wisely and with moderation. It acts as an affordable source that enhances the accessibility to research and knowledge, bridging the communication gap thus enabling the distribution of information in a much easier, efficient and effective way.

Along with the reserves of knowledge, internet has some extra resource material such as interactive lessons and educational games which prove to be incredibly useful for educational purposes assisting teachers as well as parents to acquire access to new teaching possibilities and methods, expanding their own knowledge which they may transfer to their students and children, while students have the possibility to use the internet to convert their theoretical knowledge into practical.

As the technology is prevailing, many new teaching methods are emerging in the education sector such as online courses and interactive teaching.

Before proceeding further, it is important to refer to the basic human aspects of human communication:
1. Attracting people who are interested in the specific topic presented
2. Engaging them with interesting and interactive content
3. Delivering value that will unquestionably improve life and resolve issues

The scope of this paper is to analyse the importance of the use of webinars as an important interactive tool. It will present an effective method of creating a webinar that will benefit anyone who has content of knowledge or product to share. A webinar is an online seminar that includes an audio and visual presentation. Some major advantages of the use of webinars are outlined below:

- It is a method of teaching as well as marketing and provides the perfect opportunity to present a topic or demonstrate a product by connecting in a very interactive manner with people across the globe.
- Implementing webinars in a company's strategic marketing plan can help you improve your customer base, providing the opportunity to share important information about the company, products or services.
- It is an excellent opportunity to create a sense of event around your values, ideas and information.
- A unique bond with the audience is forged, since watching you on live camera is the next best thing to seeing you in person. Thus it enables engagement by having interaction with the presenter as well as between the webinar attendees.
- When you appear as a presenter you give value to the viewer and in this way uplifting feelings like self-confidence and sharing are cultured and enhanced.
- By demonstrating expertise, you have the opportunity to become an authority on the subject in question, thus building personal branding and creating loyal followers.
- Online events, like webinars, are like magnets that can generate leads and new subscriptions by increasing your blog traffic.
- It is a method of generating income by reviewing, promoting, or talking about a product in a webinar, thus making sales and earning income.

- An amazing two-way flow of information with a sense of fulfillment is experienced when there is a positive and giving interaction between the trainer/presenter and the trainees/attendees.
- As the webinars can be recorded during the presentation, the video recording can be used as a very important promotion and sales tool and knowledge delivery medium.

Eliminating Fear and Initial Hesitation

Like any new technology for those not accustomed to it, a webinar may initially seem like a fearful/intimidating challenge. However, it is universally recognised that if we wish to rise above average and leave the crowd of mediocrity behind, we require grit and massive action. Once we face our fears, we are open to a world of opportunities on our highway to personal and professional evolution. For some people, the easiest and most effective way to start presenting in webinars is to watch for a long period of time successful webinars from professionals presenting webinars and have the knowledge and expertise to show the way.

Webinar Software Selection

Once you understand the importance of presenting in webinars and you feel confident that it is a tool you wish to make use of, it is advisable to search in the web for the various webinar software available. There are many excellent software in the market today offering various plans depending on the number of presenters and attendees allowed and the features permitted to use in each plan. All these webinar software have their strong and weak points so you should make a careful choice on the plan and the software to use, based on your needs at that time. An important point to consider is that some software are more user friendly than others while some offer amazing features which may be unnecessary for you at this point. It is recommended to find a software that is among the top ten list (many comparisons are found on the web), one which is generally considered as easy for any newcomer to this technology to learn and use and which offers a free trial period including most basic features required, so that you may start practicing before you are in the position to make a good presentation. Such a webinar software is ClickMeeting which was the one used for the purpose of STAMP webinar series.
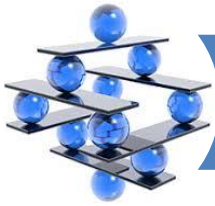
Webinar Basic Structure

Webinar time structure

The webinar is recommended to last from around 40 minutes to an absolutely maximum duration of one hour as at that point the attention span of the attendees will start deteriorating in addition to the fact that statistically around 44% prefer to watch a webinar with 30-45 minutes duration while only 10% attend sessions of one hour. In general Tuesdays as well as Wednesdays and Thursdays are preferable for attending webinars.

A time structure for a forty-minute webinar may be as given below:

- 5 minutes for the introduction and personal story
- 25 minutes for the main presentation
- 10 minutes for the Q&A – Wrap up

Webinar session structure

1. Title/topic, start/end time, speaker photo and name, brief overview of tools for audience.
2. Open question
3. Agenda
4. Slides for each sections (3-5 sections)
5. Wrap up
6. Q&A

Webinar creation process

1. Create a rough outline of the introduction and the main presentation with headings, subheadings, and bullet points.
2. Decide on an approximate length of each section so that you can work out how many slides are required. In order to create slides, you need some presentation software. Depending on whether you use a PC or a Mac, you can use PowerPoint or Keynote to create slides. Another option is to use the Google Slides app, which you can access on Google Drive for free. A key technical point is that your slide presentation needs to appear in a new window. Both PowerPoint and Google Slides have settings for this, but using Keynote is more complicated.
3. When you create slides, you initially use text only with big bold headlines.
4. Once slides are created, images should be incorporated to give extra emphasis on the content.
5. As you show each slide, you will be speaking to your audience, so it is better that you create a script of the scenario to follow. You will be more confident if you have the words you want to say in front of you. Combination on the same screen -especially if the screen is large in size- of the Webinar tool page and the Word file next to it with the presentation data in detail, will greatly facilitate the flow of your presentation without worries of forgetting important points.
6. During the last five-minute stretch, you should always end with a call to action. If your webinar is educational or inspirational, you should recommend one simple action your viewers can do that day.
7. It is advisable to ask your attendees to sign up for your email list or like/follow your social media page. If you are using the webinar for selling a product or service, you would rather use the last five minutes before the Q&A to explain how the product/service may assist in

resolving problems described in the presentation, and encourage people to buy it by the end of the presentation.

Importance of Trust

Before analysing the various stages in preparing a successful webinar it is imperative to give some important suggestions with the objective to build and foster trust.

1. Proper appearance according to the audience and subject
1. A technical rehearsal before the actual presentation is extremely important. It is expected that you are absolutely prepared in order to give your audience a compelling reason to stay. The best way to say the right thing in a webinar is to rehearse beforehand, to actually practice what will be presented.
2. Being punctual and strict with the timeframe indicates and verifies professionalism and shows respect to the attendees.
3. Craft *__your__* story and why you are passionate about your topic (establish credibility); put down your point(s) and make sure that you stick to it. Avoid empty statements (e.g. this is really important) but establish your credibility with hard facts instead. Avoid doing a sales pitch for yourself, your product/service or your company/organisation but rather show clearly that your intention is to offer value to your audience.
4. Respect the audience by focusing entirely on the task of performing the webinar, without any distractions at all.
5. Treat the audience in the same manner as having a phone conversation with a respected colleague.
6. Inform your audience about the structure of the presentation from the beginning so that they have a clear mindset on the subject. If that is the case, say to the audience that they can only send messages in the chat room and audio and visual is ON only for the presenter.
7. Be fluent from the start, with no hesitation or sense of insecurity. Have a point and stick to it which means that every question, analogy, metaphor, and piece of information should lead to or reinforce that point.
8. Create live presentation environment by engaging the audience and asking questions for quick replies to "stir the water" and "wake up" the audience. Develop the presentation so that it helps to build and retain rapport and interest. Credit people by name when they ask questions. Employ/refer to their comments and questions during the webinar.
9. Develop and maintain visual interest that reinforces the written content.
10. Be enthusiastic, expressive and amusing with a clear voice at the right pace and tone.
11. Master questions and answers and chat to give the audience real value.
12. Avoid inappropriate manners and body language usually adopted in daily face to face delivery.

PowerPoint Presentation

Process of creating a PowerPoint presentation
1. Brainstorm
2. Clarify
3. Synthesize and discard
4. Order and write
5. Edit and write again

Six facts for PowerPoint presentation content
- People can't stop themselves reading (danger to lose your audience, or it becomes frustrated).
- People do not listen well online (so put any directions and questions in clear simple writing). You need to make sure each slide has <u>realised value</u> for your audience.
- Images, research videos, examples etc. have a very important impact. You must watch out for the emotional impact in choosing your photos and videos.
- Variety provokes attention.
- Our eyes follow motion.
- Words work. We need to choose our titles and sub-headers wisely.

PowerPoint preparation tips
- Prepare a slide before the title, stating the presentation title and start time, name and affiliation of speaker, start and run time, photo (if there is no video cam on the speaker) so that attendees know that they are in the right place.
- Have a slide to provoke interest while at the end it acts as a summary. During the process it acts as a compass to show where you are in the running order.
- The webinar is not the place to convey a lot of new information that demand instant digestion or reflection – stay constantly on the move.
- Content: one rule: Be useful! The actionable, practical and real is always preferable to the theoretical.

Virtual Classroom Presentation

Six key roles that need to be filled for a successful webinar
- Presenter (creates and delivers)
- Host (facilitates the event, does introductions, watches chat)
- Producer (chooses the topic, schedules rehearsals)
- Marketer (promotion, brings in the right audience)
- Administrator (technical issues)
- Attendee (needs clear expectations and an understanding of the webinar's message)

The use of a facilitator next to the presenter who may deal with the technical issues, and watch out for the questions and text chat while the presenter is speaking, is advisable especially when there is a large number of attendees participating in the event.

Six basic elements in a webinar presentation starred in a sequence of importance
- Content *****
- Voice *****
- Interaction *****
- Anecdotes (otherwise it is a lecture) ****
- Structure ***
- Visuals **

Technology and preparation

Technology is possibly the first important factor to consider in creating a successful webinar and should be given the highest importance before even beginning the preparation of the webinar schedule. Other than the choice of the webinar tool used for your webinar, you need to make sure that your internet bandwidth available from your internet provider, offers very high upload and download speeds to ensure an uninterrupted webinar with high quality audio and video presentations. Additionally the following points are recommended:

- Use of a high resolution external camera mounted at or slightly above the eye level.
- Use of good quality microphone or for more professional presentations use of a quality handset. In general it is recommended to use head phones to have a steady voice when turning your head. Using a headset will also ensure avoiding echo noises especially when a video is shown.
- Have another laptop or computer as back-up.
- Prefer internet connection with Ethernet cord; have more than one point of internet access

General preparation points

- Use of appropriate background.
- Use of excellent lighting of the room.
- Always have a glass of water next to you.
- Have a print out of your presentation with you.
- Always have all your folders uploaded in the webinar tool and all files and programs ready and open on the Desktop before the start of the presentation to save time and make sure everything is in order.
- Make sure any mobile phone sound or other distractions are turned off.
- Have more than one method of contact in case a problem arises.

Warm up tips before starting the presentation

1. Stand up as you speak
2. Practice reading aloud
3. Listen intensely to yourself and what you are saying
4. Find a critical friend you trust to offer his/her opinion for every step

Rehearsal

In the recipe for success, preparation is an indispensable ingredient so, apart from the creation of your webinar presentation it is also important to rehearse your presentation. There are three types of rehearsals:

1. Script building rehearsal; you repeat your words until you are happy with your keyword script and the flow of content.
2. Technical rehearsal; testing the beginning, the ending, the sound and any transitions between speakers on the same equipment you will be using when going live.
3. Dress rehearsal

Considering that the sessions can be recorded and the webinar tools offer the opportunity for their users to record as many test sessions as they wish, the test recording is a perfect way to watch yourself in action before the actual event and correct as well as improve certain aspects considered important.

Grab Attention

It is very important that you grab the attention of your audience immediately but it is just as important to maintain their attention at high levels. After a strong opening, it is imperative that the momentum continues. Attention drifts after 10 minutes of watching, therefore many professional presenters need to implement ways to keep their audience interested and motivated such as the following:

- Catch their attention immediately: You only have seconds to get the attention of your audience.
- Begin with something spectacular.
- Have passion: Present a topic that ignites passion and enthusiasm and is reflected in your presentation.
- Be amusing: Use humor to engage your audience
- Be relevant: Make the demonstration or presentation relevant to your audience by using descriptive language with metaphors and similes, making the why, how and what of the presentation, absolutely clear to the attendees.
- Use clever and catchy header and subheads which create curiosity and surprise to the audience and by demonstrating personality and enhancing emotion, enable them to continue participating.
- Make the presentation fun and interactive.
- Use slides in moderation preferably using one slide for each major idea avoiding oral repetition of what is written but rather elaborating on the subject.
- Use plenty of animation and images relevant to the webinar. Most people have a limited attention span and incorporating images is a natural way to gain the audience's attention.
- Use videos to transmit mass of information and create emotions in the most efficient way
- Use case studies and stories relevant to the content as the tie of what is presented is always more understandable and emotionally fulfilling when connected to real life.
- Ask for the attendees' opinion ahead of time. This involves the attendees in the webinar and provides you with the opportunity to address questions and maximize audience understanding. It would be a good idea to insert some of these questions into your webinar presentation.
- Limit information: Provide a basic overview of an array of relevant topics or an in-depth analysis of one specific/specialised topic.
- Use demonstrations relevant to your topic.
- Make use of interactive icebreakers whenever appropriate.

Audience Engagement

The matter of engagement is of utmost importance as it generates a strong emotional and personal connection with the presenter and the content, elevating enthusiasm and passion. Considering that the attendees of a webinar are very quick to react in remaining or exiting the webinar class, the presenter needs to make use of his/her personal abilities and professional presentation structure

- Use personal stories
- Smile
- Vary the tone and pitch of your presentation
- Use gestures and move while speaking
- Speak to participants by name, to create a small-meeting feeling in a large group
- Maintain eye contact

Additionally you should also make use of any built-in tools offered in the webinar software to be more creative in order to facilitate engagement: Webinar attendees can become passive so these tools, when utilized wisely and with a scheduled plan, will maintain the attendees fully engaged until the end of the presentation.

- Collect questions for Q&A using the Chat feature.
- Pass the camera and microphone to a guest or even to a participant; (it is advisable to set this up in advance and make sure their technology supports such participation).
- Query your audience with the built-in online polling feature. Announce results instantly!
- Play a brief YouTube video to enrich your presentation content and ignite emotions.
- Share screen to demonstrate processes on running programs (Excel, Prezi, Photoshop, etc.) guiding and possibly training attendees through documents, websites or projects.
- Use the whiteboard functionality to enhance webinar presentations by drawing live on screen thus allowing presenters to add to the visual content, or even allow some attendees to share and interact in the presentation.

Webinar Promotion

It is important to create a buzz around the event in order to increase the number of participants:

- Get participants to register for your event by setting up a special email list with a corresponding signup form to use for registrations. You can do this easily if you're using an auto-responder service like Aweber or Mailchimp or create a Google form. You can create an automatic response that gives them the URL of the page where the webinar is embedded.
- Write a blog post that gets readers fired up about your webinar topic. Create anticipation by opening up questions in the post with the promise of answering them in the upcoming webinar. Place the webinar registration form or the link for online registration at the bottom

of the post and request people to register. You may reach out to other bloggers to let them know about the event too and possibly assist in your promotion.

- Email your subscriber list. As done for the webinar scheduled day, emails are preferably sent on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Once you have announced the webinar on your blog, you need to send out a series of emails reminding the people on your main list to register. One recommended way of reminding your audience is to send a sequence of three emails, one week before the webinar, two days prior and the last one, two hours before the webinar.

- Use of social media to inform your followers and friends of your upcoming event possibly requesting them to share the post on their timeline so that the word is spread.

Conclusion

As technology is moving in an exponential rate, it is more dangerous to be ignorant than to have an open mind on the current trends if we wish to make use of our maximum potential on the way to mastery. The need for effective communication which facilitates the flow of information and understanding between people and organisations through different media using all the channels and networks, has never been more important in our everyday interactions. Webinars are taking the digital marketing world by storm allowing real-time, multicast video conferencing or audio conferencing events to occur enabling people from remote locations around the globe to connect and interact, establishing huge marketing awareness and stronger bonds between people in the process.