

Greg Ward's Top Tips for Virtual Presenting

Welcome to the future! With the swift and necessary rise in virtual meetings, online events and digital presenting, there's a few things, well within the grasp of even the newest online meeting platform participant that will significantly enhance your experience, and at the same time, increase your impact and engagement with your fellow meeting members or online audience.

Set up early

Murphy's Law will strike at the most inconvenient moment (in fact, that's a core tenant of Murphy's Law!). Preparation is the initial key to a successful presentation. Test, test, and test again. Double-check your audio and video, paying close attention to your audio, onscreen positioning, lighting and what might be visible behind you.

Audio

We've all been in meetings with video issues. "Oh, it's bandwidth!" we hear time and again. As a rule, people will forgive jerky, stop-start video, or even with complete dropouts – but we are not so accommodating when it comes to audio. The trick here is in creating the best possible playing field as a presenter with the equipment you have to hand. First thing is to create a zero-sound environment as best you can. By this, I mean the only thing that should be heard in the room is your voice. To achieve this, take some time to eliminate sound sources that might impact. The air conditioner hum, other devices, mobile phones (more on that later). Cats. And for best case, always use some form of monitoring device – headphones or earbuds to remove the echo/feedback potential from open speakers.

Microphones

If you have access to a microphone to plug into your computer, then use it. The closer you can get the mic to your mouth, the better. This lessens the challenges of feedback loops and we hear a much fuller version of your voice rather than losing the top and bottom frequencies due to distance. Don't get me wrong – most modern laptop mics do a halfway decent job, and you will certainly be heard - but for rich tonality, an external mic is necessary. Headsets with microphones attached are a valuable resource.

Mobile phones (and other distractions)

Just as in a face to face meeting, having your mobile phone open and referencing it/checking messages etc through your online meeting or presentation has an effect, both on yourself and on your fellow attendees. As a presenter (unless in a webinar format), it is immediately apparent who amongst the attendees is paying attention. And if you are the presenter and juggling multiple devices – stop it. Focus on the one place where your attention matters – down the barrel of your camera.

Webcam

The camera is a window into your world for the attendees, and that is exactly where your focus should be. One of the main challenges that people face in digital presenting is that suddenly, we have been given a mirror to how we look while presenting that we do not experience in a face to face setting. This can make the most seasoned presenter experience a new level of discomfort, and for the less experienced it can seriously impact



your message. The trick here is to practice – get comfortable in being uncomfortable, and train yourself to look not simply AT the camera, but THROUGH the camera – that’s where your audience is, not down on the screen. Hints? Try attaching a photo of a loved one just above and slightly behind the camera – the moment you look at them, you experience a subconscious feeling of love and comfort – and this translates as a feeling down the camera to your audience. And, although you may be presenting to hundreds, remember that each person is experiencing you, individually, so focus on making your presence personal to them.

Eyeline

Use whatever means you can to raise your camera (either a webcam, or the whole laptop if the camera is in your computer) to the level of your eyes. Any old books, boxes or more will do, even as a temporary measure. We converse best with those on our level, and the simple act of looking up, or looking down on someone (or feeling we are being looking down upon) changes how we feel, and our perceptions of those with whom we are talking. Whether you sit, or stand for your event is a personal choice, but whichever way you choose to present, modify your camera eyeline to match (and spare a thought as to how this placement of your device may impact on your audio too)

Lighting

You may be in a position where you have limited control over lighting but spare a thought as to how you look on screen. Every light source creates shadow, so take a moment during your preparation phase (remember point number one?) and look at yourself on screen with an eye to detail – where does the light fall on you? From only one side? Try adjusting your direction more towards the light source, and if it is too bright, find a way to diffuse the light if you can with cloth, or even paper can do the trick (remember to keep it well away from hot bulbs though!). If you are backlit, this darkens your image on screen. The best lighting position is in front, approximately 45 degrees above you – if you have a portable lamp, play with positioning, trying small, incremental changes, re-checking each time on screen to see the difference.

To green or not to green...

Some, but not all online platforms have built-in green screen technology which allows the user to hide their background environment, depending on the age of your computer and the speed of the processor. On Zoom, if used without a physical green screen behind the user, this translates to a blurry outline around the person, which has the effect of drawing attention to the technology, not the message. In this case, it is better to modify your real background for best effect, or if possible, move location to take advantage of a better backdrop. Where the virtual background becomes valuable, is where you have a physical green screen behind you, and specific lighting setup to take advantage of it (screen around 1.5 metres behind you, 2 lights to light the screen, and two lights in front of you to light yourself). With carefully selected virtual backgrounds (Google away!) and with care in the setup, you can achieve life-like backgrounds which significantly enhance your presenting.

...and finally

The above tips are tried and tested to enhance the impact of your messaging to your audience during online presenting, whether you are the presenter, or simply a meeting attendee.

Would you like to further support your team or Association members? Call +64 27 285 3310 or click [here](#) to email Greg Ward for presentation and speaking options, as well as coaching on digital delivery.

