

Keeping Attention on a Webinar

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Many people host webinars or short presentations on various topics via the internet. The audience dials in at a particular time and listens to a speaker while viewing a slide show. Typically, webinars last sixty to ninety minutes. The problem many speakers find with webinars is the lack of interaction. Since they cannot see people, they are unsure whether people are interested. There are three solid tips that maximize attention.

Pausing

First, the speaker should be aware that there is a time delay as the audience moves from slide to slide. With that being the case, the speaker should pause for at least three seconds between slides to allow participants to see the slide and digest it before beginning any commentary.

Pausing is also critical because it allows the speaker's voice to sound more interesting and conversational. Since the audience cannot see the speaker, people read a lot into what they hear in the voice. If the speaker sounds energetic and passionate, the audience is more likely to have the same enthusiasm. Conversely, if the host's voice is a monotone or if it appears that the individual is reading from a script, the audience is likely to be bored or unimpressed.

Pausing has other benefits. With pauses, the speaker can emphasize a particular point or highlight what comes next. Enunciation also becomes clearer because the speaker has time to say all of the syllables in a word. From the listener's perspective, pausing allows people to absorb the explanation and write down any questions.

Previewing

Previewing the next slide is always a good idea on a webinar. It alerts the viewer to what is important about the next slide, and it also shortcuts the time it takes people to understand the slide. For example, a speaker might say: *"On this next slide, you will see the design for Profiler."*

Sometimes, people are viewing the wrong slide or were momentarily distracted. It is a good idea to announce the number of the slide you are currently discussing as you begin and even during the explanation. *"What is important on Slide 11 is what is highlighted in green. Please focus just on the section marked in green right now."*

Prompting

People need prompts. The smart host of a webinar invites interaction with prompts like: *"Understanding this architecture is critical. I want to pause now for questions. I'll start first with you folks in the East; then I will ask the Midwest Region and the West for questions. Ok, what questions do you people out East have?" Or "I know there must be some questions. Please take your phones off mute, identify yourself and ask your questions."*

Webinars are the wave of the future. By remembering the three 'P's of Pausing, Previewing and Prompting, speakers can greatly enhance the effectiveness of their webinars.

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