

What's wrong with today's Webcasts?

THE WEBCAST IS FAST BECOMING a favorite marketing tool, but it's becoming one of the most misused vehicles even more rapidly.

The sins of the poorly done Webcast are many, but the most destructive one is the refusal to create Webcasts with the wants and needs of the audience in mind. In recent months, we've seen companies do the following—and then wonder why attendance and lead-generation were below expectations:

- Promote a particular industry luminary as a panelist after that luminary said he wouldn't participate in the panel. (The marketer later justified the decision, saying the luminary had approved the arrangement. That missed the point. The victim was not the luminary but attendees who signed on based on a false promise.)

- Arrange for a piece of highly desirable content for a select audience, promote it extensively and then place it at the end of a live Webcast as a way to get attendees to stay for the whole event.

When the Webcast was born—just a few years ago—its purpose was to reduce travel and entertainment costs by reducing the number of in-person meetings. As happens to so many things in technology, the Webcast has found a place in our hearts, but not the one originally envisioned.

Ask typical marketers today why they want to conduct a Webcast and you'll rarely get the T&E-reduction answer. You're much more likely to hear about lead generation and an efficient way to communicate topic expertise. But even though the goal of most Webcasts has radically changed, the process hasn't, and that's the problem.

B-to-b marketers still look at the Webcast as a 60-minute, live event, completely ignoring reality. The overwhelming majority of your prospects are not likely to be available to attend your Webcast at the precise hour you've selected. It's the way you present the Webcast to people who visit it on another day—say, two months after the live event—that will have the most

impact on lead generation. The first step: Don't think of the Webcast as a one-hour event. Think of it as a three-month campaign.

That means making the post-production Webcast the best it can be for that format. First, remove the obvious items, such as instructions for posting questions and taking instant polls (which will no longer be relevant after the live event is over). Second, edit the material so that it is as compelling and brief as possible. Third, create a layout that allows for attendees to get in and out of the Webcast in as little time as possible.

It's that third item that often gets the most marketing pushback. "Don't we want to encourage them to stay for as long as possible?" Encourage? Absolutely. Force? No way. How do TV entertainment producers bring in and hold large audiences? They focus rigidly on what the audience wants to see and how it wants to see it. Deliver your material that way, and you'll have your audience.

Give your audience what it wants

Webcast attendees in the b-to-b space want information in as little time as possible. Give them quality data that they need and can't get elsewhere, and you'll win them over. But the first part of that battle is convincing them that you do indeed have that quality data. The best way to convince them is to show them as quickly and cleanly as possible.

When we do a Webcast, the opening post-production screen provides short, explicit written descriptions of every point made. And it gives the attendee the ability to go instantly to that point and then back out. The attendee can view points in any sequence.

Don't limit your Webcast imagination. Who says you need to restrict yourself to what happened during your live event? What if a panelist wants to add to his or her answer? With post-production, that's easy. What if there is a terrific panelist who couldn't make the live event because of a scheduling conflict? Why not add him or her in the post-production version?

GUEST
COLUMN
BY EVAN SCHUMAN

Webcasting Don'ts

- Don't mislead prospective attendees about content by positioning it as informational when it's actually promotional.
- Don't ask participants to spend more time than is necessary. One hour should be the maximum for a live event.
- Don't try to control attendees. The more control that site visitors have, the longer they're likely to stay.
- Don't assume attendees have a high-speed broadband connection. Even employees of Fortune 100 companies rarely have fast connections when they're not in their offices.
- Don't focus all attention and resources on the live Webcast and ignore the rebroadcast version.
- Don't keep the event tightly scripted. If every minute of the event is planned, the audience won't have time to ask important questions and get valuable answers.

Make that post-production event as powerful and information-rich as possible.

Most b-to-b marketers live by their customer profiles, focus group data and whatever insights into their prospects they can obtain. Yet they leave a diamond mine like a Webcast virtually untouched.

In a live event, there's not much you can learn beyond the number of people attending and how long they stay. But in the post-production version, where each point is a separate multimedia file, there are no such restrictions. Want to see how many prospects care about pricing vs. security? U.S. vs. global issues? Scalability vs. stability? A good post-production Webcast tells all, but you must set it up initially to collect these gems.

The Webcast can be a wonderfully powerful marketing tool. But if you don't design it to deliver for your current objectives, the live event is going to end up feeling awfully dead.

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