

# How to be a Webinar Master

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The notes are based on the experience of presenting and chairing several hundred online presentations. As such, it is fairly comprehensive, but by no means complete. Online presentations are still relatively new, and so this is a working document. Things change, and in particular our understanding of how we communicate and learn online is growing. If you have any comment to make on these notes, or would like to contribute your own experience, please contact me at [donald@donaldhtaylor.co.uk](mailto:donald@donaldhtaylor.co.uk) with your comments. You are welcome to quote from these notes and pass them on to others with one condition: please acknowledge Donald H Taylor as the author.

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## ***Introduction***

The essential point about online sessions is this: *the audience's only interaction is via their computer screen*. This may be obvious, but precisely for that reason, it is easy to overlook how wide the implications are.

Because each audience member is separate from each other and from you, three lines of non-verbal communication are removed, lines that we take for granted during a physical presentation. The audience cannot communicate with you non-verbally, nor with each other, nor can you communicate non-verbally with them. The result is that online presentations require you to think very clearly about how you will build rapport with your audience, engage their interest and maintain it.

Online, without your body and face to help you, your voice becomes an important tool. It must be clear, varied and well-modulated. Using a set of wordy PowerPoint slides as a script for ad-libbing is a poor approach when you are physically in front of people. Online it is a disaster. To be a success presenting online you need compelling, well-structured content that involves the audience.

There is not a great deal that is new to learn, but any online presenter will have to remember *not* to use all the habits, tricks and instincts built up over years of exposure to face-to-face delivery. The good news is that anyone can present online, and doing so enables you to do things you cannot easily do in the physical world. These notes examine how you can exploit these to make the most of this exciting medium.

## ***Some key webinar concepts***

Before starting on the practical ‘how to’ of delivering a great online presentation, here is a quick background on some facts that will affect how we develop that presentation.

### **Our noisy, multi-stream information culture**

‘Information culture’ may sound like an academic irrelevance. It isn’t. From the way you watch TV to the way you interact with friends, we live in a noisy, multi-stream information culture. People increasingly expect to be on Twitter at the same time as they watch entertainment shows on TV, or to see multiple streams of information presented when they watch the sports or business news. Whether it’s live voting on talent shows, or TV’s screens simultaneously showing the results of three different sports while discussing a fourth, information-rich culture is now mainstream and consciously or not, your audience expects it.

This profoundly affects the way people attend webinars. Many delegates are used to dealing with plenty of information at once. Some even feel cheated or under stimulated without it. Almost none will expect – as their equivalents 20 years ago might have – to sit quietly and listen to a factual talk for 40 minutes. We will come back to this many times.

### **The delegates’ environment**

Most delegates work in a noisy environment – both literally and figuratively. They are often attending webinars in open plan offices, with other applications as well as the webinar software open on their desks – including email. They may well be interrupted by work colleagues during the event, physically or via the phone. The advantages of webinars in reaching distant people effortlessly come at a cost: the audience may not be fully engaged. This noisy environment is something you will have to take into account when designing your talk. Your presentation will need to be engaging, clear and constantly on the move. Many of your delegates are only ever seconds away from reading their email.

### **The five key roles in a webinar**

A final point. Although this paper is all about delivering great webinars, it is important to remember that delivery is only one of the roles essential to a successful webinar:

1. Presenter – creates and delivers the content
2. Host – facilitates the event
3. Delegate – needs clear expectations and an understanding of webinar etiquette
4. Producer – sets up the event technically, schedules rehearsals, may edit content
5. Marketer – ensures delegates know about the event and turn up

This paper concerns the first of these roles. Papers on the other four are planned for the future.

## ***Four Steps to a Great Online Presentation***

There are four steps to a great online presentation. The most obvious is writing the presentation itself. Equally important, though, is the preparation – from your choice of topic to your rehearsal through to your delivery:

1. **What you say** – decide on the point you want to make and stick to it.
2. **Working the crowd** – structure your presentation to allow you to build rapport, engage interest and maintain it
3. **How you say it** – use your voice well
4. **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse** – this is usually the difference between online success and failure

### ***1. What You Say***

Let's assume you are delivering a one-hour web cast. During this you may only be presenting for some 30 – 35 minutes (see Session Timings below). How will you make those 30 minutes count? Because you don't have body language to rely on, your content becomes much more important than when presenting in person. In fact, it is the essential element. In addition, because your audience does not have the habit of sitting and listening for 30 minutes at a time, you have to be absolutely clear about what you're saying. So the key point of a successful online session is this: **have a point and stick to it**. By "stick to it" I mean that every word of the presentation, every question, every analogy, metaphor and piece of information should lead to or reinforce that point. If it doesn't, throw it out.

When William Goldman wrote the screenplay for the film *A Bridge Too Far*, the tale of the airborne assault on Arnhem, he knew British soldiers had won five Victoria Crosses (the highest British award for gallantry) during the battle. He wrote each into the script then cut them all out. Why? Although each was a dramatic story in its own right, none played a part in the structure of the film he was writing. You have to be as ruthless when writing your presentation – for each point you make, ask yourself: how does this advance my thesis?

### **Your content**

Of course, your thesis and your content will be useful and of interest to the audience, we take that for granted. So will the audience. It's why they turn up. Some considerations on content:

- If in doubt, have too much content rather than too little
- The actionable, practical and real is always preferable to the theoretical
- Avoid hyperbole, spin or marketing

## Assembling your thoughts

It's very common to have a general idea of what you want to say, but to be a little hazy on the core point you want to put across. If this is the case, the worst thing you can do is to start writing a script or building a PowerPoint slide deck – you will begin too far along the creative process. Instead, here's a process that will help you collect your thoughts and assemble them so that you not only know the key point you want to make, you also have the material to support it, and a clear benefit for your audience:

- 1) **Brainstorm** – indulge in the pleasant activity of just writing down on paper everything that you can think of which is associated with the subject. One way of doing this is to use a mind map.
- 2) **Clarify** – now take the time to reflect on what you have written. Underline the most important thoughts, and as you do so your key point should become clear. You should also now be clear on the benefit for your audience in listening.
- 3) **Synthesize and discard** – now that you know your key point, and your proposal to your audience, you can begin to cluster together the headings and thoughts that best support them. For an online presentation, aim for 2 – 5 headings supporting your main point. Discard anything that is superfluous.
- 4) **Order and write** – your cluster of thoughts will suggest an order in themselves. Usually this is one of these: chronological, problem/solution, or cause/effect. Use this to order the headings you developed in stage 3). You are now ready to start writing your slide deck using the tips in the next section to ensure success online.
- 5) **Edit and write again** – while you are rehearsing your presentation, you will find many ways to improve it, in terms of running order and content. Edit your presentation accordingly.

## An Example Structure

In the past, people sat through sermons and plays, listening to rapid delivery, and took it all in. (Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's time was supposed to require just a 'two hour traffic of the stage'. Today it's more likely to last three.) Nowadays people are less aurally practiced, so once you have your point, break it into parts or topics, and signpost each one to the audience, verbally, and with "signposting" slides. In other words, stick to the old adage:

tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em  
tell 'em  
then tell 'em you've told 'em.

There is more on signposts in section 3, under 'Structure and Signposts'.

The questions referred to in this example structure are the *minimum* you should use. You should also include some 'on the fly' questions which they can answer through chat, with a raised hand or a tick or cross, or the response allowed by your chosen presentation tool.

Aim to ask your audience to do something at least every 5 minutes of the presentation. We will refer to this example structure in the following sections.

Slide	Title	Notes
1.	Holding slide	Title of presentation, start time, and invitation for delegates to introduce themselves in the text chat area (if available). Can also contain a brief overview of the tools available to delegates.
2.	Title slide	Slide mentions title, speaker, and timings and perhaps has a photo of you. Introduce yourself <i>briefly</i> (they are not there to hear <i>about</i> you, but <i>from</i> you).
3.	Sound check	“Can you all hear me? Click the tick if you can.” (The significance of this question is explained on page 7)
4.	Survey	“Why are you here?” Invite interaction immediately, and comment sensibly on the results.
5.	Aim of Session	Tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em – <i>and be clear of the benefit to them</i> . Do this by referring straight back to the results of your survey.
6.	Agenda	The structure of the talk
7.	Section title 1	A signpost: “Now we’re going to talk about Topic 1 this is important because ....”
8.	Topic 1 – diagram	
9.	Topic 1 – words	
10.	Question 1	Perhaps use this either to summarise Topic 1 or to lead into Topic 2
11.	Section title 2	“Topic 2, this fits in to the other topics as follows ....”
12.	Question 2	
13.	Topic 2 – demo	Show an application live, or demo some internet activity
14.	Topic 2 – feedback	Gather feedback from audience with online ‘whiteboard’
15.	Section title 3	“Topic 3, this is important because ....”
16.	Topic 3 – screenshot	
17.	Question 3	
18.	Topic 3 – words	
19.	Wrap up	Tell ‘em what you’ve told ‘em.
20.	Q&A Place holder with contact details	

This will make a good 30 minute presentation. The labelling of slides as containing diagrams, words and screenshots is only one example of what they *might* contain. Each section here contains three slides. It could easily contain more, but if you find yourself with more than six slides per section, you may ask yourself if you need cut back your content.

## **2. Working The Crowd**

There are three parts to any presentation, and it is no different online. You need to:

- Build rapport
- Engage the audience
- Maintain interest

Although in this section I refer to slide numbers from the example structure above, I do not want to imply that there is a rigid structure that must be kept to – the slide numbers are included only for reference to the example above.

### **Building Rapport (example structure slide 1)**

Rapport with a physical audience is won or lost very quickly – usually in the first minute or less on stage. The first impressions of a speaker are based on the introduction to them, their body language as they begin to speak, and the manner in which they deliver their first few sentences.

An online rapport is never as strong as one developed in the flesh, but it exists, and it is built by ensuring that your audience feels comfortable that they are in expert hands. Build this trust by ensuring:

- 1) There is a holding slide in the presentation stating presentation title and start time, so that as soon as they are online they know they are in the right place
- 2) You have done a proper technical rehearsal to ensure no software glitches
- 3) You start on time
- 4) Your voice (see section 3) is enthusiastic, at the right pace and confident. Online, your voice is your body language, dress sense, posture and smile rolled into one. Use it well.

For all these reasons, it is a good idea if you are new to online presenting to have a facilitator presenting with you who can deal with any technical issues that come up, and who can – if necessary – be watching out for questions and text chat while you talk. This will enable you to concentrate on presenting. With experience you will find that you can simultaneously be talking, using a keyboard or mouse and responding to points brought up in text chat by yourself.

### **Engaging the Audience (example structure slides 2 – 6)**

I would not spend a lot of time talking over the holding slide. By all means chat to your audience using the text chat box – a good place to allow rapid interaction between people – but do not expose your voice too early, except perhaps to say ‘we’ll be starting in 5 minutes’. The risk of speaking without a presentation or script – especially if you are new

to the medium – is that you may ramble. That would dramatically reduce your chances of building rapport once you begin presenting.

On the title slide, introduce yourself, your background and your topic quickly. Avoid empty statements such as “this is really important” unless you can back them up with solid fact. Be as brief as possible here. Early arrivals could already have been online for 10 minutes or more, and they don’t want a further two minutes on how wonderful you or your company is. They want to get going. Simply handle the basics in about twenty to thirty seconds and move on. The easiest way to do this is to have a script, or at least detailed notes, prepared for your introduction. I do not recommend stating the benefit of attendance to the audience yet. You might miss the mark slightly. Wait until you have some important information from them first – after your first question (see below).

When presenting to a live audience, you might first ask them a few questions in order to understand more about them. Online, I recommend that is the *second* thing you do. First I recommend a sound check – asking (with the words on a slide, too) whether they can hear you. This might sound like a weak opening, but it is useful for several reasons:

- You need to do a sound check anyway, and often people join at the last minute, so the best time for it is just before the presentation begins.
- It gives an immediate chance for the audience to use the response mechanism (quick poll, text box or whatever) that you may use elsewhere in the presentation.
- It sends two messages: you are in control, and this is an interactive presentation. This is not a time for them to catch up on their e-mail.<sup>1</sup>

Having established that you are in control, and having given the audience a chance to practice using the response mechanism, you should now try it out for real with one or two practical survey questions of exactly the type that you would ask a physically present audience. Types of survey question you might ask could include:

- How much experience do you have of x? (Multiple choice answer)
- What are your aims of being here today? (Text chat answer)

In every case, make it clear verbally and on the slide, how you expect the audience to respond – e.g. through text chat or by raising a virtual hand, or whatever. This builds the audience’s confidence in you, and increases the numbers of responses you will receive.

As with any question, respond intelligently to the answers given. “That’s interesting” will not do. Try something like “I can see that a lot of you have reported problems with the ABC software package in the past. That’s more than I would have expected. Let’s look at that now....”

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<sup>1</sup> If you work with a group over a period of time, and establish a listening, focused webinar culture, you can eventually drop this initial sound-check question. The audience will expect to focus on the session.

From this survey, you should be able to segue neatly into next slide – the aim of the session. This is not the title of the presentation, but a single sentence, in bold in the middle of a slide, stating the outcome of the presentation.

For example:

## **Today's Aim**

**To explain the background to the RingStone system and how it can be used to improved customer relationships.**

This is your aim – but not the benefit to the audience. Why not explicitly write the benefit of the session? Because you want to make it as relevant to your audience as possible. As soon as you show this slide, you can give the benefits of the session verbally. This will be a combination of what you believe the benefits will be, and comments based on the results of the survey. Be as specific as you can without being insensitive. You might say for example: “So, Jeff, if as you say you aim to raise your customer satisfaction statistics, this will be of benefit to you”. Or, “This will be of assistance to the 55% of you who said that they felt they were not using most of the functionality offered by RingStone.”

As with any presentation, the aim of this is clarity. The audience now knows what you aim to achieve. They know why they are there, and they have a clear reason for listening over the next hour.

The Agenda slide is the final piece in engaging your audience's interest. This will list the 2-5 key headings that you decided on when assembling your content. It should also have a graphical hint that it is a signpost slide, so that it marks the beginning of the path through the presentation (see Structure and Signposts, below)

## **Maintaining Interest**

Once they audience understands why you and they are there, ensure that they keep their interest. There are three key ways to doing this:

- Ask questions – prepared and *ad hoc*
- Make your presentation visually interesting – with diagrams, pictures and movement
- Structure it clearly

## Using Questions

Active involvement is always more interesting than passive, so use questions liberally, throughout the presentation.

As noted before, whenever you ask a question, *acknowledge the answers*. If you were in conversation at a party and someone kept ignoring what you were saying, you'd quickly lose interest in them. The online audience is no different. You can acknowledge the answers in different ways. One of the best is to use it to run into the next slide, e.g.: "So only 36% of you think that is important, and yet as we'll now see, a recent survey showed that 75% of learners thought it vital...." Or, "I see that the majority of you don't believe that this is important. I believe it is, and I'm going to attempt to change your minds over the next 40 minutes." You can also use the same question twice – at the beginning and the end of the presentation – to gauge whether your presentation has had an effect on the audience.

Because everyone can read, but most people have trouble concentrating on listening, wherever possible write the questions on a slide (or in the chat area, if it's an *ad hoc* question). Here are 3 types of questions you can ask:

1. **Yes / No Questions.** The easiest to ask, the quickest to get a response, and something that requires no preparation. Maintains the flow of the presentation. Akin to getting a series of nods from a classroom audience. If you can, type the question into the chat area, to ensuring everyone is answering the same question.
2. **Multiple Choice Surveys.** These can be designed and built into the presentation beforehand or produced on the fly. They are interesting for the audience because of the variety of responses available and the visibility of those results.
3. **Text Chat Questions.** You can ask a question (on a slide) and get people to respond with their thoughts via the text chat area. This is a great way to brain storm and get feedback, and far better than getting people to shout out in a classroom, or over phone lines, because each answer is separate and clear. If you want, you can pick out particular ones and copy them onto the slide, accentuating them. You should certainly acknowledge relevant points verbally. For more on this, see Back Channel Communication later.

Build questions into your presentation from the start, but you may find that you change your mind about them, or come up with completely new questions, as you rehearse.

### A note on surveys

Surveys are in some ways great for involving the audience – for example, everyone can contribute without exposing their opinions, or having to type. On the other hand, because it typically takes a minute or two to gather in all the responses, they can easily slow down a presentation. You risk losing your audience as it waits for the results to be shown and discussed. Use surveys sparingly, and only when you really need a numerical answer.

## Visual Interest

**Slide builds:** Keep it simple. It's easy to go overboard with slide builds – but because your audience is likely to be on a mixture of internet connections, you cannot guarantee how well the builds will render. Try keeping slides without builds, using separate slides to construct an effect.

**Use diagrams:** You can make a presentation more interesting by using diagrams, screenshots, photos, and Flash animations if you have them. In fact you should. No presentation should consist purely of words.

**Use movement:** Movement keeps attention. In particular, if you have something to show, seeing it live is always more interesting than seeing a screen shot – this is true for software and *anything* on the internet. (Your webinar software should support sharing of applications for this.)

**Use the mark-up tools:** When presenting the slides, use the available mark-up tools to highlight the key words as you speak. If you don't, they are in effect watching the radio. Practicing how to do this is an essential part of rehearsing your presentation.

**Pictures:** Pictures are great – when used with words. Without words, they will lose impact for the more literally-minded members of your audience. Apart from occasional use for impact, always add a handful of relevant words to purely visual slides.

## Structure and Signposts

You decided on your structure when planning your presentation. Your signposts are how you convey that structure explicitly to your audience. In the example structure above they are shown as 'section title' slides. They begin with your agenda slide, and continue to your wrap up slide. Here's an example:

### Agenda Slide



### Signpost Slide for Middle of Section 2



### **3. How You Say It**

Substance is more important than style, so what you say – your content – is crucial. It does no harm, however, to put good content over in a compelling way.

#### **Your Words**

The best way to ensure that you have the right words for your presentation is to rehearse many times, saying aloud what you intend to say online for each slide. Do not fall into the trap of describing what you will say: “And on this slide I’ll cover our eastern district sales, and on this slide I’ll look at how we’re expanding the market in the south”. This is not rehearsal. The only adequate rehearsal is to verbalise what you will say. That way you will find the right words to express your point clearly, and come up with the vital last edits that will move your presentation from good to great.

- Don’t do a sales pitch for yourself, your product or your company. The audience will silently file out.
- Don’t use platitudes, cliché, or redundant phrases. In a classroom they pass unnoticed. Online, with no visual distraction, they are deadly dull. When thriller writer Stephen King has finished a manuscript he cuts it by 10% before submitting it. The result is a more compelling read. The same is true for your presentations, particularly online, where every word counts.
- Don’t treat the audience as a mass (e.g. by saying “some of you may find ...”). This is an intimate medium. Treat it as a phone conversation with an individual, but respected colleague (so say instead “If you’ve ever found ...”). US President Franklyn Roosevelt was a master at this in his radio fireside chats, even though he was talking to millions.
- Don’t just read out bullet points unless you’re going to add something to them.
- Do get to the point. Fast. Do this by writing a script first and cutting redundant words.
- Do keep it short.
- And do keep any anecdotes short and to the point. Stories are among the most powerful presentational tools – when used correctly. For maximum impact, script them and aim to use no more than 150 words per anecdote.

#### **Your Voice**

You don’t have to be Richard Burton or James Earl Jones to do this job, but there a few simple things you can do to make your voice more interesting. First, pay attention next time you listen to the radio news and hear how they make their voices more interesting by stressing every third or fourth word. This is not natural, but it enlivens the voice. So, too, does variation. Listen to a confessional chat show host like Tricia or Oprah and compare their variation of tone and pace with their poor guests’. Then ask yourself: which would you prefer to sound like?

Some other tips:

- Smile as you talk.
- Warm up before speaking. It might sound silly, but five minutes with some tongue twisters will warm up your mouth and tongue, and make your voice clearer and more interesting. Here are some that I use:

Peggy Babcock's mixed biscuits  
She's not the Kerry who you used to know.  
Red lorry, yellow lorry, red leather, yellow leather  
Who wears Wainwright's white rainwear?

- Stand up as you speak. Many top sales people stand as they speak on the phone because they recognise that it makes their voice more alive by freeing up their lungs and allowing their voice to resonant fully.

## **Keyword Scripts**

One great advantage of speaking online is that you can use a script and nobody knows. However, that does not necessarily mean that you should read every word from a script. Rather, build your 'keyword script' as follows. First, print a handout of your script with enough space for notes (allow 3 slides per page). Then, go through what you expect to say word for word. As you speak, write key words down next to each slide. Pay particular attention to links between slides and key concepts. Do not under any circumstances simply read the text on the slides. If you find it difficult to move easily from one slide to the next there is something wrong with the structure and you may need to make a change. For example, split one slide into two, insert a new concept or delete some slide text.

You will be left with a script that consists of slides on one side of the page and key words and phrases on the other.

Now go back to the beginning and do it all over again.

Repeat the process until the words flow naturally, with the key words acting as prompts.

Building up your script in this way means that you do not have to write a full script from scratch only to re-write it. It does, on the other hand, require a lot of rehearsal time. Still, if you want to shine online, there is no substitute for rehearsal time.

There is one area where a script is a good idea: your opening 2 minutes. It is very easy to ramble into a long introduction about yourself which the audience does not want to hear. If you write down what you intend to say, you have a better chance of getting through it with impact, and into the main part of your presentation.

#### **4. Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse**

When facilitating online, I always de-brief the presenter immediately afterwards, and am struck by how frequently they describe themselves as ‘exhausted’. This is a common reaction to having to deal with several new things simultaneously.

How many hours have you spent presenting to live audiences face-to-face? However many or few, it is almost certainly many more hours than you have spent presenting online. During those hours, you have built up a repertoire of methods for everything from dealing with nerves to understanding your audience and pacing delivery. You do not have to learn all these again from scratch when presenting online, but some of them will need to be adapted, and it is essential to build up your familiarity with the new medium. Whatever tool you select to use, practice using it until the basics become completely familiar, and you can concentrate during your presentation on giving a great delivery.

Whatever you do, do not be fooled into thinking that because you are at your desk, with a script in your hand, that you do not need to present. For face-to-face presentations, rehearsal is important. For online presentations it is essential. So much else of what you are doing will be unfamiliar that your words at least must come easily to you.

One key benefit of rehearsing is that while doing it you will build up your script (see above). A further benefit is that it will give you more time to say what you actually want to say, because you won’t be hesitating or saying “um” and “er”, those little filler words that can take up as much as 10-20% of normal conversation. Because you won’t be hesitating, you’ll sound more authoritative, and your audience will be keener to listen and participate. And finally, you’ll find you have more to say, because additional points will occur to you during rehearsals that you’ll want to add (and you’ll have time to say them because you won’t be umming and erring).

Once you’ve built up your script, you can carry out an on-line rehearsal of your material. Ensure that you have a private area online with the actual tool that you will be using. Go through the entire presentation until you feel comfortable with the tool. If you are new to the medium, do at least one rehearsal with someone else present online to judge your performance.

There are three types of rehearsal you should consider doing:

- 1) **Script-building rehearsal** – where you pace up and down repeating your words until you are happy with the flow of content.
- 2) **Technical rehearsal** – where you test the introductions, finish, sound and vision on the same equipment you will be using when you go live.
- 3) **Dress rehearsal** – a complete run through of your talk. Recommended for all events until you are fully confident with the medium.

## **Online Presentations for Training**

These notes are written to be useful for any sort of online presentation, and so they apply equally to online training. The difference with training tends to be the context of what happens before and after the presentation, and the fact that online training tends to involve small groups that are involved in activities outside the webinar, and which develop a sense of community and culture as the training and webinars continue.

### **Familiarity**

As you may be dealing regularly with the same group, you can explore the use of your chosen technology platform further. If you have a small group, you may wish to use the microphone more than suggested above. Passing a microphone between speakers always takes more time than using the text box for short comments, but is very valuable if someone has a lot to say, and is also valuable when you are maintaining the same group of members over a period, as nothing can replace the sound of the human voice.

If you are training larger groups, you may wish to explore the capacity to run break out rooms (offered by some software).

### **Recording**

If it is important that people attend all presentations, it will be useful to record events, to accommodate the inevitable absences due to illness, etc.

### **Back Channel Communication**

One of the great advantages of online presenting is that the audience can communicate with each other via chat, without the speaker being aware of it. Although this may seem disconcerting and distracting in fact this sort of ‘back channel’ communication can really add to a presentation’s effectiveness by giving extra context for listeners to latch on to.

### **Numbers in the audience**

Online presentations can be used for any number of delegates, up to the hundreds. However, as numbers increase, so the level of possible interactivity decreases. Here is a very rough guide to how numbers affect interactivity:

1 – 8	Plenty of interaction, possible to have individuals talking
9 – 45	Good interaction possible using chat/text rather than talking
45 – 150	Chat/text begins to get ‘noisy’, so use of Q&A tools that target individuals becomes useful
150 +	Becomes more like an old-style lecture

These are, of course, only general, rough notes. I have attended sessions of nearly 200 which had a great, informal, interactive atmosphere.

## ***Technical Considerations***

### **What Functionality Should I Expect?**

The features of online presentation software are now almost standard. You should expect your package to offer:

- Event management
  - easy registration of delegates
  - bulk e-mails of joining instructions and reminders
  - reports on attendees showing who registered and who attended
- Interactive white board, which delegates can be allowed to use
- Application sharing – allowing the presenter to show an application to delegates
- Text chat – with the group and between individuals
- Ability for speakers to alter delegates' view of interface
- Polling – both on the fly, as pre-built part of presentation and allowing pre-built quizzes to be saved, so that you can keep a standard post-course evaluation
- Audience reaction monitoring – allowing you to see icons registering agreement, approval and technical problems
- Recording of events that can be saved either on vendor's server or on your own
- Ability to include rich media such as Flash, Java, Shockwave and animated GIFs
- Presentation tools, such as a highlighter and light pen, usable by speaker and delegates
- Microphone / sound for speaker and can be given to any users

### **How Should I Use the Microphone for Group Communications?**

Unless I am dealing with a small group, where each member is familiar with the microphone, I always use a Text Chat area instead. The reason is that using the microphone often slows down the presentation right down as the delegate takes the mic., checks the sound level, and deals with any technical problems. Often when they do speak they are much less coherent than they would be if forced to express themselves in the written word. In contrast, when using the chat facility, many members can express themselves simultaneously (although with more than 50 delegates, this in itself can become 'noisy').

### **What Hardware do I Need?**

You can run an online presentation from any modern computer with enough RAM and a decent sound card. If you're using voice over IP rather than a phone conference for audio you will need a good headset/mic combination. This should cost about £15 / \$25 and is well worth the investment. Names to consider include Plantronics and Labtec.

You will need a broadband connection. I do not recommend a dial-up connection for presenting, as it can slow things down if there is a lot of internet traffic.

## **Check Lists**

### **Things to Have to Hand**

When sitting down in front of your computer, ensure you have the following:

- Water in a sports top bottle (so that it won't spill on your keyboard)
- Script
- Paper & pen for notes
- Mobile phone on vibrate, allowing others involved in your session to contact you

### **Timing**

- 45 minutes to one hour seems to be about the ideal time for a session. It could be as short as 30 minutes, more than about 90 minutes would probably be demanding too much from the audience in terms of both their attention and the free time they have available.
- Keep to time – make sure that you know how long you expect to take in reaching each signpost in your presentation, and stick to it. Fail and you will either rush towards the end or over-run. Either way your audience's last – and probably most abiding – memory of your presentation will be an unsatisfactory one.

### **Session Timings**

For a session which began at 10.00, timings would run as follows:

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 09.30 – 10.00 | Session is live, with a title slide showing and a chat session going to engage those who show up early. Microphone perhaps given to early attendees to introduce themselves online if they wish. Ideally, have background music playing. |
| 10.00 – 10.02 | Introduction by facilitator, if present. (He or she will introduce the speaker, topic and the user interface.)   |
| 10.02 – 10.35 | Speaker Presentation, including regular questions and answers  |
| 10.35 – 10.55 | Questions & Answers, fielded by facilitator  |
| 10.55 – 11.00 | Facilitator wraps up, thanks speaker & prompts delegates to answer evaluation questions  |

### **Technology Back-Up**

When presenting online, I always use two machines: the one I'm using, and a back-up signed in to the presentation. That way if my machine crashes during the presentation, I can continue on the spare machine with minimal loss of time. I have only had to use this back up a handful of times, but it was worth it.