

Good Practices for Interactive Online Meetings

Michael Fraidenburg
Owner, The Cooperation Company

Think back to the best online meeting you attended this year. What factors created that success? Here is a baker's dozen of the best practices for creating and running online meetings:

1. Set reasonable expectations. While online meetings are valuable because they save travel costs, the event itself is less efficient than a face-to-face meeting. Make sure the meeting sponsor and the participants have reasonable expectations so you can meet (or exceed) them.
2. Ensure that you are well-versed in the technology and how you can use it as an interactive tool.
3. Don't assume interaction is not possible in an online meeting. Repurpose collaborative, face-to-face meeting room exercises with interactive, virtual activities.
4. Plan to use polling, chat, annotation tools, and whiteboards creatively to achieve the same objectives as your face-to-face meetings. It can take more time, so prepare your audience if you anticipate a slower pace.
5. Apply adult learning principles to the online meeting experience—talking heads don't work well in a face-to-face meeting—even less so in an online environment. Rule of thumb: no more than 3 - 5 minutes between participant interactions during your event.
6. Don't upload the same slide presentation used in the meeting to the web conference platform. And don't send out the slide presentation prior to the web conference training. Making it fresh for the participants makes it more interactive.
7. Avoid slide after slide with bullet points; instead, try visually-stimulating graphics, videos, online polls, concept graphs, etc.
8. Encourage participants to share ideas and information using multiple modalities: chat, polling, voice-to-voice and break-out rooms.
9. Don't short-shrift meeting design time. Apply the same (or even more) planning time you devote for a face-to-face meeting to your online meeting.
10. Separate the host (technology expert) functions from your job as the facilitator during the online meeting. The host handles technical questions and can optionally help set up polls, chats, and break-out rooms behind the scenes and banter with you to create lively conversation, especially at the start of the meeting.

11. Create 'support staff' for your online meeting. If you need a note taker, recruit that person and give them access to the web broadcaster you are using so their work can be observed by participants. If you need a database manager, get that person on board. You get the idea—decide what roles are required in the online meeting and recruit these helpers early.
12. Schedule a dry run with your meeting management team prior to the event to test the design, practice the interactivity tools, and ensure that everyone is on the same page.
13. Create a link to an online, post-course evaluation and make it available at the end of the web training. If possible, create a clickable link within the web platform to give participants an easy path to that ending activity.
