

## **Webinars - Content Development, Speaker Selection and When NOT to Sell (Aug 08)**

**By Lisa Pelish of Massive Impressions**

Webinars are the latest online marketing craze. It seems everyone's doing them. Can they really be attracting audiences? Are those who attend really the qualified prospects you're looking for? How can you get people to attend them? Where to begin?

**If done correctly**, webinars can afford your company a platform to establish itself as a thought-leader in the training industry, showcase your technologies and methodologies and feed your sales pipeline at a very reasonable cost per lead.

**If done incorrectly**, webinars can destroy your organization's credibility, or simply just fail to produce results; with a lot of time spent spinning your wheels and the wheels of your employees with no registrants and no attendees.

How can your webinar effort succeed? Orchestrating a successful campaign of webinars can be a daunting task even for the most experienced marketers. The planning starts months in advance to determine target audience, topic/pitch, speaker(s), goals, etc.

There are many ways to execute your webinars. There are third party sponsorships that feature your content, third party sponsorships of a publisher's content, or you can webcast your own events from your website.

The point of a webinar is to help a company establish itself as a thought leader, showcase its capabilities, and collect leads.

Sponsoring other people's content is okay, but your only real benefit is the advertising exposure. It's the entity having their content showcased that gains the most from the webinar.

Creating and featuring your proprietary content is the way to go if you're seriously considering employing webinars as a part of your marketing strategy. However, before you can consider whether to host them yourselves or work with a publishing partner (like TrainingIndustry.com, Talent Management, CLO Media, Training Mag, etc.) you first have to make sure you have something of interest - and value - to share with your audience.

The first step in producing a webinar is choosing a hot topic in the training industry and developing quality content that has relevance to your audience. It's important to provide actionable tips and advice within that context of your event, while demonstrating your expertise using case studies.

### **Webinar Content Development**

The first thing to remember is that this is not a sales presentation. It is valuable to get your sales team's perspective on what their clients and prospects are talking about when selecting webinar topics. However, keep in mind there's a risk of the content becoming a powerpoint presentation that falls into the standard sales pitch.

The number one reason webinar attendees drop off in the first five minutes is because the presentation is too sales oriented. If at all possible, try to keep the sales team out of the content development process until the very end. It's better to involve them in the process of editing and deciding what not to say, and putting breaks on anything that would be a mistake to say. Involving sales in setting the agenda of what to say too often leads to a presentation constructed around a sales pitch.

If you are your sales team, then take off the sales hat because it will not serve you well in this endeavor - it's too tempting when developing webinar PowerPoint presentations to fall into the standard sales pitch.

Next, think about how has your company benefited your clients? What are the types of challenges that your organization has tackled most effectively and with the most quantifiable results? How did you do it?

You don't want to, and shouldn't, give away all your secrets - but just like this article, providing an outline of the thought-process and methodologies used to achieve your successes can be a very useful and inspiring tool for a potential prospect. They may not immediately hire you, but they'll remember your company and respect it for the valuable information and advice you provided. Eventually, they'll have a need - or decide they're better served to outsource and you, hopefully, will be top of mind.

Once you've determined the topics that you can provide the most insight on within the training community, you have to start writing the content.

***Here are the steps to develop a b2b webinar presentation:***

1. Develop a topic
2. Develop a compelling event title (keep it short, no more than 5 - 7 words)
3. Write an abstract (basically an executive summary no more than 3 - 5 paragraphs that tells the potential attendee what this is about, why it should matter to them, what makes you credible and what benefits/practical tools they'll walk away from the event with)
4. Write an outline based on the abstract
5. Fill in the outline with content generated from the best and brightest of your employee pool.
6. Back-up your content with case study data, third party research and primary research - data is critical for credibility!
7. Have a writer, or someone who is good with writing, edit and possibly change the structure of your content.
8. Have someone good at developing PowerPoint presentation content cut and paste the content into the speaker's notes and edit it appropriately so the key points are summarized neatly on individual slides.
9. Have a graphic artist, or someone good with PowerPoint develop graphs, charts and other visual aides. When it helps, simplify slides to more easily communicate complex concepts.
10. Time your presentation by speaking to each slide - and then cut it down to stay within 45 minutes or less. If you spend 2 minutes on each slide that's approximately 23 slides.

**Speakers**

Too often organizations feel they have to push their President, CEO or other executive into the limelight - regardless of their talent for presenting. This is okay when dealing with a live audience, who are unlikely to be rude and leave in the middle of a presentation. However, the reality of an online webinar is that people are attending under a perceived cloak of anonymity. What does this mean to you? If you're not keeping their attention, they'll leave. Shut you down. Walk away. And why not, they don't have to look the speaker in the eye.

When selecting a speaker, look for someone who's dynamic (on the phone!), is able to modulate their voice to keep things interesting and most importantly - truly understands what they're talking about. Alternately, find someone who is GREAT at reading a script and making it believable.

It's hard to find the perfect speaker. Here are a few scenarios and possible solutions to give you an idea of how to go about selecting your speaking team.

***Speaker Scenario One - 2 Speakers:***

Your lead instructional designer may be the best person to do the presentation in terms of know-how, but

the hot-shot salesperson you just hired may be the best candidate in terms of delivery. Consider teaming them up and have the salesperson do the opening, introduction of more general concepts and the closing - but have the instructional designer speak to the slides that require more in-depth knowledge of the topic and its practical applications. Practice makes perfect - so doing at least two full, timed rehearsals will give the speakers the opportunity to help each other by providing speaking tips - and insights into the background of the event topic.

***Speaker Scenario Two - A Panel of Experts:***

Your director of client services may be the most knowledgeable person on staff, and the best speaker on your team, but you may still want to include your upper-management in the event. One solution is to structure the webinar so it ends with an expert panel discussion - instead of a traditional Q&A. This provides the opportunity to gain exposure for your top management with the audience, and for them to share insights and expertise from their perspective - while making sure you don't lose the audience during the presentation.

***Speaker Scenario Three - Client Testimonial:***

Nothing brings in registrations and attendees like a webinar that involves a client. If you're successfully working with a well recognized company in the training industry, try to find a way to include them in your webinar as a co-presenter. Getting clients to participate in these types of marketing activities can be a challenge, but many of the more savvy companies out there realize that there are public relations advantages to showcasing their successes implementing training technologies and programs.

If you get a client to participate, let them present your success as their own through a case study of how they affected change in their organization (oh, by the way, they worked with you to make it happen).

**When NOT to Sell**

The single most important thing you need to know to make your webinar a success is when NOT to sell. Webinar participants care about the topic and how the information you're providing will help them solve a business challenge. Aside from a brief introduction to establish credibility, they do not care about your company and what you can sell them - at least not at the start of a webinar.

Avoid the temptation to delve into your company history, management team and services overview. If you absolutely must include this information, do it at the end of the event. Doing a sales pitch at the beginning of a webinar is the number one reason people leave after 5 minutes.

That doesn't mean you can't talk about how you achieve success for your customers. It just needs to be done in an educational way. For example:

***Example of a Sales Oriented Webinar Presentation that will Lose Attendees***

**Slide 1:**

XYZ Training Services provides comprehensive training materials, e-learning solutions and trainer training. Speaking today we have John Doe who is an instructional designer at XYZ and has been with us for 4 years.

**Slide 2:**

We've been in business ten years, have a million clients (showing logos).

Our management team is the best in the business (bios/pics)

**Slide 3:**

We drive performance by creating custom blended learning solutions that help companies reach their goals regardless of their training needs. We've merged instructional design, technology, project management and quality processes to achieve training success.

**Slide 4:**

The results we deliver give our clients the ability to launch global data management applications, teach new ways to operate in a new environment, allow employees to utilize new applications on the day a system is turned on.

**Slide 5:**

Our services are rooted in the change process - we look at the goals of our clients and keep that in mind as we develop the training needed to achieve the organization's goals.

**Slide 6 - 10:**

Here's how we do it.

**Slide 11 - 14:**

Here are case studies of how we did it for some clients.

***Example of an Educational Webinar Presentation*****Slide 1:**

Speaking today we have John Doe who is an instructional designer at XYZ Training Services, a leading provider of training services.

**Slide 2:**

Today we will talk about how you can drive performance in your organization through custom blended learning solutions that will help you reach our goals regardless of your training needs.

**Slide 3:**

First we will discuss how to effectively merge instructional design, technology, project management and quality processes to achieve training success. The key is focusing on the change process - to look at your organization's goal and keep them in mind as you develop the training needed to achieve those goals.

**Slide 4:**

Then we will discuss proven methodologies and actionable steps you can take today that will help you launch global data management applications, teach new ways to operate in a new environment and allow employees to utilize new applications on the day a system is turned on.

**Slide 5 - 10:**

Here's how you can do it.

**Slide 11 - 14:**

Here are some case studies of other companies in the training space who have done it (oh, by the way they're our clients).

**Slide 15:**

A brief slide states who you are, what you deliver, why it's different from the competition, why it will benefit the audience to engage with you - and most importantly, offering some sort of "next step" added value content.

***When Can You Sell?***

Save the sales pitch for after the event - you'll have a list of registrants who did not attend, to whom you can send a link to the archived event. You'll also have a list of attendees - and the knowledge of how long they stayed on the event, which is a great indicator of interest. Send them an e-mail or direct mail piece with additional, valuable content or information. Send them an offer for a free evaluation or other "foot in the door" sales offer. Pick up the phone and talk to them!

If done properly, your content will position your company as an expert, and compel people to *want* to learn more about your business and services.

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