

Free essay about presenting to an unseen audience

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Technology has made communication much easier for training purposes. Because of distance learning possibilities, it is no longer necessary for companies to spend significant sums of money to send their personnel to a distant seminar or to pay a hefty fee for a speaker to come to their site. Instead, speakers can present their content online via a webcast or webinar. That way, not only can people view the content from anywhere on the planet, they can even view it at a time of their own choosing, if interactivity is not a necessity. While this is a real boon in a number of ways, particularly in terms of convenience and accessibility, it can also present challenges to the presenter. In a face-to-face setting, presenters receive nonverbal cues from their audiences. Faces that are looking up at the speaker and that show engagement through expression tell the speaker that the presentation is meeting the needs of the audience, while people who are looking away, having a hard time staying awake, pulling out the newspaper or spending a lot of time on their iPads are generally not as engaged, a sign that the presentation is not meeting needs that they have. The good news is that there are some principles that a speaker can put to use in order to build a strong presentation that will even engage those who he cannot see while speaking.

The primary challenge that a speaker faces when presenting to an audience whom he cannot see is that there is the risk of that audience tuning out. If what the audience members are seeing on their screen is not engaging, they will be tempted to multitask by opening other windows and turning their attention away from the speaker, or simply to sit and daydream. Either way, the content that the presenter has for an audience ends up going to waste,

because the audience is no longer paying attention.

So which story should you use? Remember that your audience is much more interested in themselves than they are in you, by and large, so you want to create a presentation that addresses them. Also, audiences are “collections of individuals, each with their own interests, priorities, capabilities, styles, personalities, experiences and cultural backgrounds” (Communication in the Workplace, p. 217). This means that you have to focus on what the audience has in common, in terms of an overarching story, rather than trying to engage audience members through a single set of personal variables. The story that you want to tell, then, is their story – the story of their aspirations. If you construct your story well, your audience members will be able to view themselves within it. This means that you have to figure out where your audience wants to be and tell a story that helps them get there. You’ll need to know things that your audience cares about (desires, opinions, and perceived needs) as they are relevant to the subject of your presentation. If you can bring these into your presentation, you will have the audience riveted to their seats.

This is where a concept known as content sacrifice comes into play. When you are an expert on a particular subject, one of the temptations is to let your audience know everything that you know about the topic. However, an important discipline is only giving your audience what they need rather than including too much. This is also important in terms of audience preparedness; even if you are an expert in a particular area, your audience “may not have the skills or knowledge to satisfactorily participate in the event” (Communication in the Workplace p. 272), so make sure that your

presentation fits within your audience's competencies. Make sure that every piece of information that you share is connected to a concept that your audience cares about. If you cannot think of a connection between the information and an important concept, you might think about leaving that particular piece of information out of your presentation.

When you cannot see your audience, one of the most significant challenges involves figuring out whether they understand your presentation or not. Also, you do not know the degree to which they are absorbing and mastering the information. To assess this more accurately, add some points in the presentation where you interact with the audience. It's true that you cannot stop and talk to your members, but you can use polls, comprehension questions and other strategies in slides to ensure that your audience is staying with you and understands what you are talking about. Think about including one of these every seven to ten minutes. This way your audience feels like it is participating more actively, and you have a sense of whether you are getting your message across - or whether your audience is surfing sports websites and pretending to pay attention.

Another important consideration when you are building a webinar involves engaging multiple senses. Remember that PowerPoint we were talking about earlier? Slide after slide of large paragraphs make you look like all you can do is copy and paste your speech onto slides, putting in bullets almost at random. If you have this sort of presentation for a face-to-face seminar, your listeners will be angry, because you could have just emailed them your presentation instead of wasting their time by dragging them into this meeting room. In a distance presentation or a webcast, slides this will ensure

that your audience finds something else to do. Indeed, viewers will often make decisions after a minute or even less has gone by about the quality of your presentation (Lowry, et al.), so you must engage your audience quickly. So how do you avoid this? Use pictures. For each vision, draw a crude sketch that shows your vision for the slide. Then find a picture that represents that vision. Websites like iStockphoto.com are tremendous sources for pictures and graphics that are either free or low-cost, and they will help you emphasize your point using as few words as possible. Since you're talking, you don't need a whole lot of words on the screen as well. If this webcast is part of a high-stakes sales presentation, you might want to bring in the services of a graphic artist to make sure that your website comes out looking and feeling as professional as possible.

Another way to help your audience stay with you is to break your text down into sound bites. Text can provide value along with a visual, but the text has to be short and written for high impact. The rule of thumb is to include between two and five of these sound bites on each of your slides, along with a visual image. This allows you to engage your audience in a multitude of ways.

When it comes to slides, don't skimp when it comes to their number. If you're using images and sound bites, you're going to go through a ton of them. A good rule of thumb for this is that you'll include one slide for every 30 to 45 seconds in your presentation. If you were presenting in person, the rule would be a slide for every two to three minutes, but you're not there to hold the audience's attention. This means that you have to keep things moving at a speedier pace, maintaining a higher level of graphic interest.

The more movement you have on the screen, in terms of changing from one slide to the next, the more likely your audience is to remain engaged in your content.

One more important tip is to bring your presentation to a clear and useful ending. This “ draws the communication event to a close and should leave the audience with a clear idea of what has been achieved and possibly what they need to do next” (Communication in the Workplace p. 216). This should review the outline from the start of the presentation and detail, taking the audience back through your main points and ending with the outcome that you intended.

Another important element in successful preparation of a presentation is having speaker notes that are robust. In most presentation applications, there are areas to include speaker’s notes alongside each slide. Once you’ve made them, develop them into a script, and practice going through them before the presentation. Use vivid, descriptive lingo to keep your audience visualizing the things you are talking about. Notate all of the changes and animations in your notes that you’re not surprised by what is taking place on the screen.

After you’ve finalized your notes, print them out and put them into a binder, so you can flip easily through them as you talk your way through your script. Rely on your content, because the fact that you have practiced will make it smooth from the audience’s point of view. Don’t give into the temptation to ad lib or get spontaneous on one particular point. Remember that you’re not the focus - the audience is. Focus on their needs, and stay close to your notes, and you will have a superior presentation. Even if you are transmitting

information that contains directions from your company's management to workers lower in the company, rather than carrying out a more empowering type of dialogue (Van Reenen), the degree to which you make your presentation engaging will ameliorate some of those effects, and your audience will effectively retain the content that you are presenting to them.

Works Cited

Andersen, Mariah. " Tips for Effective Webinars."

<http://elearnmag.acm.org/featured.cfm?aid=1710034>

Communication in the Workplace. McGraw-Hill Create. VitalBook File.

" How to Give a (Good) Webinar." <http://busynessgirl.com/how-to-give-a-good-webinar/>

Lowry, Paul Benjamin and Wilson, David and Haig, Bill, A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Source Credibility Theory Applied to Logo and Website Design for Heightened Credibility and Consumer Trust (June 1, 2013).

International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction, vol. 30(1), pp. 63-93.

Sibley, Amanda. " 10 Things That Take a Webinar from Good to Great."

<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/webinar-planning-list>

Taylor, Dan. " How to Host a Great Webinar in 6 Easy Steps."

<http://thenextweb.com/lifehacks/2011/08/24/how-to-host-a-great-webinar-in-6-easy-steps/>

Van Reenen, John Michael. " The Distinct Effects of Information Technology and Communication Technology on Firm Organization." Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, 2009.