Virtual Presentation Etiquette: Tips and Tricks

Presentations are an effective medium to convey your message on just about anything. The key is to provide an engaging presentation with key takeaway messages.

If you can chat to a group of friends, you can deliver a presentation.

So where do you start? Presentations can be delivered in a variety of forums such as for conference, workshops, education of students, lectures at university or a proposal for the workplace. Each type of presentation has a purpose and an outcome.

Audience Engagement

Presenting in the virtual environment is a very different experience to presenting in person. The ability to connect with a person can now no longer be through movement, eye contact and body language. Create an upbeat tone that captures the audience's attention immediately. Pace yourself so that you can maintain your energy throughout your presentation. Stand up when you are delivering your presentation. Use a wired headset microphone. This keeps the energy up, but also allows you to breathe properly to remain focused and in touch with the virtual audience.

We have all been participants in virtual meetings and conferences over the last year, and you will agree that it is very easy to be distracted from the presenters. As the presenter, it is your job to keep the audience focused on you for the allocated presentation time whether it be 5 minutes – 12 minutes. To prevent listeners from tuning you out, pick up the pace. If you speak at a leisurely pace, you risk losing your virtual audience.

Use a Mirror to Monitor Yourself

One presentation trick is to practice in front of a mirror. This will enable you to see what your audience is seeing. As it is a virtual environment, the challenge is the lack of feedback that you would get from a live audience. By seeing yourself in the mirror, you can then be prompted to smile, or add that additional level of oomph to a presentation that may contain a lot of statistical information. Make sure that you also have good lighting around you to ensure that you are not hiding behind shadows and appear as though you are lurking.

If you have the opportunity, dial up some friends on the virtual platform be it zoom or teams and schedule a

practice run. Get them to behave as a virtual audience would and allow them the opportunity to provide you with feedback on your presentation, lighting, colours etc.

Visuals

Make sure that the device you are using eg. laptop has the camera at eye level. To achieve this, use some boxes or books underneath your laptop and raising it to the appropriate height. Locate your camera, and practice speaking to it and not the screen. Angle the laptop screen so that you are centered in the frame, and your head is not cut off. Work out the distance that you need to be away from the camera to ensure that you are presented with the most flattering angle. On average this is about an arm's length from the screen. Sit up straight, smile and make an effort to look good.

Dress Professionally

As much as it is more comfortable to lounge around in casual wear at home, when you are presenting, you need to be in the correct frame of mind. As such the choice of clothing you wear

should be what you would wear in a face-to-face environment. The ideal is to have plain coloured clothing. Stripes or patterns as well as colours that blend into your screen such as white, red or a color similar to your background may not work as well. Solid colours are best—you want people to focus on your message, not your clothes. Do also ensure that the environment around you is appropriate for your presentation. We do not need to see the family pet or family members in the background. Try and record with a plain wall as your background to eliminate distractions and look professional.

Audio Quality

When you are presenting virtually make sure that you have tested your computer or phone audio. A USB connected microphone may be useful to produce better quality audio. Remember you are trying to engage an audience that you cannot see, and if they cannot hear you, they will become disengaged very quickly.

Ensure that your presentation environment is quiet and that you remember to turn off your mobile phone and notifications on the device you are using to record the presentation. Make sure that you speak slowly and clearly and avoid 'umms' and 'ahhs'. The virtual environment makes processing

speech a little more challenging as participants are unable to see your face and tune into facial, vocal and body language cues. Speaking quickly can sound like a word salad to the audience and compound this with unstable internet connections increases disengagement. Take your time, slow your pace a little and enunciate all your words clearly. Also practice having the microphone an ideal distance from your face to

ensure that your breathing does not become distracting. The key here is to practice, practice, practice, and knowing your material well.

Presentation slides

Remember the KISS principle. Keep if simple and make sure that you have easy-to-read slides.

We all know how easily it is to multitask and be distracted when listening online.

Make sure that you ensure that your audience remains engaged by driving home your key messages quickly.

Use a sentence headline for your slide titles that states the main point of your slide. You can then include the evidence for each of your key points in the body of the slide.

Spread out your points over more slides, rather than less, so that new slides appear on the screen periodically to bring wandering minds back to you and your message.

Balance the pace of your presentation. Too slow or too fast can lose your virtual audience. There are also a few other ways to retain engagement through frequent change-ups or interruptions in your speaking pattern by:

- asking a direct or rhetorical question (live pres)
- soliciting feedback or comments (live pres)
- Use of polling (live pres)
- using engaging images here and there,
- telling an anecdote that illustrates your point,
- providing an example or two to explain a point or introducing a metaphor to bring a pivotal point to life, or
- showing a brief video clip that ties into your message.

Anything that is relevant and breaks up a monotonous pattern will enable you to come across as a more engaging presenter.

Technical Preparation

We cannot live without technology; however, Murphy's Law will always occur - anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.

Here are some tips to assist you control this aspect:

Use the most reliable internet connection you can. A wired connection is more optimal than wireless (WiFi) connections. and WiFi connections are considered better than cellular connections.
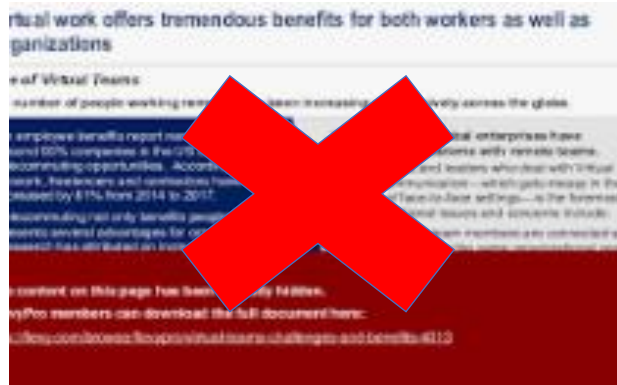
Have another laptop (or emergency tablet or phone) at the ready in case you encounter a problem.

Download a PDF version of your presentation to use as a backup in the case of a technical mishap with your slides (You do this by selecting "Save As" and choosing "PDF.") When saving your presentation as a PDF, remember to delete your hidden slides first as they will not remain hidden when you display your PDF presentation.

Close any unnecessary applications or any other background activities that require a substantial amount of memory or bandwidth, such as downloading or uploading large files or instant file synchronizations.

Make sure you are familiar with the platform that you are using to record your presentation, or if delivering on the live virtual platform.

Checklist

- ☐ Preparation
- ☐ Practice, Practice, Practice and again Practice!
- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Visuals
- ☐ Dress
- ☐ Minimalist slides

We hope that this assists you with the preparation for your presentation. Prepare and practice to ensure that you produce a professional presentation, and finally enjoy the process and **good luck!**