



## Making rain with webinars Getting comfortable with this technology as a selling tool.

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in PSMJ's *AE Rainmaker*

Webinars—prevalent communication and selling channels—are here to stay. If you have ever delivered a webinar then you may recall a lonely feeling, almost as if you are sitting in the woods with the sound of crickets chirping! As the speaker, you are typically talking for about 90 minutes. Any audience feedback is built-in, almost contrived. Options for interactivity include: online survey questions; opening up phone lines for comments and questions; having a moderator field questions via instant messaging. But these techniques have drawbacks. For example, often there will be multiple participants at a single site, making it tough for individuals to truly interact with the speaker. As well, participants are shy about speaking on a cyber call. Or the reverse: sometimes an attention-nut will hog time by asking a series of personalized questions. Here are just a few tips to make delivery easier and more effective.

**Underscore desire for feedback throughout, to make on-the-spot adjustments similar to a live presentation.** You can do this by building-in more frequent opportunities for interaction, perhaps at each section's end. Encourage them to rate their experience at some point during the presentation (with comments) electronically, then take a quiet 60-second break to scan those comments. If you notice a recurring theme, you may need to improvise (not easy, but doable). Once I delivered a webinar where my content was too academic relative to the audience preferences. If I had been in-person, I would have interpreted their body language, then quickly made adjustments, such as citing more anecdotes or facilitating audience dialogue to make the data more palatable. Instead, I 'lost' some of them with dense information, but had no way of 'reading' this feedback until after the webinar was over.

**Don't keep phone lines open during entire session.** I attended a webinar where the speaker left the phones fully open, and kept asking if anyone was 'out there'. With just a few feeble responses, it felt awkward. Most attendees were shy, preferring to quietly absorb. Plus, open phone lines meant various distractions—clearing throats, typing, barking.

**Add polling questions (this is tricky when there are multiple participants at each site).** Polls will make them feel more like a 'community' because they will see overall results from all the participants. Make sure to keep the polls moving along. Forewarn the audience that polling questions will be tossed out, then tallied quickly. During their response time, prepare some filler comments so that the audience isn't sitting in complete silence.

**It doesn't have to be fully scripted, even if it's being recorded for re-sale.** I am partial to a scripted approach for webinars (when delivered masterfully, scripts sound conversational and smooth, similar to an NPR radio announcer). Yet, I've heard audiences tend to prefer a more spontaneous, casual delivery style. If you do plan to speak from an outline or extemporaneously, keep it tight and on-topic because time flies during webinars.

**Be prepared for every possible technical glitch.** As speaker, keep a hard copy of your presentation nearby. Then, if technology goes awry (internet connection fails, computer dies), then the facilitator can still advance the slides per your command, and you can continue speaking from your hardcopy. I once experienced a technological glitch where I could not operate the slideshow. I thought I had control, but the moderator was actually advancing the slides, based upon my verbal cues. It wasn't until about 50% through that I realized what was happening. It was unnerving, but I went with the flow, and took care to exaggerate pauses so that my words and the visuals would appear coordinated.