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HOW TO MAKE AN IMPACTFUL FIRST IMPRESSION WHEN PRESENTING VIRTUALLY

[FREE E-BOOK + BONUS CHECKLIST]



ARE YOU READY

FOR A MASSIVE SHIFT IN THE WAY YOU (RE)PRESENT YOURSELF?

It's hard to believe that at this point there isn't an industry, company, or professional that hasn't been impacted in some way by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus.) This is certainly true for my profession and the clients I serve. In light of the recent outbreak, thousands of conferences have been canceled or postponed, or are taking place virtually. This doesn't even include the trillions of meetings and events in organizations—from Fortune 100 companies to small businesses—around the world. Many have been altered to be completely online to avoid the formation of crowds in confined spaces.

With the switch to digital meetings, presenters must be comfortable and well-versed in techniques to use during an online conference. While there are many similarities between presenting in person and online, there is frequently more anxiety around virtual presentations because of the need to set your space and technology up appropriately to deliver a memorable talk. So, with a wave of virtual conferences coming through your workplace, let's walk through some tips to ensure you are making a professional impression.

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Chapter

*** VIRTUAL MEETINGS CHECKLIST ***

HELPING YOU BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR NEXT VIRTUAL MEETING



01

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

ONE OF THE MAIN ISSUES WHEN IT COMES TO USING TECHNOLOGY IS ALL THE DISTRACTIONS THAT COME ALONG WITH TECHNOLOGY.

Distractions can be present on your end, and on the end of your attendees. Both will take away from your message and make you look less professional.

PERSONAL DISTRACTIONS

When you are presenting virtually, follow these guidelines:

- Turn off your phone, place on "airplane mode," or on "do not disturb," and do the same for any other devices in your home office, such as iPads, iPods, Smart Watches, as well as Google Home, Amazon Alexas, or Apple HomePod devices.
- Close all other competing software programs on your computer device—not just because of distraction—but also because this will influence the processor power and network bandwidth.
- Eliminate any notifications coming onto your screen. If any notifications come through, your eyes may veer, and you will get distracted, which will take away from your effectiveness.
- Let others know you are in a virtual meeting. Close the door, put out a sign, and if possible, mute your doorbell if you are hosting a meeting from your home office.

CHAPTER 01 | MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

ATTENDEE DISTRACTIONS

To avoid distracting your audience, here are a few key points to keep in mind. You

- **You might be asked to share your screen**, and everybody will be able to see files on your desktop, all of your open tabs, e-mail and text notifications coming in, and any installed and running applications.
- **Clean up your space.** Yes, your messy office. If there are hundreds of files behind you, your audience may pass assumptions about your organization and productivity in general.
- **Close windows and doors and turn off air conditioners** to avoid distracting sounds.
- **You need to avoid movements around you.** This means no dogs, cats, children, spouses, colleagues, or anything else that can cause distraction. If there are people walking around behind you, or you are sitting in front of a window with activity in the background, your audience may be more entranced by your surroundings than what you are discussing.

And while virtual meeting software offers you plenty of features—such as blurring the background in Skype, using filters or virtual backgrounds—keep in mind you are still running the risk that movements or mess are noticeable to your attendees.

Furthermore, it is essential only to use these features if you know exactly how to use them effectively. If you are not experienced with these features, you could end up altering the way you look when you move around and could even come across unprofessional. Using backdrops that depict beaches, or certain landmarks may not only be distracting but could also come across as juvenile and lack the integrity your topic deserves.

Therefore, it's better to go for a background that isn't too personal (no bedroom, dirty dishes, or laundry), or too sterile (no empty wall), and instead (if possible) pick something like a bookcase, shelves, or plants in the background. A dark background makes faces appear washed out, and a bright background usually makes faces appear dark.

02

VISUALS MATTER

ATTENDEES ARE GOING TO WATCH YOU AND THE SCREEN CLOSER AND MORE THAN IN ANY REAL-TIME ENVIRONMENT BECAUSE THEY ARE TRYING TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S IN FRONT OF THEM ON THE SCREEN.

YOUR PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Even if you don't plan to be on camera, take these reminders into consideration:

- Make sure to be "camera-ready" at any given time. Dozens of things can distract attendees from the important message you have to share, including your hair and makeup, and the cut, colors, and prints of your clothes. [Here is one of my past articles about what to wear on stage.](#) The challenges, rules, and recommendations are very much the same in front of a computer screen.
- You never know if you'll need to stand up for some reason, so don't assume attendees will just see your face and shoulders in the frame,
- Ensure your distance to the camera is similar to how close you would be if you were talking to another person's face-to-face. You do not want to be too close (so that your audience can see your face up close) and you do not want to be too far (that the audience does not feel they can make eye contact with you.)
- Consider investing in a moderately priced, high-quality webcam that will present you clearly to your audience if your built-in laptop or computer camera doesn't do the trick.

CHAPTER 02 | VISUALS MATTER

LIGHTING IS CRITICAL

While natural light is great for any office space, it can be unflattering when you are on camera. Therefore, consider the following:

- **Be very aware of where the sun is going to be during your on-camera time.** Computer cameras automatically adjust to and record the brightest source of light. And if that light is behind you, you're no longer the focus. So, if you are sitting in front of a window and the sun is shining directly behind you, it will drown you out, and attendees will only see your silhouette.
- **Have the light source in front of you and at eye-level,** and try to provide the right amount of light on your face without causing harsh and distracting shadows. Most offices provide overhead lighting, which is the worst kind of lighting for online conferences because it makes shadows under your eyes and on your face and washes you out.
- **Remember that your face will also be lit by the laptop or monitor,** so make sure the main light source is stronger than your monitor light.

If virtual conferences are going to be frequent for you, I recommend investing in semiprofessional lights such as a ring light, screen bar light, cube light, a professional lighting kit, or something similar. These are going to give you the look of having professional lighting in your space.

ADJUST YOUR SLIDE DECK

Regardless of whether you are presenting in front of a live audience or on camera, keeping your slides simple is always going to be best. However, what has worked great for in-person meetings might not work in a virtual setting. Also, keep in mind, your slides could possibly take up the entire attendees' screen, and they will see your face only in the top corner of their screen. Because the screen is the majority of what they are seeing, make your slides attractive and intriguing. Using visual cues, eye-catching photos, or questions to cue up your answers and explanations can keep your audience engaged and eager to hear what you have to say. On the other hand, if you put all of the words you are going to speak in the text on the slide, your audience no longer has a reason to listen to you. Instead, use your slides as a tease for what you are going to say.

03

SOUND IS CRUCIAL

YOUR SOUND IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ANY ONLINE CONFERENCE. POOR SOUND SETTINGS CAN RUIN EVEN THE BEST PRESENTATION. IF YOUR AUDIENCE CANNOT HEAR YOU, YOUR TALK IS INEFFECTIVE.

If you have to rely on your built-in computer microphone, make sure to test it beforehand. You can log in to whichever application you are using for your conference and go into "sound settings" to test the quality. If you are going to use a professional microphone, your sound quality may be enhanced from that of your computer microphone. Ensure you plug your microphone into your device ahead of time and, again, test the sound quality on your platform. Once you start your talk, if you have to fuss with the microphone or sound, it could come across as unprepared.

- **Configure your audio settings.** If your microphone picks up too much sound, it may hear squeaks and echoes for your audience. If it doesn't pick up enough, your audience won't hear you.
- **Place your microphone on top of a soft surface on your desk**, such as a piece of foam, to suppress vibrations that it otherwise might pick up and cover it with a sponge cover.
- **Try to keep the distance between you and the microphone consistent** throughout your meeting to ensure the same volume level for all attendees.
- **Make sure you know how to mute your microphone.** There might be unexpected interruptions, such as coughing or shuffling papers, or a quick side conversation you need to have urgently.

04

BE CONVINCING ON CAMERA

THE WAY YOU SPEAK IS GOING TO HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON YOUR VIRTUAL PRESENTATION EFFECTIVENESS AND HOW MUCH YOUR AUDIENCE TAKES AWAY FROM YOUR TIME TOGETHER.

It is vital to connect with your audience personally and be very cognizant of how your sound is coming through.

YOUR BODY LANGUAGE SPEAKS AS LOUD AS WORDS

Even if your audience cannot see your entire body in the video, I recommend the following:

- **Standing when giving your presentation**, if possible. By standing, you ensure that you continue taking deep breaths and speaking clearly throughout the duration of your speech. If you are sitting, your posture may suffer, resulting in uneven breath and speech.
- **Keeping a straight posture with your shoulders back.** Your body language says a lot about your confidence. Often poor posture can lead your audience to think you lack poise and therefore make you seem less trustworthy and like less of an expert in your subject.

CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

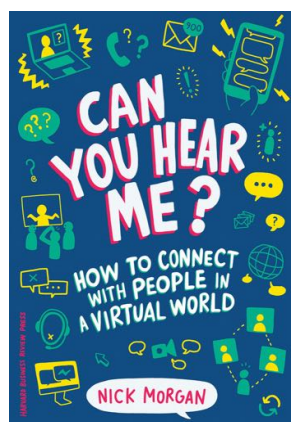
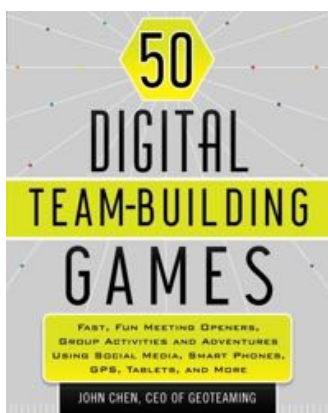
When you present in person, it is often easy to connect with your audience because you can make eye contact with individuals and engage one-on-one.

CHAPTER 04 | CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

When you present in person, it is often easy to connect with your audience because you can make eye contact with individuals and engage one-on-one.

- **Look into the camera, not at the screen.** The best way to ensure people feel you are looking at them and acknowledging that they are in attendance to your online conference is to look into the camera on your computer when you are speaking, rather than to look at the screen on your device. If you look at the screen, it will come across like you are not making eye contact with people, which feels less personal.
- **Be aware of the transmission delay,** and pause for others to comment.
- **Address them personally and directly.** Just as you would in person, make sure you know the names of those organizing your talk and can acknowledge them personally so that they feel seen behind all of the computer screens. When you are addressing your audience, instead of saying, "Can everyone hear me?" say, "Can you hear me?". By switching to directly saying "you," your audience members will feel as if you are personally connecting with them rather than talking to the masses.
- **Add plenty of interaction.** There is no doubt that virtual conferences can be a bit dry in comparison to in-person meetings. That's why you need interactive activities. You will need to alter your presentation a bit to accommodate the circumstances. This may look like asking for more participation in the chat section, utilizing polls or quizzes that attendees can respond to, having a moderated panel discussion, or asking questions and opening up a discussion.

If you are looking for ideas on how to interact with your audiences online, here are some great books on Amazon. Some of them are...



05

ACCEPT ASSISTANCE

VIRTUAL MEETINGS ARE COMPLEX, AND MANY THINGS CAN BE OVERSEEN OR GO WRONG WHILE YOU ARE PRESENTING. THEREFORE, BETTER TEAM UP WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

I recommend you collaborate with someone else (from your team or from the audience) and have an "assistant" or "co-moderator" with you. While you focus on presenting your topic, your assistant or co-moderator can perform some of these tasks:

- Answer questions that are not relevant or require a response from you, such as questions about features, agenda, or anything general.
- Queue up questions and discussions when you open up the floor. Let your audience know that they can write in the chat when they have a question so that they can be added to the queue. They can then ask questions at the appropriate time, and an organization can be maintained.
- Help with setup, registration, or with troubleshooting any technical issues that you may encounter.
- Keep track of time and take notes for you to make the process go more smoothly and take some stress off of you while you are focusing on your presentation.

06

AVOID TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

ISN'T THAT EASY TO SAY? AND HARD TO DO? LIKE IT OR NOT, SINCE TECHNOLOGY IS INVOLVED, SOMETHING IS LIKELY TO GO WRONG.

This can happen on your end or with an audience member who is located in another country, especially when using a variety of devices and programs to access the meeting. However, there are ways to minimize the risk of technical difficulties. Here are tips to ensuring that everything is set up for success:

- Request a tech rehearsal before the event begins. That way, you or your organizers will be able to tell you if they can see you clearly, hear you clearly, and if everything is working well on both ends. This enables you to do a sound and camera check to reduce stress on the day of your meeting.
- Take a deep dive into your device of choice and check your device for updates or compatibility with any software or equipment you plan to use for your meeting and troubleshoot before you are in front of a live audience.
- Ensure you have a strong WiFi connection that will not falter during the conference. If you work for an organization, chances are high that your employer requires you to use specific tools to host your virtual meetings or conferences.

If, for some reason, something goes wrong, be sure you know exactly how to turn your camera or microphone off during your conference. Familiarize yourself with the platform you are using and be well versed with the features it provides so that you can easily react if difficulties occur. If you do not have the time to prep in this way, then have someone on hand who does.

07

START OFF STRONG

IF YOU FOLLOW ME, YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE AND HOW UNCONSCIOUS BIAS WILL EITHER WORK FOR OR AGAINST YOU, DEPENDING ON THE INITIAL IMPRINT YOU MAKE ON OTHERS.

Therefore, it's crucial to start off your meeting strong. Consider the following:

- What are your attendees doing before the conference begins? If available, have them in a "virtual waiting room." That way, if you are testing your camera or sound, they are not watching and hearing you fumbling around with your technology. Instead, they will jump into a waiting room that will automatically connect them to the conference when you decide to start. This is a good way to increase engagement from your audience before you even start talking. Also, by letting them into a waiting room early, it gives attendees time to set up their equipment and settle in.
- Start the meeting on time or even early. It's that simple.
- Begin with acknowledging attendees and team members personally. Make sure they do not feel unseen. If you are hoping to get a discussion started immediately, you could ask a question. For example, you can ask them to type something into the chat whether they can hear and see you, are ready to get started, or where they are located.
- Set the rules at the start of your presentation, so attendees know what to expect for the period of time you will be presenting to them and do not have to take too much time thinking about when they can chime in or ask a question.
- Announce whether you are going to be recording the meeting in any way. You must give attendees the opportunity to opt-out of being seen or heard if they are not comfortable with being recorded for your future use.

08

**PREPARATION IS
KEY. ALWAYS.**

**TO PRESENT YOURSELF BEST POSSIBLE
AND TO BE EFFECTIVE, VIDEO
CONFERENCES TAKE PROPER PLANNING
AND PREPARATION.**

However, honestly, it's not much different than any other meeting you host. As you know, there's nothing worse than going to a meeting without any context, plan, or goals. But, in an online conference, you need to be prepared for things to change, fail, or be more difficult than they might have been in person. Don't stress too much about this; just be adaptable and able to troubleshoot issues quickly and effectively as they present themselves.

- Have a plan B in place if something goes wrong. You need to be prepared for the possibility that things may not go according to plan
- Consider the different time zones, and triple-check what time you need to schedule the event, and be logged on. Being prompt is a huge factor in professionalism, and with a virtual conference, there is no excuse for lateness.
- Be familiar with all of your content and roadmap during your presentation so that you speak smoothly and clearly. This ensures you come off as the expert you are.
- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! Just because you are virtual does not mean you can succeed without preparation. Practice your talk as much, if not more, than you would for an in-person meeting.

09

FINAL THOUGHTS AND FAIR WARNING

**YOU ARE GOING TO BE FINE.
WE ALL WILL.**

Dear [fill in your name],

Online meetings are both very different and very similar to in-person interactions. And I am a hundred percent sure you'll do your best to present yourself as the incredible professional you deserve to be. Just by reading this article to the end, you have proven to be willing to learn and grow and be part of a new way of gathering that will forever change the event, travel, and speaking industries and much more. A word of caution though: It didn't take long for so-called experts to catch onto the coronavirus panic. You'll find dozens of offers in your mailbox and on social media from coaches, trainers, speakers, or other providers who use the timeliness of hot and popular topics in their marketing strategies. Don't panic, and don't sign up for something just out of fear.

**I HOPE THIS E-BOOK WILL HELP YOU (OR SOMEONE ON YOUR TEAM)
HOST YOUR NEXT VIRTUAL EVENT.
IMPRESS YOUR AUDIENCE FROM THE VERY FIRST MOMENT!**

Let me know how it went. And if ever I can be of any help or service, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Sylvie

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VIRTUAL MEETING CHECKLIST

YOUR NAME

DATE

PARTICIPANTS

MEETING TITLE

TIME

PLATFORM

CONTENT

- ☐ plan the agenda
- ☐ prepare & adjust slide deck
- ☐ add interactive elements
- ☐ check time zones (start & end times)
- ☐ send invitations to attendees & team
- ☐ distribute key documents in advance
- ☐ ask attendees for preliminary questions
- ☐ send reminders to attendees
- ☐ rehearse your presentation

DISTRACTIONS

- ☐ turn off phone (or place on airplane mode)
- ☐ turn off iPads, iPods, smart watches
- ☐ mute Google Home, Alexa, Apple Homepod
- ☐ close competing software programs
- ☐ deactivate notifications
- ☐ clean up computer desktop (icons)
- ☐ close open tabs, emails, or text messages
- ☐ close door and put out sign
- ☐ mute doorbell
- ☐ close windows
- ☐ turn off air conditioner (if noisy)
- ☐ clean up desk
- ☐ clean up office (background)
- ☐ get yourself camera-ready

TEAM

- ☐ designate assistant/cohost
 - clarify responsibilities
 - ☐ setup & registration
 - ☐ tech questions & support
 - ☐ queue up questions & discussions
 - ☐ time-keeping
 - ☐ note-taking
 - ☐ others:
- ☐ Emergency telephone numbers
 - assistant/cohost:
 - tech support:
 - others:

TECH

- ☐ check front light and back light
- ☐ check light source is on eye-level
- ☐ test webcam or built-in cam
- ☐ check audio (input & output)
- ☐ configure audio settings (volume)
- ☐ place microphone of soft surface
- ☐ locate mute button or feature
- ☐ locate camera off button or feature
- ☐ request/perform tech rehearsal
- ☐ deep dive into features
- ☐ check all devices for updates
- ☐ test WiFi connection
- ☐ upload and test slide deck
- ☐ develop Plan B in case something goes wrong

VIRTUAL MEETING CHECKLIST

START OFF STRONG

- ☐ get water, coffee, tea for yourself
- ☐ use the bathroom
- ☐ login 15—30 minutes early
- ☐ connect with assistant/cohost
- ☐ prepare waiting room (if available)
- ☐ double-check audio and video
- ☐ open meeting 5 minutes early
- ☐ start meeting & welcome participants
- ☐ set ground rules
- ☐ walk through tools and features
- ☐ announce intent to record (if applicable)
- ☐ start recording (if applicable)
- ☐ acknowledge team (assistant/cohost)
- ☐ acknowledge attendees
- ☐ acknowledge co-presenters
- ☐ present agenda
- ☐ interact/engage with attendees
 - chat
 - Q&A
 - whiteboard
 - polls & quizzes
 - video
 - panel discussions
 - others:

LESSONS LEARNED

What went well: _____

What could have gone better: _____

FINISH STRONG

- ☐ summarize & close meeting
- ☐ thank attendees
- ☐ thank assistant, cohost, co-presenters, tech team, sponsors, etc.
- ☐ announce next steps
- ☐ stop recording (if applicable)
- ☐ check on recording (if applicable)
- ☐ distribute minutes to attendees
- ☐ distribute link to recording (if applicable)
- ☐ distribute any other promised assets
- ☐ schedule a debrief meeting
- ☐ seek feedback for improvements
- ☐ be proud of yourself. I mean it!