Avoid Zooming and frustrating your audience

We've all become Zoom pros, or have we?

Sure, we know what Zoom is, and we've probably used it dozens of times in the past few months, but are we really pros at it? Based on my recent experiences with Zoom presentations, I would say no.

Just yesterday, I was on two different online meetings. In the first meeting, one of the presenters was having audio difficulties (her talk was garbled). She went on for several minutes and the audience could not make out what she was saying. Then several minutes more were wasted in telling her to call in, etc. In the second meeting, somebody "forgot" to turn off his/her mic and we could hear cooking sounds in the background, and then chewing as this person settled down with the dinner he/she had prepared. It was immensely distracting and annoying.

Wasting time and making it hard to hear a speaker adds up to audience frustration. So, if your organization uses online video conferencing to engage with your audience/conduct meetings/host events, it is time to lay out some ground rules so that you can avoid chaos and a have a smooth online experience.

Photo by Anna Shvets from Pexels

Select the correct online video conferencing provider and package

Although Zoom has become the most popular platform, there are other video conferencing providers, including GotoMeeting, Webex and others. Read more about the best alternatives to Zoom in ZDNet and Wired.

To select the proper platform, you'll need to determine what will suit your needs best. Questions to ask yourself include:

- What will you be using the videoconferencing for? Staff meetings, presentations, online conferences
- What functionality do you need? Recording capability, audience interaction, question and answer, breakout sessions, ability to share screens/videos/slides, etc.
- What's your budget?

Map out your online event.

Your meeting or presentation should be planned out, with time allocating to each participant/speaker, and with a written agenda if possible. Mapping out how an event will go, will make it easier to keep it on track.

But, build in time and plan for technical difficulties

There will be glitches. Your presenter may not have strong enough internet signal, or the provider could be experiencing problems. Know beforehand what you will do if a presenter can't log on, or the video software is not working. Have a Plan B, which could include a reschedule date, alternative presenter, alternative software, etc.

Have a moderator and make sure he or she sets up ground rules

Do not start any meeting or presentation without making sure everybody is following some ground rules. Perhaps everybody's mic is muted, or everybody's video is on (or off). Tell your audience who to contact if there are technical difficulties, and how. Make sure to let people know if you are recording, and when/whether the recording will be available. If this event is public, you could sent participants an email explaining the ground rules, and also make sure your moderator repeats them at the beginning of the event.

Understand Zoom fatigue is real

Online video conferencing has been a godsend, but it is not the same as an in-person event. When we've convened people in person, we probably have given them comfy seats, or provided snacks and drinks, and time to schmooze. But when we present online, people are sitting where they always have, in an environment that is probably the same day after day. Dispense with the long introductions, and the long lists of thank yous. Send those in an email. Get to the point. People have limited patience for you.

The bottom line

Cut down the distractions, and make the screen time worthwhile for your audience.