THE
STREAMING NETWORK

WEBINAR ENGAGEMENT EBOOK
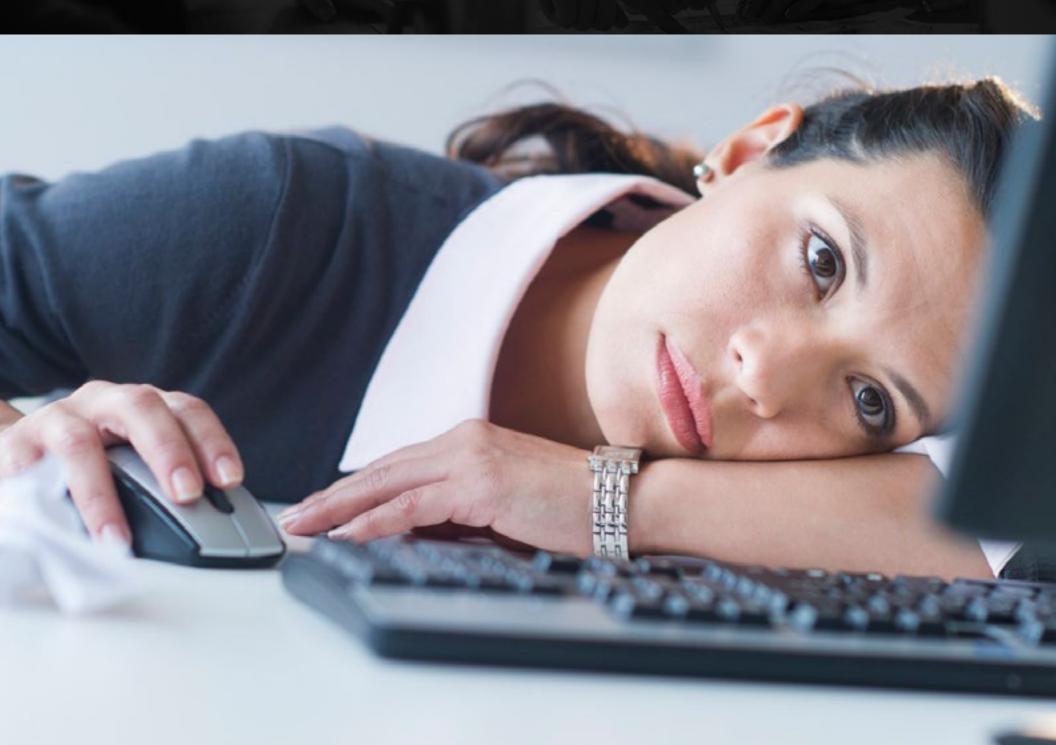
Intro

Improving Webinar Engagement

When we speak to customers, prospects or anyone responsible for producing webinars the number one thing they are looking to improve is Audience Engagement. For over a decade webinars have been lulling audiences to sleep with the same repetitive formats and lack of interactive options.

Does this sound familiar?

✔ You sign up for a webinar on a topic you are very interested in.

✔ The webinar starts and the speaker tells you he or she will take your questions at the end of the session.

✔ At about the 45 minute mark they tell you that they are behind and will try to speed up to make time for your questions,

✔ At about ten minute to close they start to take questions.

✔ They close the session apologizing for not getting to all the questions.

So what's wrong with this format?

✖ The audience does not trust that you will answer their specific questions, so they are less interested in engagement to begin with.

✖ With Q&A and chat being the only mediums available for engagement, they don't have any other options than to sit back and hope the speaker will cover their questions in the content delivery.

✖ There is not enough room for real engagement with the audience.

✖ Let's face it – no one likes to be lectured and that's what this this format is.

Webinar engagement is not just your problem – it is an epidemic! Based on a history of just sitting back and listening and expecting little in the way of engagement audiences are really not that active on webinars today. The data indicates that less than ten of webinar audience members will submit a question, fill in a survey or engage in social media (if you give them that option).

This is why we wrote the book on Webinar Engagement!

After producing better than 15,000 webinars and virtual events we have seen everything, tried everything and have the data to back it up. This E-book represents the best of our learnings and we guarantee if you follow these steps you will drive more engagement with your audience.
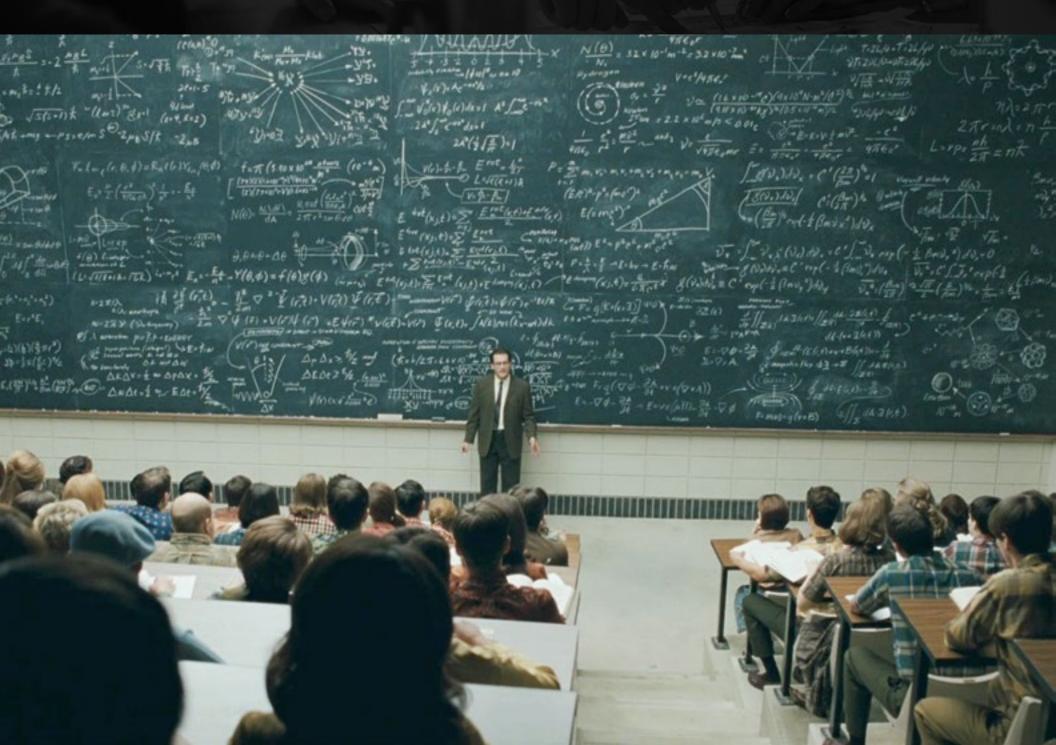

Video
20 Questions - A Rapid Fire Q&A with Webinar Expert Matthew Ley

Chapter One

No one likes to be lectured

Think back to one of your university lectures. You were in a room with a hundred or so of your peers and you professor walked into the room, went to the black board and started the lecture. You didn't feel the professor really wanted your questions or comments and since no-one else was asking questions. In the case that you had one, you were likely not all that confident raising your hand.

The same dynamic happens in a webinar when you bring in your thought leader or speaker to present on a topic in a lecture format.

You want the audience to ask questions and make comments but since there is a lack of a conversation they are apprehensive to interject. That's why you need to change the dynamic, and make the webinar feel like a conversation.

The "interview technique" webinar that breaks the format of the lecture while still maintaining the single presenter model is the format to focus on. To accomplish this format you will need:

- One presenter with a deep knowledge of the subject being discussed.
- One moderator with a working knowledge of the topic and a good understanding of the audience (usually someone in marketing…maybe you!).

Step One: Throw the PowerPoint Away

Often times a webinar is first conceived as a deck. A mish mash of past presentations that has been created with a beginning, middle and an end, to be delivered by an expert in a linear format. The best of which have been trial tested at a conference or in boardrooms with customers and the worst of which try to tell someone everything they wanted to know on a topic but were afraid to ask. The deck is an integral part of the webinar but should be the final step, not the first! The first step is defining a compelling topic and defining who you are talking to.

Not sure who your audience is? Check out this great tool from
The Streaming Network's Webinar Survival Guide for help!

Step Two: The Talking Points

Now that you know who you are talking to and what you are talking about, it is time to meet with your presenter. The goal of the meeting or the presenter's preparation is to provide you with 10-15 minutes of talking points which address the topic and the target audience. The topics don't necessarily need to be linear meaning they don't have to build upon one another but rather they should encompass all content of perceived importance to your audience.

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Step Three: Define Your Questions

Out of the talking points you will likely find that most of them follow a pretty concise narrative while a few of them are flyers or items that often come up when talking to customers that might be a myth or maybe a half-truth propagated by a competitor. Take those topics that follow the concise narrative and create questions that will drive your presenter to answer using the talking points he or she has provided. Call those questions one to ten. The other questions that don't fully follow the narratives become audience questions, filler questions or comments that the moderator can add at various points and each of which is important to the anatomy of your show.

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Step Four: Re-Write Your Questions

Go back to considering who your target audience is and try to write the questions from their point of view. If you believe you have already done so then read your questions aloud to make sure they sound human and are not full of industry double speak or jargon, alienating your audience.

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Step Five: Get Your PowerPoint Out of the Trash!

Although we told you to throw it out, it will now serve in helping to support your content with visuals. Grab the deck that got the planning process started and match the existing slides you have to the talking points your presenter provided in the order of the questions you have created.

Step Six: What About the Extras?

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The flyers, myths or propaganda from a competitive school of thought should be used to help get the audience into the mood to participate. We like using one as an audience question very early in the webinar to create trust with the audience that if they submit a question it will in fact be answered. Since we know that only seven percent of a webinar audience is generally inclined to ask questions we like to reserve the other extra questions for a Q&A period in the event there are not enough questions to carry the full hour or to prompt the audience to get involved.

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Step Seven: Get the Buy In From Your Presenter

Do a dry run with your presenter so they are comfortable with this format. After they are done thanking you for doing their work for them they will likely need some reassurance that this format will work. At that point you can show them this e-book or this example.

The moderator wraps up the event thanking the presenter and audience for their time, plug any relevant resources or promotions and talk about the next webinar or event.

Video
Thinking About Your Webinar
as a Show

Chapter Two

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Give room and create trust with your audience

If you want to break the mold and get your audience to engage during your webinar you have break old habits and get them to trust that you will actually respond to their questions or comments.

Step One: Go to audience questions early and often!

We recommend going to an audience question in the first five minutes of a webinar. To be ready for this, build it into your script and take a frequently asked question from your customer base to fill this spot. Going to an audience question this early will let them know that you are here to answer their questions and will be more likely to submit their own. We recommend you stop periodically throughout the webinar (every five to seven minutes) to answer questions and further hit home the fact that you are here to ensure that they get the information they want.

Step Two: Leave room for audience questions in your agenda.

Let's face it. If you plan for a 40 minute presentation you will likely go over and not leave much or any time for questions. If you have ever said to yourself "My audience doesn't ask questions anyway" that could be because you don't leave them any time to. Create a content agenda no longer than 35 minutes. Then rehearse and ensure that you can hit that timeframe to ensure you will have sufficient time to facilitate audience engagement.

In the end you should have a script that resembles the following agenda:

Host Introduction – *3 minutes*

Review logistics for using the webinar console, housekeeping items and introduce your speaker.

Prepared Questions 1 to 3 – *10 minutes*

Broad questions that set the stage for what will be discussed during the webinar and provide background on the topic.

Audience Question – *3 minutes* (extra question # 1)

Mix in one of your extra questions as an audience question early to establish trust with your audience that you are listening to encourage them to participate.

Prepared Questions 3 to 7 – *20 minutes*

This is the meat of content where you will deliver the majority of narrative you set out to in the webinar.

Formal Question and Answer – *15 minutes*

This is where you answer real questions from your audience and/or the other extra questions you had prepared. Remember you always run out of time and you never run out of questions!

You're Moment of Zen – *3 minutes*

Give your presenter an opportunity to comment on the webinar as a whole, cover off anything they think they might have missed or reiterate any important topics that may have come up in the Q&A.

The Close – *2 minutes*

Chapter Three

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Other formats that work?

They say imitation is the best form of flattery. People usually imitate the best. The same can be said for webinars. In fact, our most successful client webinars here at the Streaming Network are those that effectively mimic leading formats that the audience can understand, relate to and most importantly trust when consuming content.
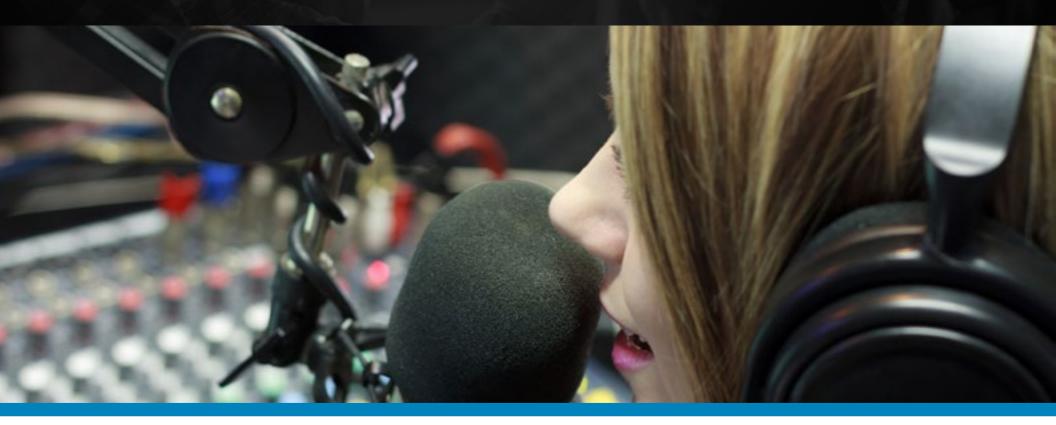
The fundamental difference between your in person presentation and your virtual event is your physical presence. This means you need to account for things like your body language, making eye contact, smiling, using your hands and most importantly making adjustments to your presentation and delivery based on reaction from the audience. This becomes even more of a challenge with an audio webinar.

The Audio Webinar

Your audio webinar is like a radio show with photographs to help illustrate what you're talking about, and your most effective tool is really your voice. Using a range of tools and best practices can help ensure that the audio is always optimized.

While content is critical to an effective audio webinar, I would argue that the format that you choose is just as important. Remember, people are used to consuming content in ways that are the most recognizable to them. Newscasts aren't shot like soaps and talk shows are as interactive with the studio audience as possible. From our experience, interview style works the best for audio webinars. To further optimize your show consider the following techniques which have proven to be successful in radio and podcast format.

He Said, She Said

A large majority of radio shows include a male and female host. One of the most successful shows that utilizes this is 680 NEWS which boasts 1.3 million listeners weekly.

Ask the Right Questions

Engagement is an essential part to any successful virtual event, and the best way to do this is with questions. You can choose to open it up to live participant questions or ask for questions in advance of the webinar if you need the time to prepare the answers.

More voices leads to more discussion

Another great way to enhance an audio webinar is through a panel discussion either introduced throughout the webinar or during a specific portion. The benefit of this is a number of different perspectives and ideas being discussed based on your topic. The downfall of this one however, is that pure noise can take over if participants are speaking over one another and it may be difficult to manage time.

Our recommendation is to take some time and listen to some of the highest ranked podcasts and radio shows in North America, if this is the audience you are speaking to. If your audience is elsewhere in the world do the same for for-mats and shows that work for those markets. Keep in mind the basic rule which is something we tell clients day in and day out. Teach in the way the world learns. There is little need to re-create the wheel here, just use what works.

Chapter Four

Give your audience choice in how they engage with you

Going back to the school analogy. Not every kid likes to put their hand up in class so even if you follow every best practice we have outlined so far it will be hard to get a high percentage of your audience engaged. You need to give them choice in how they interact with you and utilize all those great features that your webinar platform offers (or at least it should).

You can provide you audience with offline options that allow them to engage with you outside the linear nature of the formal webinar Q&A.

We always offer an opportunity for the audience to connect with speakers on LinkedIn during the webinar. They will commonly get five or six connection requests with engagement attached. The strategy that works well is embedding a contact us or book a meeting option in the webinar allowing the audience to take the conversation offline and engage in a more personal way.

Audience members are 4 times more likely to respond to polls than submit questions.

Any good conversationalist knows that asking questions is more important than answering them. The good news for webinars is that more than 30% of your audience will answer poll questions. This is one more way for you to create trust with your audience that you are there and listening to them with the added benefit that you get even more data from your audience!

Understanding this data, our customers have taken to using nonlinear polling. It's a term that we invented to mean that you poll an audience on the subject matter you are presenting upon without referencing it during the webinar. Not everyone will give you an answer but those who do will provide you with new insights into your audience.

Polling has been a long time strategy used by adult learning instructional designers to reinforce learning points. Basically you ask a question, generally about a commonly held misconception on a topic. You poll the audience and ask them to answer. Once you receive the answers and get what you you provide them with the right answer.

Allow your audience to satisfy their need to click on things while viewing your webinar.

Let's face it, you have probably stopped at least two or three times times while reading this e-book to check your email, fact check one of our data-points or do who knows what. We have a need to click, search and interact and one of the main reasons people don't do this during webinars is that they don't have the option! Knowing this, you can offer them supplemental options that will fulfill this need to click.

Resources/Handouts: Most platforms give you the options to give your audience resources or handouts to let you round out your content. These can include white papers, case studies or links to topical websites that will help to keep your audience from doing other things during your webinar and promote more engagement.

Encourage them to learn more: If the webinar is one of the first times the audience is engaging with you, provide them options to learn more about your organization. We often include speaker bios and links to our website and blog in the webinar to allow people to learn more about us while listening to our content.

Calls to action: In the end we are happy to have people view our webinars but are focused on driving action. This can range from creating a customer, to up-selling or moving the registrant through to the next part of the sales cycle. Whatever that next step is for your organization, make it easy by letting the audience do that while watching the webinar.

Chapter Five

Measuring Engagement

Data is key to any measurement, and getting the right data on your webinar is the only way to see if you are improving. Knowing how little the average webinar audience member actually likes to engage with, here are the metrics that we track.

Time in Webinar

Questions Asked

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Polls Answered

Surveys Submitted

Resources Viewed

Engagement Score

Metric 1:
View Time (Live + On-Demand)

If a viewer stays until the end of your webinar they are generally engaged in the content. We look for a +/- 55 minute view time. If that same viewer comes back and consumes part or all of the archive, you know they are very engaged.

Metric 2:
Questions Submitted

Remove the inevitable tech support related questions that come in and then review the # of questions that were submitted. Overall, you want to look at 10%+ of total audience submitting questions as a win for the actual webinar, and 2+ questions from any one webinar attendee indicates they are engaged in your content.

Metric 3:
Other Interactions

Look for your other interactions and track the polls responded to, resources downloaded, and offline LinkedIn connections or emails. With a highly engaged audience you are going to see +/-40% of audience members downloading a resource or responding to a poll and +/-5% of audience members taking an offline action during the webinar.

These are your most engaged audience members!

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The reason that most of our customers and prospects ask about how to drive better engagement is that webinar audiences who are engaged are generally highly motivated to take the next step with your organization, as they received value from your webinar.   At The Streaming Network, we are always looking for new ways to elevate the craft of webinars and often take chances in our Better Webinar Series just to test out our theories.

⊙ Check out this beat the Clock Challenge event from earlier this year

If you are wondering how you might be able to improve your program, submit a recording of your webinar here and we will provide you back our feedback!

⊙ I want TSN to evaluate my webinar

About The Author

Matt Ley is the current President and co-founder of The Streaming Network. Starting his career in virtual events in 2007, Matt is an industry veteran that is passionate about helping customers stand out in their industry with compelling virtual events that people want to attend. The driving ambition for Matt is that virtual events are not a utility for information distribution but an opportunity for firms to create a competitive advantage. Matt is an accomplished speaker, moderator and a sought-after thought leader.

About The Streaming Network

The Streaming Network is one of North America's most prolific Virtual Event producers providing platforms and professional services to corporate customers of all sizes. With over 16,000 events produced in our 8+ years of fighting the good fight, we have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly (along with the incredibly awesome, of course!) of webinar events and are passionate about elevating the craft of the webinar.