

Improving Your Online Presentation Skills

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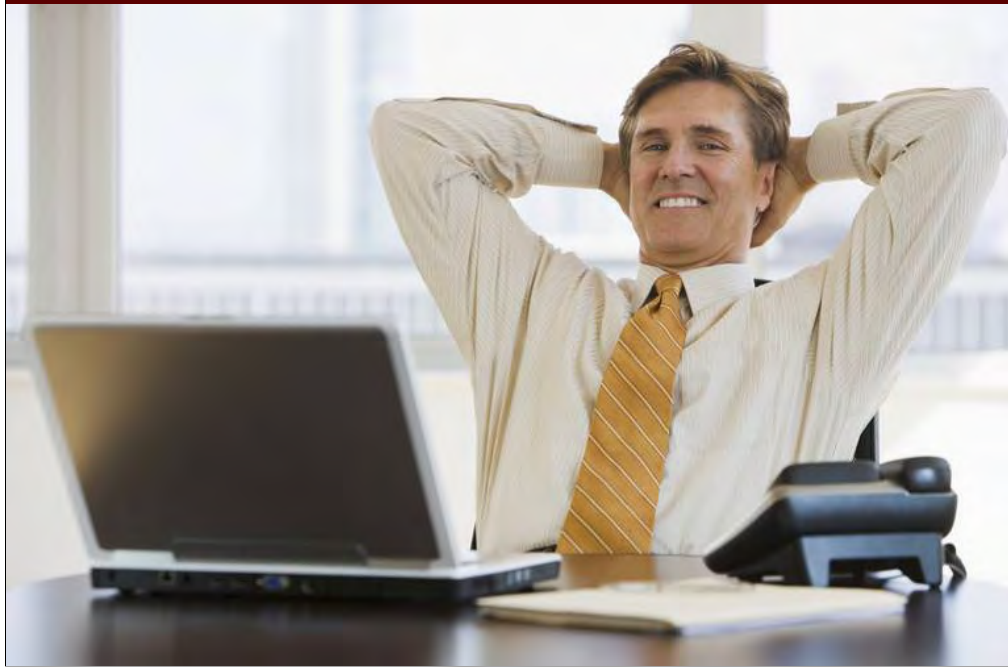
This information was presented by Ken Molay in a live web seminar on February 11, 2009. The slides and notes are here for your reference.

Goal #1: Make Your Webinars More Effective

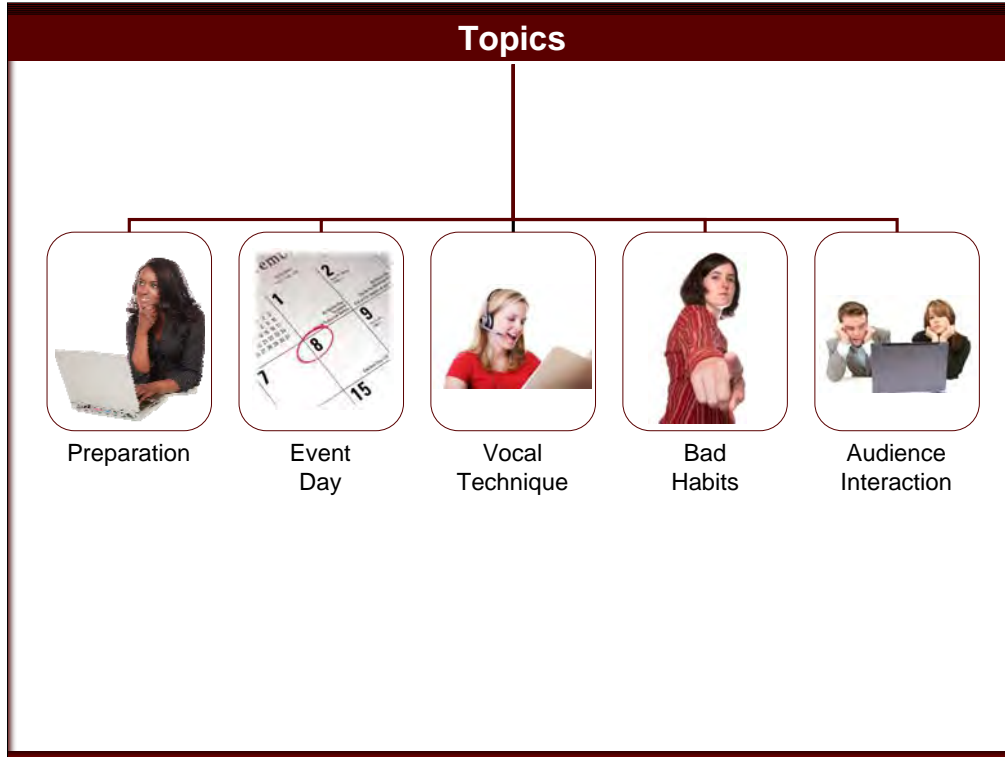


Following these guidelines should result in two important benefits for you. The first is that your webinars will be more engaging and effective in informing and persuading your audience.

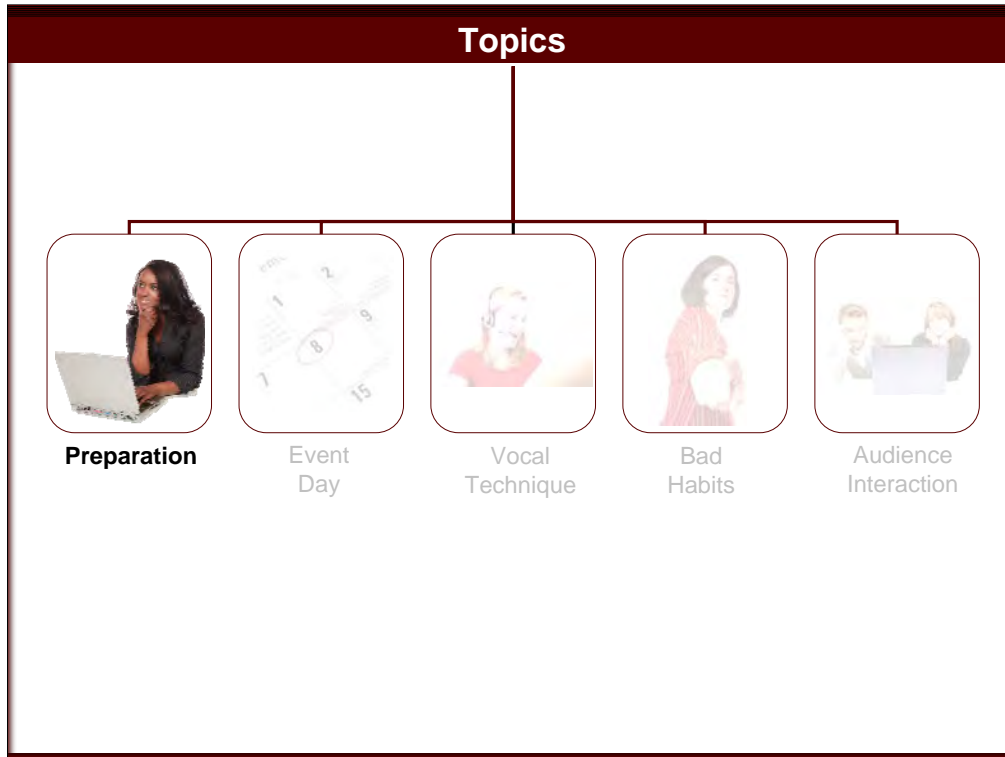
Goal #2: Make You More Comfortable & Confident



And you will feel better prepared as a presenter, confident that you can give the same quality presentation to a remote audience that you would give to an in-room audience.

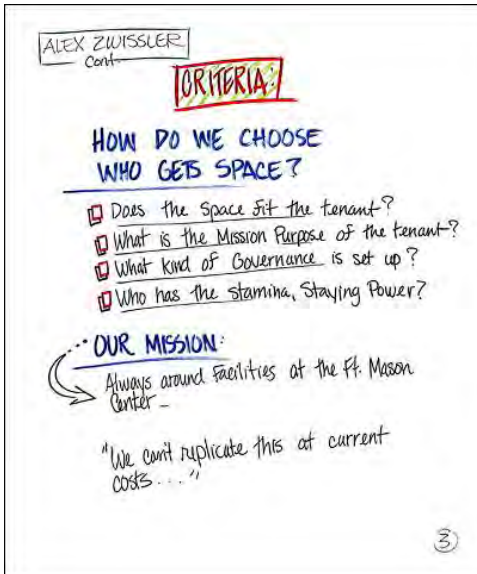


You can improve your skills in many different ways. We will break the topic into five major subdivisions, with guidelines and examples in each content area.



Being an effective presenter starts long before your event. Just as actors rehearse for months before opening night, you need proper preparation to give a great "performance."

Preparation: Know Your Purpose



You should have a clear and unambiguous statement that summarizes your purpose for putting on the webinar. It's not enough to say "To train the audience." What is the point of the training? What would be the measurable outcome of a good session versus a bad one?

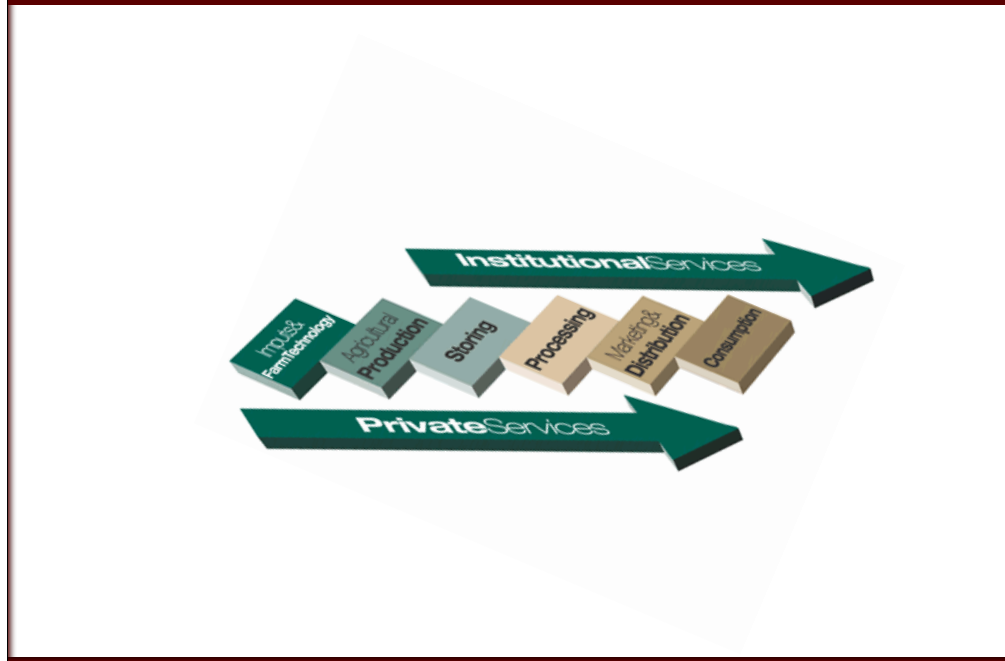
I decided to start this webinar by telling you my goals right up front. You don't have to do that, but your goals should be on your mind during preparation, promotion, and delivery of the event. Write them on a sticky note and put it where you can see it on your PC. Anything that doesn't contribute to the goal should be discarded.

Preparation: Prepare Your Evidence



The next step is to begin assembling the raw data, stories, anecdotes, facts, and examples that help you to establish your points.

Preparation: Establish A Clear Flow



Even a technical training presentation should have a storyline. Why do you present one fact before another? How can you group information into thematically-related sections? This training is an example. There are many separate tips and guidelines I wrote down first. Then I created a way to group the information and move my audience along a defined path towards the final goal of being better presenters.

Preparation: Script Opening And Closing



I prefer to script an opening paragraph or two and a closing paragraph or two. This helps you start your presentation without fumbling for the right introduction and it makes sure you end strongly, without forgetting any housekeeping items or calls to action for the audience. In between, simple bullet point notes should help you remember your key points without giving you a word for word script. You want to sound like you are having a conversation with your audience, not like you are reading a book to them.

Preparation: Shorten Your Introductory Remarks



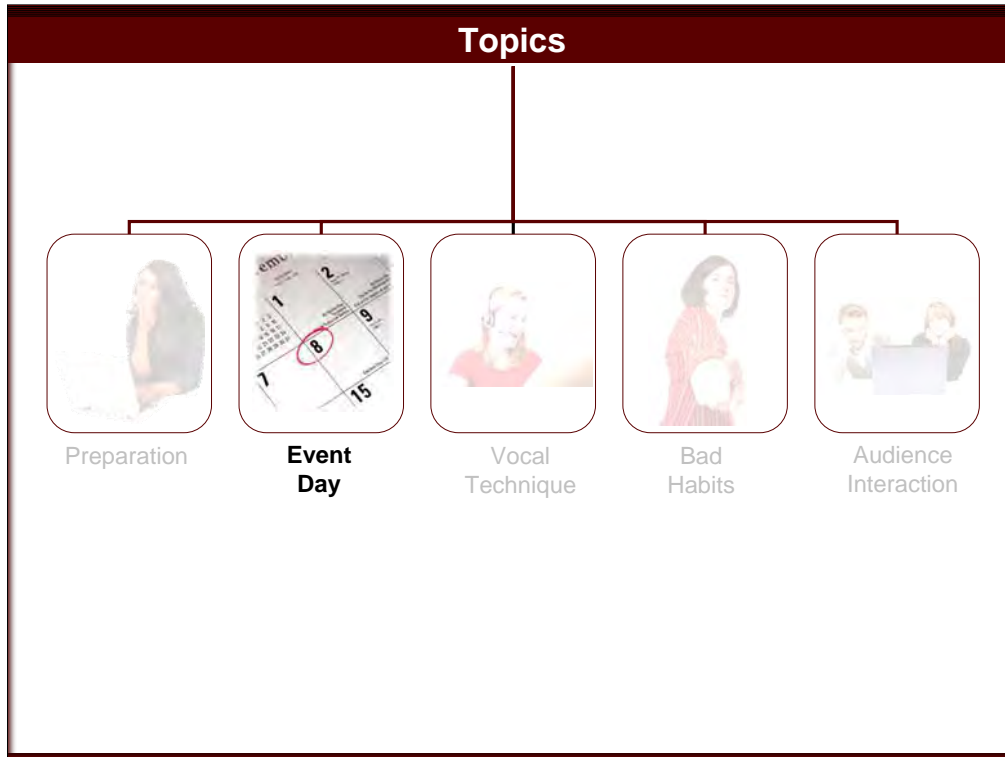
Writing your introduction will help you combat the natural tendency to add too many prefacing remarks. Get to your topic and give the audience something useful and interesting quickly. Your audience knows why they are there. You don't have to tell them the topic again.

Preparation: Practice, Practice, Practice!



This is the single most important slide in this presentation. Rehearse. Adjust. Rehearse again.

That means delivering the entire presentation, word for word as if there was an audience listening. It is not sufficient to skim through your slides, confirming that they are in the right order and you know the subject for each. Delivering the presentation ahead of time makes you confident and comfortable with segues, timing, and what you will say.



Now we come to things that can help you during the event itself.

Event Day: Print Slides And Have A Backup Plan



Always print a copy of your slides and keep them handy during your presentation. If you lose your connection to the web conference, your moderator may be able to advance your slides while you keep speaking on the phone. Otherwise you have to abort the session or have a long delay while reconnecting.

Event Day: One Presenter In A Quiet Room



If you will be presenting as part of a team, have each speaker in a separate room at a separate computer. When multiple speakers try to use the same room it results in audio problems and distractions.

Event Day: Build Your “Fortress Of Solitude”



Never give a webinar presentation from a cubicle environment. Find an office or conference room with a door. Put a sign on the door saying that there is a live public presentation in progress. That will help dissuade people from sticking their head in to see if you can answer a quick question.

Event Day: A Short Course On Fluid Dynamics



You should have liquid handy to combat a dry throat or mouth. The best drink is cool or room temperature water. Drinking ice water can freeze the muscles of your tongue, giving you a slurred "drunken" sound. Carbonated drinks are dangerous because the gas can produce embarrassing side effects. Coffee is acceptable, but only if you drink it black. Dairy or sugar can both cause a gummy "smacking" sound as you talk.

Event Day: Turn Off Distractions



You should have a "pre-flight checklist" to help you remember all the distractions you need to turn off. This includes:

- Email
- Instant messenger
- Cell phone
- Blackberry
- Pager
- Computer sound

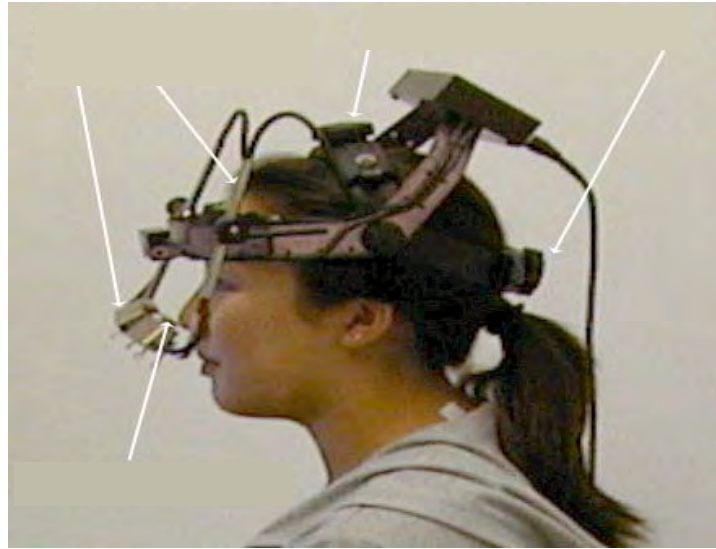
If you have two telephone lines, unplug one or set it to an automatic forward to voice mail so you don't get ringing during your event.

Event Day: Clean Up Your Sound

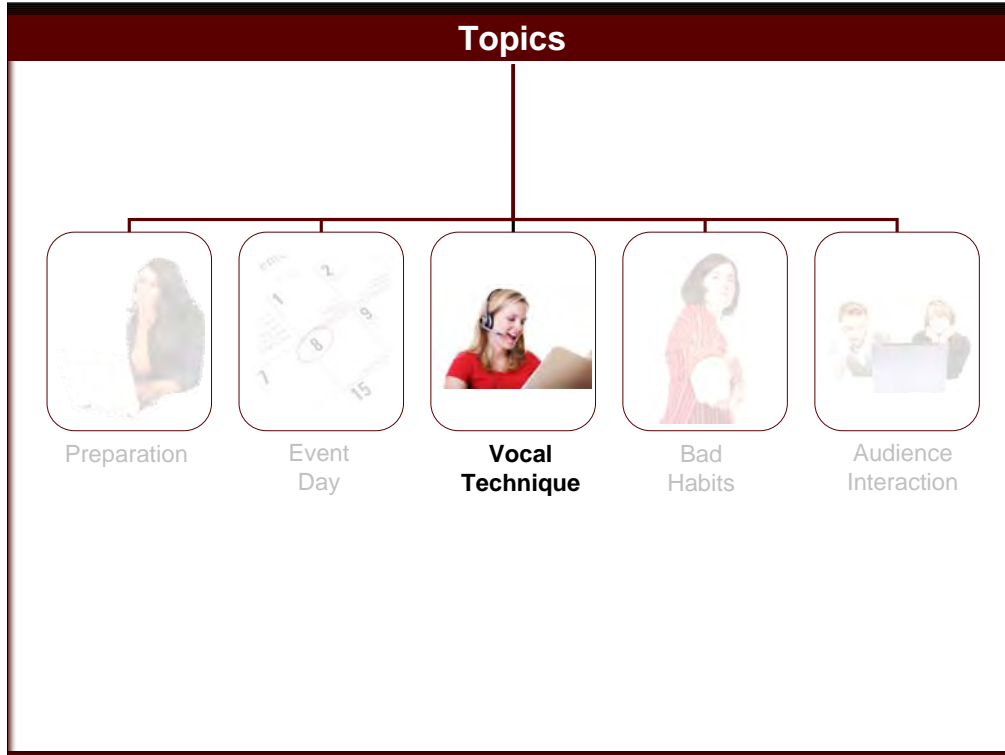


For best audio quality, use your telephone handset (always the cleanest sound) or a high quality headset (Plantronics is an excellent brand). Never use a speakerphone or cell phone... They are both plagued by noise problems

Event Day: Be Aware Of Your Microphone



Check the proper placement of the telephone microphone near your mouth. For a headset, the best position is usually slightly below and to the side of your mouth. You don't want to be blowing or popping into the mike. Have a colleague listen to your audio before the conference starts. Try this phrase: "Frank had a small pepperoni pizza today." Listen for excessive breath on the F and H sounds, popping on the P and T sounds, and hissing on the S and Z sounds.



We've finally made it to the point where you are actually delivering your presentation to the audience. Here are tips for keeping your presentation style compelling and effective.

Vocal Technique: Keep Talking



Since the audience can't see you, your voice is the only thing they have to know that you are there and to build a sense of connection. As little as a three-second pause (if unexpected) can take your audience's focus off the material and onto thoughts of whether they have lost connection or lost the sound. Think of yourself as a radio host who can't afford "dead air."

Vocal Technique: Speak With Confidence



Confidence radiates out to an audience. You need to have a clear vision in your mind of your right to present the information and the benefits the audience will receive by listening to you.

Vocal Technique: Vary Your Tone



A monotone lets your audience drift away from you. Small changes in inflection, tone, volume, and speed continuously refocus the audience on your voice.

Vocal Technique: Maintain Energy



Over the course of a 45-60 minute presentation, you can easily let your energy flag. Watch out for a sigh while talking. This is a huge cue for the audience that the subject doesn't interest you, which means it should interest them.

Tricks for maintaining energy in your voice include speaking with your hands... Let them fly! Stand up and pace while presenting. Consciously smile every now and then. Do something to reinvigorate yourself. If you are working stories and anecdotes into your presentation, these should help to reinterest you in your own delivery.

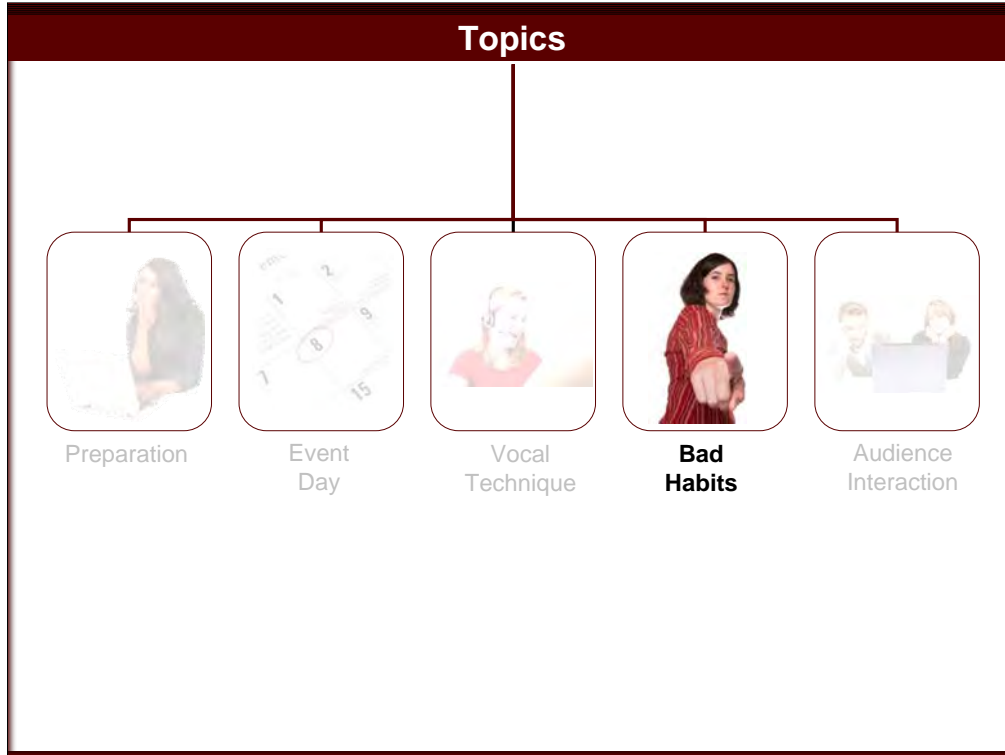
Energy is also important within a single sentence. Don't let your voice drop off towards the end of a sentence. Every word you say should be important enough for the audience to listen to.

Vocal Technique: Don't Downplay Content



Remember that a change in vocal tone refocuses your audience's attention. So suddenly speeding up and dropping your voice has the opposite effect you imagine. It makes your audience pay more attention, not less. If you need to skip over something or downplay it, don't sound apologetic or different from the rest of your presentation.

"We can safely leave this for you to study on your own later. Let's move on to something I think you'll find very interesting..."



Bad habits are hard to break, and even harder to notice. Your brain filters them out. And as you add unfamiliarity with the web conferencing environment and concentration on new techniques, some of these problems can creep into your delivery.

Bad Habits: Don't Repeat Welcomes



If you are part of a team presentation, let the first speaker welcome the audience. You don't need to do it again. Instead, continue the flow as if it was all one extended presentation (which it is to the audience... They don't think about you being a different person with your own separate slides).

"I'd like to build on what Bob just told you by introducing some additional concepts..."

Bad Habits: Minimize Apologies



“Sue me.”

Keep apologies to a minimum. If something goes wrong technically, acknowledge it and plow ahead. If you have a stuffy nose or raspy throat, you can mention it once, and then never again. Dwelling on negative factors creates a "negative halo effect" that builds a subconscious negative view of you, your information, and your company.

Bad Habits: Avoid Qualifiers



Qualifiers are phrases such as "kind of," "pretty much," and "sort of." They suck the power and authority out of your presentation. Be declarative.

"That pretty much covers what I wanted to tell you today...."

Well? Did you tell us everything, or did you leave something out? Now I have doubts I didn't have a second ago!

Bad Habits: Don't Preface Sentences



Some people start sentences with "Well...", "So..." or other phrases repeated incessantly. Eventually your audience starts counting the occurrences and ignoring what comes after your intro word. You can not hear these yourself. You need a coach to spot them and help work on eliminating them.

Bad Habits: Eliminate Rhetorical Questions



At the other end of the sentence is the rhetorical question, which may be an actual word, ("right?") or may be a questioning inflection. ("This one time?" "At band camp?").

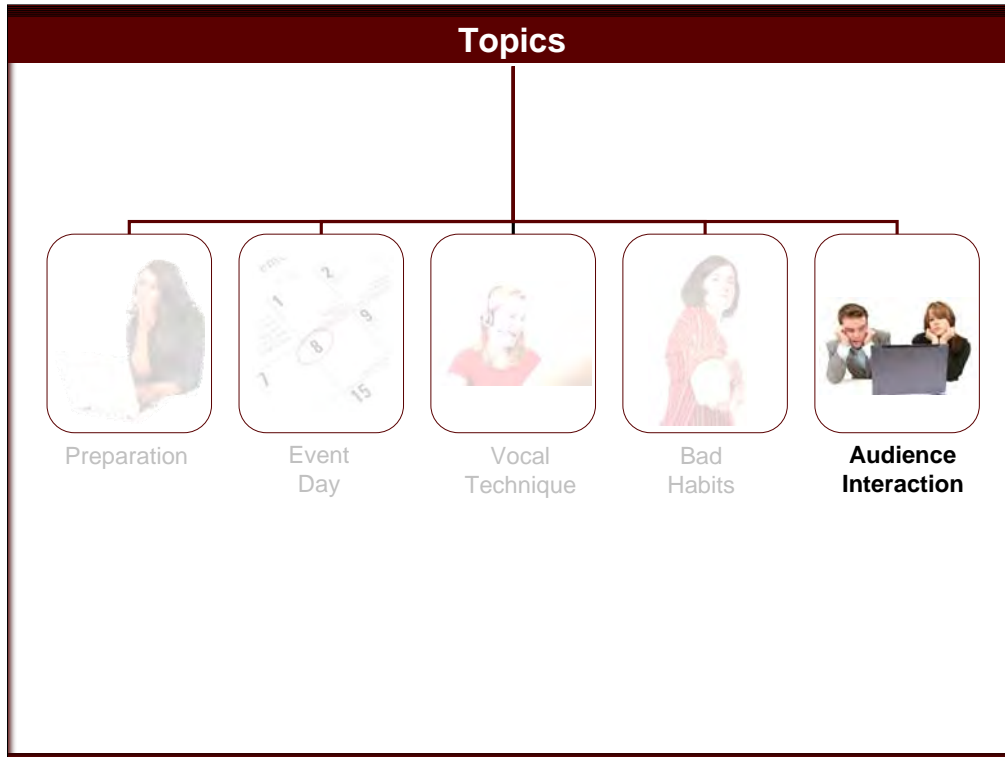
Ending sentences on a question leads to frustration in your audience. You are implying that they should respond, but not letting them do so. Again, you will need help to note this and work on eliminating it.

Bad Habits: Watch Out For Filler



In the middle of the sentence are filler words and noises your brain inserts to cover an unwanted pause. Words may be "You know," "If you know what I mean," or "like." Noises are typically "um" and "uh."

As with the previous two behaviors, these are impossible to work on alone. You need someone to help you spot your fillers and work on eliminating them.



An important part of being effective as an online presenter is learning how to work with your audience. That is more than just running online polls. Your delivery style can influence how they perceive you and the session as well.

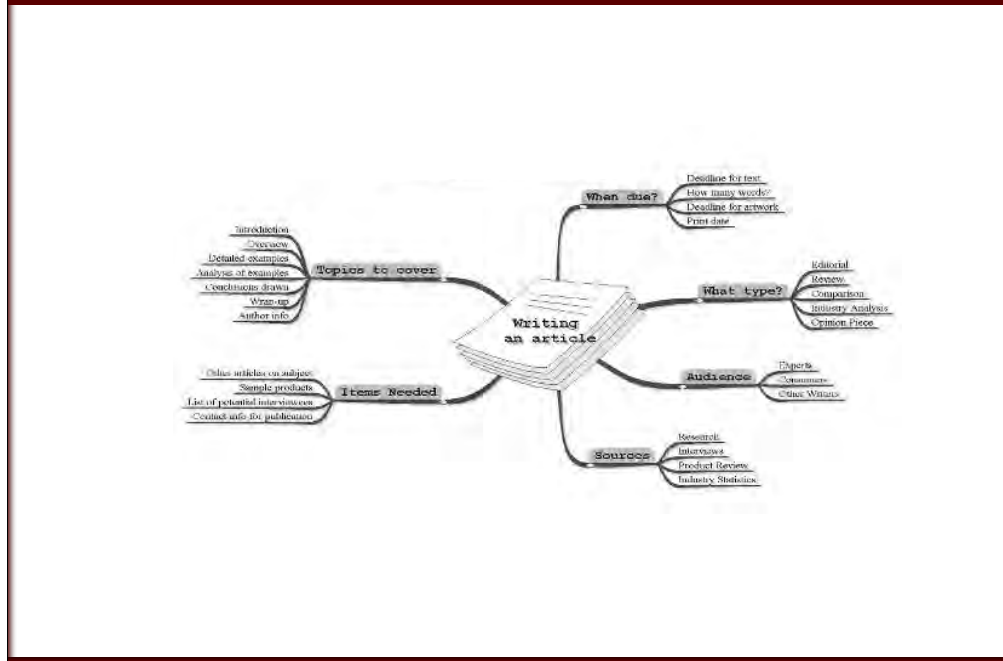
Interaction: Acknowledge Your Audience



Make use of first names in your audience. When a comment comes in, say the name of the person who asked it. Make reference to comments that people enter. Talk to your audience conversationally, rather than in a declamatory fashion. You don't want them to think they are listening to a generic recording.

Remember the magic word, "You." All your statements should be phrased as if you were talking one on one to a single individual, not to a large audience. Instead of "Can anyone out there tell me...?" try "Can you tell me...?"

Interaction: Link Content To Purpose



You should explicitly link facts and information back to your key concepts and purpose for the training. Don't assume that the audience will build the connection in their mind. They are assimilating new information they haven't seen before and it takes an extra cognitive step to understand why it is important or why they should care. Help them by making it clear as you go. This helps move the audience along with you at the same pace mentally.

Interaction: Reinforce Key Points



"Is this going to be on the test?"

Your audience may not be that blunt, but they want help in knowing what are the most important items from all the material you throw at them. Help by occasionally reinforcing and highlighting the particularly important items.

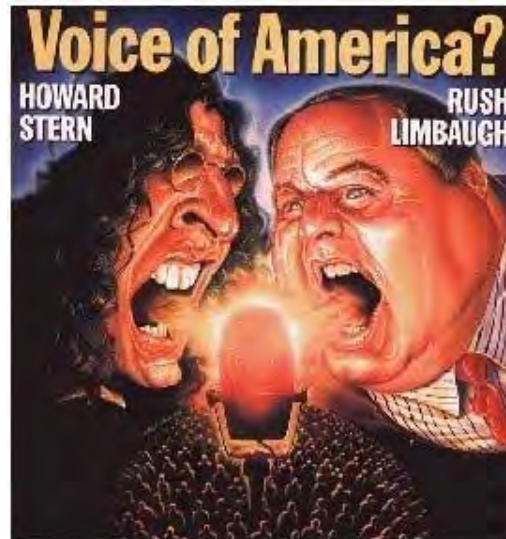
Interaction: Cue Your Audience



Working with a live Q&A session requires additional considerations. If you are taking questions over the telephone, make sure to explicitly cue each individual when it is their turn to talk. This helps avoid confused pauses while the person wonders when to start asking the question. Even if you answer questions submitted via chat, you can help to cue the audience with the start of a question and the start of your answer:

"Denise asks the next question..."

Interaction: Don't Cut Off Questioners



You may have heard the same questions before, but for the audience and the questioner, it is the first time. Let the person finish their entire question. Cutting them off and finishing their question for them is disrespectful (and you just might be wrong!).

Interaction: Restate Questions



Always restate a question asked over the telephone. Your audience is attuned to the sound of your voice and may not pay attention to the person asking a question. There can also be difficulties in understanding accents or diction.

Restating the question gives you a chance to concentrate on the piece you most want to answer and gives you a few extra seconds to think about how to answer it.

Summarizing



- Prepare yourself and your environment
- Practice dynamic speaking techniques
- Seek and destroy bad habits
- Reach out to your audience

Presentation skills start before you begin speaking. Proper setup goes a long way towards making yourself comfortable and making your information more understandable. Prepare your content for maximum impact and purpose, prepare what you are going to say and practice until it becomes natural, and set up your environment to give yourself a physical advantage.

Your vocal technique is the key to grabbing and holding your audience. It's a learned skill set that requires practice.

Presenting to a remote audience is a new and unusual communication technique for many speakers. Bad habits will tend to creep in without you noticing. You will probably need

And it's important to continually reach out to your audience to keep a connection with them, practicing the little tricks that keep the audience moving along with you, and extending your presentation style right through your Q&A session.

More Web Conferencing Resources

The Webinar Blog

Web Conferencing Tips, News, and Opinions

Webinar Wire

Contributions from industry professionals on how to produce, promote, and power web-based events.



Web Conferencing Community Forum

There are more tips, tricks, and usage guidelines available on the Web. Here are some resources that may prove useful.

- The Webinar Blog is my personal look at web conferencing technology, news, and best practices. It is available at **www.TheWebinarBlog.com**
- Webinar Wire is a community blog that accepts submissions from other web conferencing professionals. It is found at **www.WebinarWire.com**
- The Web Conferencing Community Forum is a community message board for end users of web conferencing. Ask for help, share your experiences, and make your opinions known about web conferencing companies, technologies, and methodologies. You can find it at **www.wcc-forum.com**

Thank you

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Please don't hesitate to contact me with your thoughts, comments, and questions about this presentation.