

The Five Things You Must Know About Webinar Audio

A webinar is like a radio show with pictures, so think like a broadcaster!

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Overview

Why is quality audio important?

Webinars, whether they are for demand generation, training, or large get-togethers, are about attracting and engaging an audience who will find value in your message, and through your clear call to action, will take the next step in the sales cycle or education process. Regardless of the webinar's ultimate objective, being able to connect with your audience is paramount. If you sound distant or there is an echo, it diminishes what might otherwise be a great message. You can quickly lose your audience's interest, or worse off, they might completely bail from the webinar.

A webinar is a virtual event, and as such, quality audio is critical to connecting with your audience. Attaining quality audio involves more than technology. It has to do with four interactive considerations: **Human, Technological, Environmental and Logistical Factors**. These involve things like 1) understanding the human factors that help you communicate your message, 2) optimizing the audio technology value chain, 3) creating the best sound environment for presenters, and 4) logistical planning for sound checks and rehearsals so the performance flows and sounds natural.

What is the key difference between an in-person and a virtual event?

When you deliver an **in-person** presentation, you have the ability to use your body language, or nonverbal communication, to engage the audience. You can smile, make eye contact, use your hands to illustrate a point, and move around the stage. In addition, you can watch the audience's body language and get a sense of whether your message is connecting. Based on the audience's nonverbal feedback, you can adjust your presentation.

When you deliver a virtual presentation, your voice is the main instrument that connects and engages. Without the aid of body language, you are relying on your vocal magic to make a connection. A compelling message, strong audio and visual presence, and interactive conferencing tools, such as polling and chat, can keep your attendees riveted. Using the GoToWebinar dashboard panel, you can even monitor your attendees' online attentiveness. When you see their attentiveness dropping, there are ways to bring them back, which we'll get into in the following chapters.

You do not have to be an audiophile to deliver a webinar with quality audio. The good news is that GoToWebinar already provides some powerful built-in audio conferencing options. By following best practices for webinar presentations, using the best computing platforms, broadband network and sound equipments, you will be able to deliver a quality audio experience to keep your audience engaged while enhancing their listening experience.



Chapter 1 – How to Create a Positive Audio Impression

The art and science of webinar communication

Based on a well-known 1967 UCLA Research Study, a behavioral scientist, Albert Mehrabian, suggested there are three elements of any face-to-face communication: 1) words, 2) tone of voice, and 3) nonverbal behavior.

Mehrabian suggested that when we communicate, 55% comes through nonverbal communication (visual body language), 38% of the meaning comes through our tone of voice, and only 7% of the meaning comes from the words we use. The basic findings suggest that in a face-to-face conversation, most people interpret the meaning of conversation through the presenter's body language and the tone of voice, not simply through the content. People are looking for continuity between what you say and how you say it. So when we remove the nonverbal visual cues (55%) in the case of a webinar, the tone of our voice and the words we use become a lot more important to the listener.

How to use your voice to your advantage

There are all kinds of analogies about what a webinar is like, but we prefer to think of them as **Radio Shows with Pictures**. Radio has the power to engage us in a unique way: engaging voices that reach out and connect, thought-provoking conversation, storytelling, and great sound. Webinars share the same characteristics – they are a way to connect with people and inspire them so they want to have a conversation with you with the added bonus of being able to visually stimulate your audience as well.

How do we connect with people and create a positive impression? Whether it is in-person or virtual, people prefer being entertained to being educated. So stimulating a person emotionally is the first step toward communicating and creating a positive audio impression. Presenters who speak with emotion, use inflections, vary the pace at which they speak and change the tone of their voice, know how to leverage the human factors to create a connection with the audience.

ADD EMOTION TO YOUR VOICE BY

- Using inflections
- Varying the speed at which you speak
- Changing your tone



Chapter 2 –How to Maximize Your Audience’s Audio Experience

You may have the best webinar content prepared but if your audience cannot comfortably hear what you are saying the whole webinar experience is diminished, if not ruined. Echoes from under-performing audio devices, delayed audio, background noise, or application sounds going off on your computer detract from the webinar.

While you do not have to be a sound engineer to appreciate and deliver good quality audio, it is important to know some audio basics.

For starters, let’s look at the technological factors that ensure everyone involved with a webinar enjoys the best audio experience. Engaging audio starts with faithfully reproducing the presenter’s voice with natural fidelity. In simple terms this means using quality equipment.


What do you *really* need to know about sound in order to maximize your webinar audio? The answer is just enough to understand how sound is created, and the importance of choosing the right sound equipment. Here’s a brief explanation of how sound is generated:

Sound is created when a source object vibrates the air, creating a sound wave, and there is contact between the source and the listener. *Transducers* are the electronic devices that transform energy from one form into another, such as converting acoustical energy (sound waves) into electrical energy (audio signal). In the case of audio transducers, these are microphones. Microphones have different ways of converting energy, but they all have a *diaphragm* in common. The diaphragm is a very thin piece of material, which vibrates when sound strikes it and the energy converts into a small audio signal. The larger the diaphragm, the more energy converts into a signal. The signal is amplified and sent over the network to the attendees’ computers. Then, this small electrical signal converts back into acoustical energy, or sound. In summary, the size of the diaphragm on your audio device is important – bigger is better!

The presenter’s audio value chain consists of

- 1) the computing platform
- 2) the Internet connection speed
- 3) audio devices
- 4) the GoToWebinar audio options.

Like any chain, it is only as strong as its weakest link, so here is what you need to know about audio technology to deliver the most engaging webinar experience.

TECHNOLOGY	HOW IT AFFECTS WEBINAR AUDIO
Computing Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the ways to maximize audio quality is to broadcast from the fastest computer (Macintosh or PC) you have access to. Slow processor speeds and lack of RAM memory or high CPU usage may be the root cause of dropped words, delays or robotic sounds during a webinar. The more computing horsepower you have the better to process and deliver crisp audio. • Close all extraneous applications, such as email, during the broadcast because they will affect audio performance. You should only need your browser and a slide presentation program open. • Install the latest browser version on your computer.
Internet Connection	<p>Strive for the fastest broadband Internet connection because network speed affects audio quality. From a webinar audio perspective, there is a phenomenon called system latency, which can cause delay of either audio or visual slides by both presenters and attendees due to slow network speeds, thus affecting the webinar experience. A slow network connection or a dial-up connection can be the source of dropped words, delays or robotic sounds as well.</p> <p>Network speed is measured in megabits per second (Mbps) – 1,000,000 bits of information per second – by how long it takes to send information from a computer to the Internet (upload speed), and from the Internet to a computer (download speed). Presenters should test their network speed before delivering a webinar. Citrix recommends a download speed of 2Mbps and upload speed of 1Mbps.</p> <p>Test your connection with a free speed test. There are several free speed tests available to help you determine your upload and download connection speeds. While you cannot control the Internet speed of your attendees, you can bolster the audio quality of your presenters by using a high-speed Internet connection that meets the minimum standards and by using a wired Internet connection (not a wireless router).</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px;"> <p>TRY ONE OF THESE FREE SPEED TESTS: Speedtest.net MegaPath</p> </div>
Microphones	<p>GotoWebinar offers several ways through its standard feature of built-in audio conferencing, to deliver audio to your audience, such as via landline (telephone) or VoIP (sending audio via Internet). As a presenter, the microphone you use makes a huge difference – if you start with inferior audio equipment, delivering quality audio will prove to be an uphill battle. We recommend that you invest in the best audio and computer equipment you have access to.</p> <p>Telephone handsets or headsets generally suffer from having a small diaphragm and are usually not a high fidelity audio device. While they are okay for conversations, telephones do not have the electronics to capture more than simple speech sounds and they have a small diaphragm. Your voice quality could be missing pieces of the sound and lack richness. It is fine for your audience to listen to the webinar via telephone, but not ideal for presenters to share their voice by telephone.</p>  <p>We also do not recommend using telephone speakerphones for webinar presentations because voices may sound distant and can become a barrier to connecting with your audience, and cause attendees to lose interest in your message.</p>

<p>Microphones</p>	<p>Here is what we recommend to get the best-broadcast quality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To sound like a broadcaster, use a high quality microphone, whether it is a USB headset or a standalone, studio-quality microphone. • Using a USB Microphone is a best practice. USB microphones with a large diaphragm will capture all the nuances of your voice and convert it into a digital signal. A USB device is less resource-intensive for your computer than an older, more traditional analog device that typically plugs into a mini jack on your computer. • There is a noticeable difference between consumer microphones and professional microphones in both quality and cost. • Most inexpensive consumer microphones are available in any office supply store – they work, but they do not deliver broadcast quality sound; most consumer microphones are suitable for games and simple voice recording, but not always for webinars. • A consumer USB headset such as a Logitech USB Headset H360, has both a built in microphone and headset. Using a good quality headset for either VoIP or landline audio connection is essential. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sound is relatively good, and since the device sits on your head, you can speak and gesture quite freely. These types of USB headsets are relatively inexpensive and plug into the USB port. However, they do not have the electronics, such as a large diaphragm, to capture all the nuances of your voice. • For a little more money you can get a professional, large diaphragm USB microphone. The most ideal is a professional USB standalone microphone mounted on a scissor boom. For example, the AudioTechnica AT20 plus a companion Scissor Boom mount, makes for a very effective, moderately priced, microphone solution. <p><i>Tip: Don't forget to select the microphone you're using in the GoToWebinar Preferences Menu (Right-click the GoToMeeting system tray icon and select Preferences, then select Audio and choose the device you want to test from the drop-down menu.)</i></p>
<p>GoToWebinar Integrated Audio for Attendees</p>	<p>GoToWebinar organizers and panelists can host webinars with any combination of toll-based, toll-free and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) audio options via GoToWebinar's integrated audio services.</p> <p>When you set up your webinar, you can give attendees a choice of how they connect. For attendees who prefer to listen at their desktop they can use VoIP and listen via computer - speakers or a USB headset. For those who prefer a telephone handset or speakerphone, they can dial in via a toll-based or a toll-free number. You can provide toll-free numbers to over 40 countries, which expands the possibilities of your company's global reach to new international audiences. You can say to your international attendees "Come join our webinar. The phone call is on us!"</p> <p>For more information about GoToWebinar audio options, including Hi-Def Corporate services, visit www.HiDefCorporate.com.</p>



Chapter 3—Pay Attention to Environmental Sound Considerations



When you host a webinar, you are a broadcaster. Broadcasters do not transmit in a room where there is background noise, such as traffic, barking dogs, or people talking. Radio stations and sound studios create controlled ambient rooms that soften sound and eliminate echoes. By controlling the presenter's environment, you can prevent unwanted sounds from interfering with the audience's enjoyment.

If you can hear it so can the microphone!

Great news. It is not necessary to have a professional-grade recording studio from which to broadcast a webinar. All you have to do is pay attention to a few key environmental considerations.

DO'S	DON'TS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broadcast in a quiet room (preferably an inside room) away from street or outside noise.• Use a furnished room with carpet, curtains, or rugs to absorb sound.• Put a sign on the door, "Do Not Disturb – Live Webinar in Session."• Turn off your phone, close your email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broadcast from a room that faces a busy street, or is in earshot of barking dogs, traffic noise, outside conversations• Broadcast in an empty room with a lot of hard surfaces that will reverberate sound and echoes, i.e. wood floors, no curtains.• Leave your door or windows open• Try to multitask during the webinar

Chapter 4—Coach Your Presenters to Shine and Sound like a Broadcaster



Remember, a webinar is like a radio show with pictures – it’s a live show, so the benefits of doing a few practices and revisions before you go live helps eliminate dead air and awkward silences during the webinar. A presenter’s ability to inspire and motivate an audience varies – it is one of the human factors in webinars. When you are coaching, the key is to find your presenter’s passion. Presenters are usually passionate about their message, so your job is to help them convey their excitement by encouraging the use of voice inflections in tone and delivery. Instruct presenters to smile when giving their presentation, even though no one can see them – it really makes a difference in how they sound! Practice their cues and transitions from one topic to the next in order to eliminate dead air and awkward silences. Be open and honest if what they are saying is not aligning with the invitation message, as your audience expects to hear what you promised them.

Four tips for coaching a webinar presenter to sound like a broadcaster

Tip #1 – Learn to work a microphone like a broadcaster.

If you are speaking into a professional or stand-alone broadcast microphone, be careful not to move your face away from the microphone and drift out of range. If you turn from side to side while speaking, your voice strength will come in and out as you face and turn away from the microphone, and the audience will notice it. So make an effort to speak directly into the microphone, keeping your face a few inches away from the microphone, while being careful not to breathe hard into the microphone.

Tip #2 – Test the audio devices (e.g. landline with a headset, VoIP with a USB headset) to make sure the sound quality is good.

Also, ask where presenters will physically be on webinar day, because this could affect audio quality. If presenters are using a landline, make sure they enter their GoToWebinar audio code upon login; the audio code identifies the presenter to the audience, and allows the moderator to mute when necessary. Also, make sure presenters turn off their mobile phone ringers and place them away from computers and microphones.

Tip #3 – Be authentic, friendly, and speak naturally in a conversational tone.

Develop a pleasant tone and use voice inflections to add interest. Smile, even though no one can actually see you. Use the same body language and hand gestures you would use if you were talking to someone in-person. It helps to elevate your voice and introduce interesting inflections that help

to engage your audience. Your audience will notice your enthusiasm and charisma. Practice your material so you can speak naturally and confidently. Try not to read word-for-word from your notes. Audiences want to hear you tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Tip #4 – Monitor your audience’s real time attentiveness using the GoToWebinar dashboard.

When you see their attentiveness dropping, you can bring them back by 1) launching an audience poll, 2) asking a question and asking them to type their answers in the chat panel, or 3) telling a story while noticeably changing your pace and adding emphasis and exclamation.

The critical role of a moderator

A skilled moderator is critical to the success of a webinar. She often manages all of the moving parts of a live webinar. Audiences prefer listening to multiple voices. If there is only one presenter, adding a moderator helps keep the audience engaged. A good moderator knows how to bring out the best in her presenters and can handle emergencies gracefully and behind the scenes.



A True Story

A world-renowned doctor of neuroscience was delivering a webinar about brain relaxation techniques, when suddenly the audience heard two people talking loudly in the background. Apparently, the other panelists in the webinar had forgotten to mute their audio. Fortunately, the doctor was able to get their attention to mute their audio, and move on with the presentation. To avoid embarrassing slip-ups like this one, remember to:

- 1) For every webinar, designate either the moderator or another organizer to be in charge of monitoring and muting anyone’s lines that may insert unwanted audio during the presentation.*
- 2) Educate your panelists to refrain from having side bar conversations, shuffling papers or typing on their keyboards, even when they think they are on mute.*
- 3) It is a worthwhile investment to arrange for an experienced moderator to administer your webinar, who can diffuse these types of embarrassing “off-mic” situations.*



Chapter 5–The Importance of the Sound Check

The best way to ensure a successful webinar event is to perform several sound checks ahead of time, and be prepared with a Plan B in case a technical problem occurs during the live event.

Pre-test your sound equipment and computer speed to avoid last minute glitches

The purpose of a sound check is to optimize the presenter's voice and verify the computing platform, Internet network and the audio equipment is working properly. Remember, you are aiming for broadcast quality. We recommend doing several sound checks during the dry runs and prior to going live.

Tips for sound checks

Poor audio is the Achilles heel of webinars – it can make or break the webinar!

- Do the first sound check when the presenters meet for the first time to begin message shaping. Listen for audio problems such as dropped words, echoes, etc.
- Make sure you know where each presenter will physically be on the day of the event and what technology they will have available, because his or her location could have an effect on the sound quality. Discourage presenters from using a mobile phone, wireless device, speakerphone or worse yet, using the open microphone and speakers on a PC or Mac. If they are going to be calling in from a hotel room, have them do a speed test first to make sure they are on a fast enough network.
- During the sound check, coach your presenters to optimize their ability to produce broadcast quality audio.
- If you are having trouble hearing the presenters, have them check the following:
 - Have each presenter/panelist who is using the VoIP option, open up the File menu on the GoToWebinar control panel, chose Preferences and select Audio.
 - The audio pane on the GoToWebinar panel has options for telephone, microphone and speakers, and settings to test your microphone and speakers.
 - Double-check that you have the correct audio option selected – for instance, you cannot use your computer's microphone and speakers when you have **Use Telephone** selected.
 - Are the correct sound devices selected on your **GoToMeeting Preferences** (or Audio, on a Mac) menu? If using a microphone with a mute/unmute button, is your microphone muted?

- Check the **Microphone Setup**. It should display the name of the device you plan to use during the broadcast, e.g., if you are using an external microphone or headset, it displays the name of that device
 - Is the speaker or headset volume too low?
 - Check the presenter's audio setup. Select the device you want to hear. Click **Play Sound** and verify you can hear it playing from your speakers. You can also adjust the sound level.
- Perform another sound check during each dry run.
 - Have the presenters and moderator meet one hour prior to the live event for a final sound check and troubleshoot any problems.



Conclusion

Sound is the single most important way you connect with the audience during a webinar. The audio best practices in this white paper support the process of planning and producing engaging, results-assured webinar productions. With the right computing platform, broadband Internet connection, sound equipment, preparation and rehearsals, your webinar audience will be treated to an easy-to-hear, appealing, and engaging webinar experience. Audiences who experience smooth hand-offs and energetic, confident presenters are more likely to comprehend your message. Remember, they want to learn from you and the better they can hear you, the more they will be interested in having a conversation with you after the webinar.

Enthuse, excite, tell stories! Have fun, and remember it is about **connection, not perfection.**

Consider taking these actions to create engaging webinars:

1. Listen to your presenters practice their delivery, and coach them to make the flow interesting, relevant and engaging. Offer simple suggestions to use voice inflections and storytelling techniques to connect with the audience. Do you have a skilled moderator who can bring out the best in your presenters, and keep the webinar professional, conversational and on track? Remind the presenters they are part of a virtual ensemble, and encourage them to create a seamless, effortless flow between each other.
2. Take inventory of your audio equipment. Are you using the fastest computer platform and network you can access? Have you invested in a professional quality microphone? Do you have a backup plan in case of technical failure?
3. Ensure the presenters are in a controlled environment. Have you done everything you can to prevent unwanted sounds from interfering with the webinar?
4. Create a webinar project plan that includes all the steps you need to do before, during, and after the webinar that will transform your webinar into a cohesive campaign and the cornerstone of a proven lead-generation engine. Plan to do multiple sound checks and schedule rehearsals so the webinar performance delights your audience and meets or exceeds your goals.



Resources

GoToWebinar Audio Resources

Here are some links to CitrixOnline audio product information, training tips, and frequently asked questions:

[GoToWebinar Integrated Audio](#)

[Audio FAQ](#)

[Audio Fast Help](#)

[Video Training](#)

WebAttract Resources

Here are links to WebAttract webinar services, videos, and training tips:

[WebAttract](#)

[Learning Center Videos – “How to Deliver Quality Audio for Your Webinar”](#)

[Download a FREE copy of the eBook “*WebinarReady: a Step-by-Step Guide to Hosting Successful Webinars*” by Mike Agron, Executive Webinar Producer](#)

[WebAttract Elite Consulting & Training Services for GoToWebinar Customers](#)

About WebAttract

The Author

Mike Agron, Executive Webinar Producer and Co-Founder for **WebAttract**, is a results-oriented sales and business development executive with a 25-year history at technology firms such as Apple, Oracle, and MapInfo. As an Executive Webinar Producer he has produced and moderated informational webinars for global industry brands such as Citrix GoToWebinar, Dex One, Google, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Oracle, Underwriters Laboratories as well as emerging B2B and SMB firms. Mike's goal is to deliver what he calls "High Performing – High Impact" webinars with predictable outcomes. He's a sought after speaker, and author, having recently published a new eBook with Citrix called "*WebinarReady™ – A Step-by-Step Guide to Hosting Successful Webinars*". He has been featured, on numerous webinars and industry events discussing Webinar Demand Generation best practices. And when he's not producing webinars Mike is an avid road cyclist. Follow Mike on Twitter at [@WebinarReady](#).



WebAttract

WebAttract is a professional services organization providing an end2end solution for webinar demand creation including consulting, coaching and training services. We help marketing and sales professionals excel by providing a proven methodology, best practices and metrics across the entire webinar life cycle. As your brand guardian, we will help you capture fresh sales leads and raise your brand awareness by promoting your thought leadership. Our team of experienced B2B webinar experts is passionate about delivering positive outcomes to our clients and partners, from leading global brands to emerging organizations. To learn more about informational webinars, visit us at www.WebAttract.com and check out our training, best practice videos, case studies, and on demand recordings of recent webinars. We invite you to join the WebAttract Thought Leadership Webinars and Webcasts Group on LinkedIn. Or call us at **916.804.4703**. We would love to hear from you.

About GotoWebinar

Webinars made easy™

Citrix GoToWebinar is the easiest-to-use do-it-yourself event tool that projects your message to up to 1,000 online attendees. With GoToWebinar, you can reduce travel costs, generate more qualified leads at a lower cost and enhance communication with customers, prospects and employees. Host unlimited webinars for one low flat fee and give attendees the option to join from a Mac, PC or mobile device. **GoToWebinar Premier Event** is also available to provide custom-built solutions for thousands of attendees and available with video streaming.

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