

Secrets to Successful B2B Webinars

By Matt Heinz, Heinz Marketing

The venerable webinar has become almost as core to most B2B marketing programs as white papers and straight batch-and-send email campaigns. And while some consider them cliché and stale, world-class marketers know that webinars can still be a highly effective and scalable means of driving significant volumes of qualified leads into their sales team's pipeline. Webinars are often also a mainstay of a company's content marketing and lead nurturing efforts.

This best practice guide covers a variety of elements surrounding successful webinar strategy and execution—from content and planning to campaign management, day-of execution and follow-up.

Any marketing channel, strategy or tactic can become redundant and stale if you execute like everyone else. We hope this best practice guide helps you invigorate your webinars and drive significant new value to your pipeline and organization.

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Eight Ways To Make Your Webinars More Compelling

If you thought last year was the year of the webinar, wait till you see this year.

More and more companies are discovering the power of webinars as educational, thought leadership and lead generation tools. And that means you're likely going to be inundated even more in 2014 with webinar offers.

As a marketer, this doesn't mean you should pull webinars from your marketing mix. Far from it, as they can still be incredibly powerful, foundational tools. You just need to execute better.

Below are eight ways to make your webinars more compelling, help them stand out from the crowd, and increase their power to attract and convert prospects into followers, opportunities and closed business.

1. Choose A Narrower Target Audience

If you're trying to get as many attendees as humanly possible, you might be shooting for too wide of an audience. Narrowing your focus to a more specific target audience will help you hone the message, value proposition and appeal of the event more specifically to a particular group of prospects, decision-makers and/or influencers. Focus on quality of content and audience, and not always the highest possible registration volume.

2. Solve Problems vs. Describing Products

Unless you've promoted it specifically as a demo event, don't waste time describing or promoting your product. Your company or product can be a sponsor of the event, but use the webinar to address and solve problems your customers have. Help them think differently about something they already struggle with. If you're trying to introduce a solution, you might be doing so out of context or too early, when the prospect doesn't yet understand or respect its ability to solve their problems.

3. Make Your Points More Immediately Actionable And Tactical

We're all busy people, and have tons to get done. So if your webinar can help me get those things done, I'm all ears. But that typically means they need to focus on content that's very actionable and tactical, including best practices that can immediately—right now—help me do my job better. Leave the theoretical discussions for another event. The more actionable your webinar, the more attractive it will be for busy prospects.

4. Make It Really Clear What People Will Learn

Every good webinar description needs a clear, short "you will learn" section. Ideally, this is a bullet list at least three or four points long. It should enumerate some specific, actionable things people will take away by attending. This is tactical but critical. Scanners won't read your two-paragraph warm-up copy. They want to know, quickly, what they'll get out of it. If your bullet list passes the sniff test, they'll register.

5. Tease The Reader With Quality, Pre-Event Content

If your webinar will feature a prominent expert, author or speaker, why not publish a short Q&A with that presenter on your blog a week or so beforehand? If you're going to feature a top ten list of tips to do X, why not feature the first couple on your blog as well? Think about how you can use your additional content, social and marketing channels to share snippets of content relative to the presentation, and drive additional demand, interest and registrations.

6. Create An Extra Incentive Or Offer To Attend Live

Is there something you could make available only to those who attend live? Something like an extra white paper or free research report or e-copy of the speaker's book? Something of value without a ton of incremental hard cost to you, but makes it that much more likely someone will 1) register, and 2) actually show up.

7. Build The Presentation For Skimmers

We all do it. Attend webinars while multi-tasking with something else. We listen, sort of, while checking email or flipping through RSS feeds. We aren't going to change this behavior, so we might as well optimize our webinars to accommodate. So if you take too long to make a point, those multi-tasking might miss it. But if you format and present your content with skimmers in mind (think top ten lists, highlighted subsections, well-formatted and clear divisions between points), you're more likely to get the point across to more people. And, bonus, skimmer-focused webinar content typically works much better for subsequent, on-demand viewers of the recording.

8. Have A Plan For Takeaways

Think beyond just a copy of the deck and recording. Could you summarize your main points in a one-page PDF? Create a checklist of to-dos and action items out of the event? For attendees and non-attendees alike, make it easy to distribute, pass along and digest the content in shorter, more efficient formats.

Best Practices For Successful Lead Generation Webinars

The use of Webinars to engage prospective customers and generate leads has increased exponentially over the past year. As such, best practices for making them successful for lead generation have become clear. Here are several recommendations for planning and executing Webinars that develop thought leadership for your business, and qualified leads for your sales team.

Planning

Have a bias for action. Get in there and get started. Don't worry about getting hundreds of prospects on the call. Don't worry about making everything perfect. No matter how much time you spend planning, your first couple Webinars will be a learning experience. Know your audience, know your content, and get out there and start executing.

Pick the right day and time. Customize this based on when your audience is most likely to be available. For example, don't plan on reaching sales professionals at the end of the month, or accounting targets at the start of a new month. Avoid Mondays and Fridays. 10:00 Pacific time is a generally good time (1:00 on the East Coast, avoid lunch on both coasts).

Scan for existing conflicts. Before locking in your day and time, check to make sure there aren't existing conferences, holidays or other Webinars planned for the same audience at the same day and time.

Choose a third-party speaker. Even if the topics you've chosen are well-known to employees, pick someone outside the company to give the presentation. It'll come across far more credibly if it's seen as "independent", and you'll likely get a higher registration rate by further separating the content from your sales pitch.

Ask for content feedback from registrants. As you register attendees, ask them for specific up-front questions or requests based on your general topic. For example, if you're doing a Webinar on health care reform for HR professionals, ask them what specific questions they have. As you see patterns in their answers, you'll know how to customize your content and presentation to make it even more relevant.

Execution

Teach, don't preach. Everything about an effective Webinar should be value-added to the audience. Make sure they walk away with knowledge, insights and specific ideas that can help them—both immediately and long-term. As such, make your content easy to digest. Top 10 lists are great—easy to follow along, and easy to pull next steps from.

Don't demo. Unless you've promoted the Webinar explicitly as an online demo of your product or service, don't spent time showing much of the product. Your product should be a natural next step to what you've presented. If your content has set up and addressed the problem, the pain, the challenge, or the current situation your customers are in, it will intensify the need for what you're selling. If your Webinar content is done well, it will organically drive more attendees to want to see what you can offer to help them.

Be interactive. Change the format, the speaker, the visuals on a regular basis to keep your viewers engaged. If you have a specific guest speaker, consider presenting in a Q&A format so that different people are speaking. This change in voice will keep people following. Consider also interjecting video or other visual tools in between slides.

Ask qualifying questions. Use your Webinar service's polling services to ask questions within the Webinar. You can use these answers to customize follow-on content, ensure what you're addressing is reaching and resonating with viewers, and also qualify attendees as leads for post-event follow-up.

Be ready for the Q&A. At the end of a good Webinar, attendees can ask questions. But sometimes they need to be warmed up. Have a few "canned" questions ready to address "from the audience" right away. Believe me, this will help other attendees feel comfortable raising their own hands with more questions.

Follow up

Treat registrants the same as attendees. To a large extent, whether or not the registrant actually attended the live event isn't important. What's more important is that they resonated enough with the topic to register and put it on their calendar. That relevance means they likely have a need for the content (and solution) you're offering. Everyone who registers for your Webinar (not just the 55 percent who actually attend) can be a good prospect.

Follow up quickly. Don't let those leads go more than three days without a follow-up call. Make the follow-up value-added as well. Ensure the content was valuable, ask if they have additional questions, offer an "additional" article, white paper or other content related to the topic.

Make materials available for free. Provide the slides, notes, transcript etc to attendees, registrants and anyone else for free. Put it on SlideShare, post it on your blog, make it as easy to access and pass along as possible.

Conduct and record a post mortem. What went well? What could have gone better? Capture this information quickly (ideally the same day as the Webinar) to ensure you're improving the next time. Could this single copy change double your webinar registration?

Could This Single Copy Change Double Your Webinar Registration?

It's oftentimes the simplest of changes that can give you the greatest lift in performance or results.

For example, check out this webinar offer from Ralf VonSosen, Julio Viskovich, Colleen Honan, Gerhard Gschwandtner, Craig Elias and Jamie Shanks. The topic sounds great, but my favorite part comes after the pitch, with this line:

"Register even if you can't make the live event so you receive the recording and the handout"

How many times do you get a webinar offer but can't make the day and time? Or don't have time to look it up on your calendar? But you're still interested in the topic?

Your prospects think this way too. How much higher could your registration conversion rates be if you added the line above?

Smart...

Didn't Complete The Registration Form? Send Them The Offer Anyway!

There are a ton of shiny objects in demand generation. Good looking headlines and offers that get our attention, but not quite the conversion.

Something might look like a blog post but ends up requiring registration. You thought it would be an instant-gratification white paper but instead it's a 20-minute video, or a webinar two weeks from now.

So you abandon pursuit. Not because it wasn't interesting to you, but because it was too hard to get, or not immediately available.

Most companies count you among the unconverted lost. They might score your half-effort for future usage, but they're done with you for now.

Not so for Citrix in a recent white paper campaign. I was compelled initially by a headline in an email from Enterprise Guide for an article titled "Missed Opportunities: Why Webinar Attendees Leave". Great topic, so I clicked to learn more. I assumed it was a blog article, but instead they wanted me to register. I was in a hurry, and didn't feel like it, so moved on. A few minutes later, this email popped into my inbox:

Subject Line: Missed Opportunities: Why Webinar Attendees Leave

Body Copy:

Thank you for your interest in "Missed Opportunities: Why Webinar Attendees Leave". We know that you're busy, so for your convenience, we've sent you a direct link to this resource so that you can access it anytime.

(Direct, no registration link to the paper on SlideShare here)

Enjoy!

The Enterprise Guide Staff

They didn't get my full registration, but they knew I was interested so sent it to me anyway. So instead of getting nothing, they got me to read the content (plus tweet about it, write a blog post, and link to it again on my blog).

Smart strategy, guys.

Five Ways To Prove Your Next Webinar Isn't Going To Suck

How often do you read about a webinar but wonder if it's really just going to be a veiled sales pitch?

Your prospects are wondering that about your webinars too. So how do you convince them your webinars are worth registering for and attending?

Here are five tactics that are proven to increase credibility, confidence and conversion rates to registration and attendance.

1. Share Endorsements And Testimonials From Past Events

Demonstrate that past attendees have been happy with the investment in time. Use surveys after your next survey to capture feedback on the event, then use the positive feedback to help promote future events.

2. Give Access To Past Events As Examples

Share on-demand recordings or snippets of past events to demonstrate the high degree of value-added content you're going to provide every time moving forward.

3. Give Samples And Teasers Of The Pending Event

How could you immediately show value in the content you're about to feature in the webinar? Record a three to five minute video teasing some of the content? How about a Q&A blog post featuring your highlighted speaker? Give a few examples of the kind of content you're about to present to develop credibility and conversion.

4. Tell Them "This Is A No-Demo Zone"

Sometimes, merely telling your prospects that you refuse to waste their time with unexpected product demos is enough to get past their BS barrier. Do an A/B test with a line like this in the copy or integrated into the registration form.

5. Publish Ratings And Scores From Past Events

In the survey you're going to execute for your next webinar, ask attendees to rate the content on a five or ten point scale. Publish your high ratings in the marketing for your next event to further demonstrate past attendee satisfaction.

Four Critical Components To Maximize Webinar ROI

By Nicole McIntyre

Are webinars already a core component of your 2013 marketing strategy? Not only do your events need to stand out from the mass of others out there, it is also critical to do so cost effectively with measurable results of Marketing Qualified Leads.

There are some important steps while preparing and following up that can increase your effectiveness and ROI down the line. Here are four worth keeping in mind at all times.

1. Desired Outcomes

First, ask yourself, "What is the end goal of this webinar?" Is it to generate leads, to use in your nurture campaign, or to establish thought leadership and credibility? All have their uses and purposes, but the reason will determine your audience, layout and metrics to measure success.

2. Target Audience And Promotion

Now you can determine the ideal audience, and what they know about your company. Get creative on your invitation; don't stick to the overdone simple letter format. It is important for the invitation to address the audience correctly, and share information they don't know without providing info they many already know.

If the webinar is targeted for your in-house list, an intimate, personalized invitation will work great and fits the relationship. Whereas, if inviting new contacts from a purchased list, or first contact, an informative and well branded layout will be more appealing and provide more insight into your brand.

Email invitations aren't the only way to promote your webinar. Post details to your social networks, such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Even asking any co-workers or co-presenters to spread the word to their network is a great way to reach new contacts. Some Webinar service providers (such as BrightTalk) may also have marketing channels you can use, such as newsletters, banner ads, etc.

3. Extended Webinar Lifecycle

Don't forget how to up-cycle your webinar after the live version is completed. Record your webinar to be used in other campaigns, such as nurture campaigns, or assets to gate throughout your site!

It is also important to offer the recorded version to all who registered for your webinar but were unable to attend; they could still be very interested in viewing the webinar. Another great way to repurpose your webinar is to use the manuscript to create white papers, best practice guides, fact sheets or infographics. Get creative!

4. Follow Up

Lastly, determine the appropriate follow up steps, not only to take with those who attended, but those who did not attend as well. If you have a lead scoring program in place, determine the appropriate change in score based on attendance. Based on your desired outcome from above decide the best follow up.

If your webinar was an intimate, product specific event for hot leads, it makes sense for sales to follow up with calls. If the webinar was to establish credibility, the attendees should be sent into a nurture campaign to further qualify the leads.

These are just a few ways to increase your webinar effectiveness.

How To Get Others To Promote Your Webinar For You

Without spending money on advertising or paid promotions, there are still at least two ways to get other companies to use their lists and networks to help promote your next webinar. Here are a couple that have worked in recent months.

Feature Their Products

In January, I participated in a social selling tools webinar hosted by InsideView and DocuSign. In the event, I joined a handful of other social selling experts sharing their best tools, shortcuts and apps for driving more sales engagement and leads from the social web.

The webinar organizers asked us to submit the tools and apps we would feature in advance, then let those tool/app publishers know they'd be featured in the event. As a result, most of those publishers promoted the event in advance to their lists and networks, and were highly active on the event hashtag feed during the webinar itself.

Feature Their Ideas

It's one thing to get a known subject matter expert to participate live on your webinar, but this can be a significant time commitment for the expert. Earlier this month, Trada conducted a webinar featuring advanced PPC strategies and tools curated from a handful of experts. The experts were featured on the event not live, but based on just a couple minutes of providing input and ideas beforehand.

And as a result, the live event and on-demand version have both been promoted heavily by those who had their content featured.

Is Your Webinar Vanilla Or Hot Fudge?

Five Ways To Scale Your Online Event ROI

Webinars are the vanilla ice cream of B2B marketing tactics and that's OK. But think about how much more interesting a scoop of vanilla is when it's in a sundae! Webinars are a starting point that marketers can build multiple assets from for a rich content marketing program. Here is a great way to look at using webinars to build multiple content assets.

The Scoops—Record it

Webinar platforms and service providers offer ways to record the event for on demand playback. Don't rely on a "one-time only" webinar event to engage your audience. By recording the webinar and making it available for on-demand playback, you can connect with more of an audience over a longer period of time.

Chocolate Syrup—Transcribe It

We almost always recommend having a webinar transcribed. The raw transcription is the basis for creating multiple assets that support the presentation. If you have limited resources look at using a freelancer from eLance to transcribe the event.

Carmel Syrup—Blog Series

With some basic editing, the transcription can be turned in a blog, or better yet, an entire blog series. We recently worked with a company using this simple approach where we transcribed and edited the webinar into a seven-part blog series that can be published over a period of time. That is hugely valuable.

Sprinkles—Downloadable PDF Asset

Webinars are organized into logical sections of content that share ideas the audience can relate to. Listening to a webinar isn't always possible, or desired. Take the transcribed content and turn that into a webinar content summary, checklist, or report, formatted as a PDF.

Cherry on Top—Inside Sales Assets

Get the inside sales team involved and provide them with the assets they can use in webinar-related conversations with prospects and customers. Webinar attendee and no-show follow up emails can include links to the on-demand webinar recording or blog series. Voicemail talking points can include brief details on the webinar.

Put It Together

A webinar is just the beginning, not the destination. Using the ideas I've listed let's arrange the components into an ice cream sundae of content marketing. If your organization delivers multiple webinars every quarter, you can rapidly build a library of highly valuable content assets. Make sure to record the webinar for on-demand playback. Once a webinar is delivered, find a resource to transcribe the presentation and edit the notes. This may be something you or someone on your team or a freelancer.

Post the pre-recorded webinar to your website or host as a gated asset with your marketing automation platform. In parallel, edit the content for a blog or blog series. At the end of each blog, promote the link to the full recorded webinar, or even a complementary webinar. Think about sharing quotes or facts from the blog and webinar on Twitter and LinkedIn. The webinar transcription can be crafted into a subsequent document asset that summarizes the overall topic. You can also cross the webinar from this asset and encourage visitors to view the webinar.

A webinar can turn from a single scoop of lonely vanilla ice cream to a richly decadent content marketing sundae. Your audience will be grateful for the choices.

Quick Tactic To Engage Webinar Registrants Beforehand (And Increase Attendance Rates Too)

This is the message I received from Bulldog Solutions for their upcoming event: “Expert Roundtable: Solutions to the Top Challenges Facing Marketing Leaders.” I had already registered, but received the following follow-up email:

Matt,

We’re looking forward to your participation in our upcoming webinar, “Expert Roundtable: Solutions to the Top Challenges Facing Marketing Leaders.”

Before the event on March 20, please take a moment to reply to this email with specific questions related to the content of the webinar. The speakers will try to answer as many questions as they can during the webinar. In fact, your questions will help shape the event content.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope you find the webinar valuable.

Best regards,

Bill Golder

Chief Revenue Officer

Bulldog Solutions

Clearly it would be weird and borderline inappropriate for sales to contact webinar registrants as leads prior to the event, but this is a brilliant tactic to initiate engagement early. Those who submit questions are more likely to actually attend (so they can see their question addressed and answered), plus they feel more engaged in the event itself as they feel like their input will customize the value they receive.

Plus, those questions they submit are buying signals. They likely represent questions to problems or challenges they’re facing internally right now, which should give you (and your sales team) valuable clues as to how to engage with them after the event.

Smart stuff, guys.

Three Alternative Formats That Will Work

Gone are the days when webinars required complete PowerPoint presentations, or even hours of content prep time.

This doesn’t mean a decline in content quality, or a growing laziness among content producers and presenters. Far from it. It just means that quality and value for both the audience as well as the presenting company can often be generated with far less work, simply by getting a bit more creative about the format.

For example:

1. The Group Panel

Pick a topic that’s of value to your intended audience, and invite a handful of experts to come talk about it. Prepare some questions and expectations in advance (come with examples and not just theory, for example), but otherwise find a great moderator and let the conversation drive the value. The visuals on the screen, in some cases, will be secondary. Pick some images that generally represent each conversation topic, but let the discussion stand on its own.

2. The Moderated Q&A

Pick a good enough expert and you'll drive attendance from people who want to ask that person their own questions. Have a handful of questions ready for the expert in advance, to get things rolling and keep the conversation on track, plus ensure that the moderator is carefully choosing questions based on topics that other attendees would likely want to learn from as well. But in this case, your webinar is really about the expert and their content, which is exactly as it should be.

3. The Double-Box Video Chat

Same idea, slightly different format. Instead of worrying about stock images that represent the topic you're covering, put the moderator and expert (or panel) right on screen. Laptop webcams are just fine. Again, focus on the content and the personalities. Choose those right and you'll still have a highly engaging conversation, with great content, that still drives great audience registration, attendance and participation.

And of course, each of these formats can form the basis of repurposing into a variety of other channels and formats that significantly expand the impact and ROI of the initial event, all still with far less up-front bandwidth and prep time required vs. the traditional, PowerPoint-heavy webinar presentation.

Organizations that focus on highly-active content marketing programs need to create a ton of content. That means it's even more important to find ways to produce quality content faster. Hopefully, at least for one format and channel, this gives you a head start.

Why Bullet Points On Webinar Slides Are OK

If you're presenting live, you want people watching you, not your slides. If you're presenting live, you have a captive audience that's there for you, focused on you. It's important that they hear what you're saying, and any visuals behind you should reinforce those points.

Not verbatim. If your live presentation slides are full of bullet points, your audience will frantically try to read everything. They're no longer listening to you, and it's that much harder to remember what they heard (or read) after you're done.

Webinars, however, are a different story. They can hear you but not see you. It's far more passive, even vs. something live and in person. And if it's literally just a slide deck they're watching, it's Okay to have more words.

Why? Your audience probably isn't listening that closely to you anyway. They're multitasking. Checking email, cleaning up their desk. When they glance up, you want them to be able to quickly catch up.

Bullets or key points on webinar slides, therefore, are far more helpful. In this context, they'll help your audience learn faster. And if webinar slide decks are far more likely to get passed around. So if they help tell your story, with or without the soundtrack, that helps you too.

More Information About Us



About Brian Hansford

Brian Hansford is an account director at Heinz Marketing and 20 year B2B sales and marketing veteran. Brian leads the Marketing Automation Practice for Heinz and is an expert working with a wide variety of platforms including Eloqua, Marketo, Pardot, and Salesforce. He has developed and managed complex campaigns for a range of companies and clients and frequently writes about best practices based on those experiences.

About Matt Heinz

Matt Heinz is the Founder and President of Heinz Marketing Inc. Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

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