

# The ULTIMATE guide to virtual presentations



For many organizations, the days of giving face-to-face presentations for every meeting are over. Though face-to-face meetings are still a powerful communications tool, conference organizers, marketing teams, and B2B sales people can attest that virtual presentations are here to stay. However, attempting to simply give the same presentation online as you would offline is likely to result in a disappointing presentation that neither engages nor impresses your audience.

Throughout this report we're going to look at some practical ways your teams can make sure they still make an impact in an online-only era.

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## What makes online presenting different?

With conferences and big events getting cancelled, and travel restrictions making it harder for sales reps to get to their meetings, many organisations are turning to online options to get their content out there. Luckily, web conferencing platforms are widely available, affordable, and actually pretty good, in fact [both Microsoft and Google are offering their solutions for free for a limited time](#).

### **But what effort is involved in taking your in-person content and making it online-ready? Don't you just do the same thing, but virtually?**

Well, no. Firstly, you can't just take your huge conference and shift it online without making any changes if you want it to be successful, and that's not just because some elements of a conference (like networking) don't translate. It's because there's a real difference between presenting face-to-face and presenting online. You need to adapt to the fact that your audience isn't in the room.

Equally, you can't take the sales presentation you've planned to deliver in a room of prospects, present the exact same thing virtually, and expect it to work just as well.

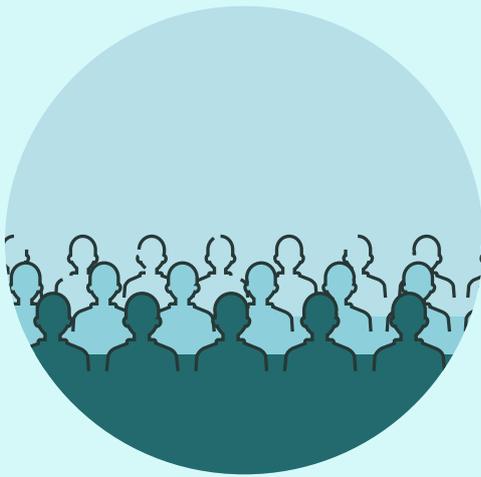
There are a few reasons why, and we'll go into them in greater detail, along with our key strategies for success, but at the very heart of all of this is the difference in the interplay between three things when you move a presentation online – the presenter, their slides, and the audience.



### Face-to-face presentations

Your typical face-to-face presenting environment: You have three things – a presenter, their slides, and the audience. The same thing is true for a huge keynote presentation, a small breakout presentation, or even a chat over a laptop in a coffee shop.

The presenter's role: Because the presenter is with the audience in person, things like presence and body language come in to play. It means the presenter can interact with their slides by pointing and directing audience attention. The presenter also is typically near the slides (at least they should be!) and so the audience only has to look in one place to see both the presenter and their slides.



**Audience dynamics:** And if we flip things round, because the presenter is in the same place as the audience, they can get a sense of how they are being received; they can change their pacing if they sense the audience is a bit bored, they can share a joke or linger on a slide longer than planned. There is a wealth of interaction options available.

**Audience etiquette:** The close proximity of presenter and audience has another implication: social convention. Most people aren't so rude that they would just get up and leave from the front row, so although your audience may tune in and out, once they're there they'll stay there.

**Shared energy:** And finally, laughter is infectious. Applause is infectious. Energy is infectious. If an audience member tunes out, but everyone else laughs, they'll probably tune back in. The impact of this will differ between a huge theatre and a small meeting room, but this energy is something unique that you get just by being in the room.

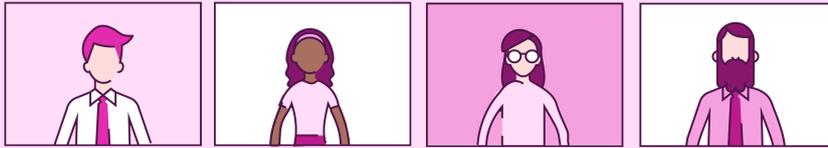
## Online presentations

Moving presentations online means changing some of the most fundamental things about how they work.

**Online presenting – what's changed:** An online presentation has those same three elements: a presenter, their slides, and the audience, but now things look very different. The presenter might be presenting from a stage and being streamed worldwide, or they might be presenting from their kitchen table to folks just down the road. The audience might be 1000s of people scattered around the globe, or a few people working from home. The slides are shown on a screen – but this could be anything from a large display, to a laptop, to a phone.



**Audience dynamics:** Because presenters are no longer in the room with their audience, the relationship between the two changes. Presence and even personality become a lot more difficult to convey online – even the most commanding speaker lacks gravitas when viewed in a small window on a tiny screen.



**Presenter challenges:** The relationship between a presenter and their slides also changes. Presenters can't interact easily with their slides when presenting online, and, in all but the most professional of set-ups, they are displayed in totally different parts of the screen. This means the audience is left looking back and forth from slide to presenter with an inherent tension in terms of attention.

**To mute, or not to mute:** For any online presentation with a reasonable size audience, the logistics mean that you need to mute the audience, otherwise you get the noise

of coffee pots, phones ringing, and worse... (ill-timed bathroom break anybody?). This means that the presenter can't hear anything but their own voice, and it can feel like you're speaking into the void. Many presenters find this unnerving, and the feedback loop you get from an in-person session is pretty much broken.

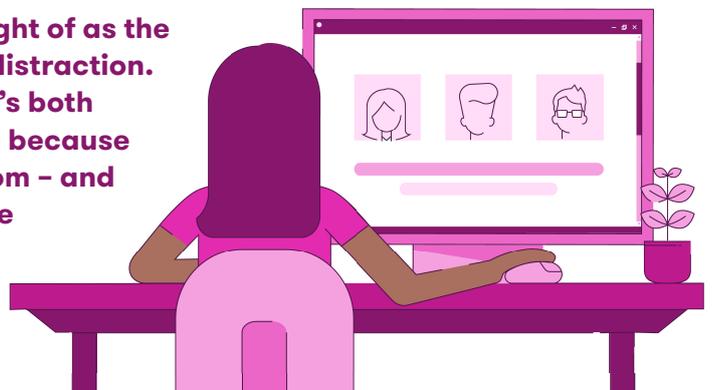
**Audience etiquette:** Another side-effect of moving online is that unobserved audience members often feel liberated to behave however they want. If someone is working from home on their laptop, a presenter is competing for attention like never before:

with online shopping, the news, sports, celebrity gossip. Everything. Some online platforms do highlight whether someone is focused on a different window, but that's anonymous, and it doesn't stop anyone. The bar to retain attention is much higher when presenting online.

**No energy to share:** And finally, if the audience is in 1000 different places, and on mute, they can't feed off each other's energy. If someone tunes out, they likely stay tuned out. Things are a bit different in a smaller online meeting – where a few people can stay unmuted and talk and respond, but even then the shortage of screen real-estate makes it much harder for the audience to participate freely when a presenter is talking.

**All of this means that both the presenter and their slides must work much harder if they're to keep audiences engaged. That means the content you have for your face-to-face audiences has to change if it's to be effective in an online setting.**

**In a sense all presentations can be thought of as the struggle of compelling content against distraction. Take a presentation online though and it's both harder to make the content compelling – because the presenter and slides aren't in the room – and harder to avoid distraction – because the audience are much freer to go off and do other things. So all we need do is eliminate distraction and make our content compelling! Phew!**



# How to eliminate distraction

Your audience is in high demand: there are people wanting urgent responses to emails, friends trying to decide where to go for pizza that evening, the dog chewing the blinds – again. That means you, as a presenter, need to be on your a-game if you're going to capture and hold the attention of your audience for the duration of your online session.

For that you need a great set-up so you can present confidently without fear of interruption, but also so that your audience doesn't have to work too hard to hear you or see you, and so that they can't get distracted by trying to figure out what laundry you have hanging up behind you.

## Best practices for an online set-up

We all remember the [viral clip of Professor Robert Kelly being interrupted by his delightful children](#). As more and more of us are relying on home offices – both bespoke and nowadays perhaps a little makeshift – ensuring you have the right set up to host and attend meetings is a must. It's not just about locking the door and throwing a smart jumper over your pyjamas... your online meeting set-up needs some extra thought. Here are some of the main things we think you should consider:

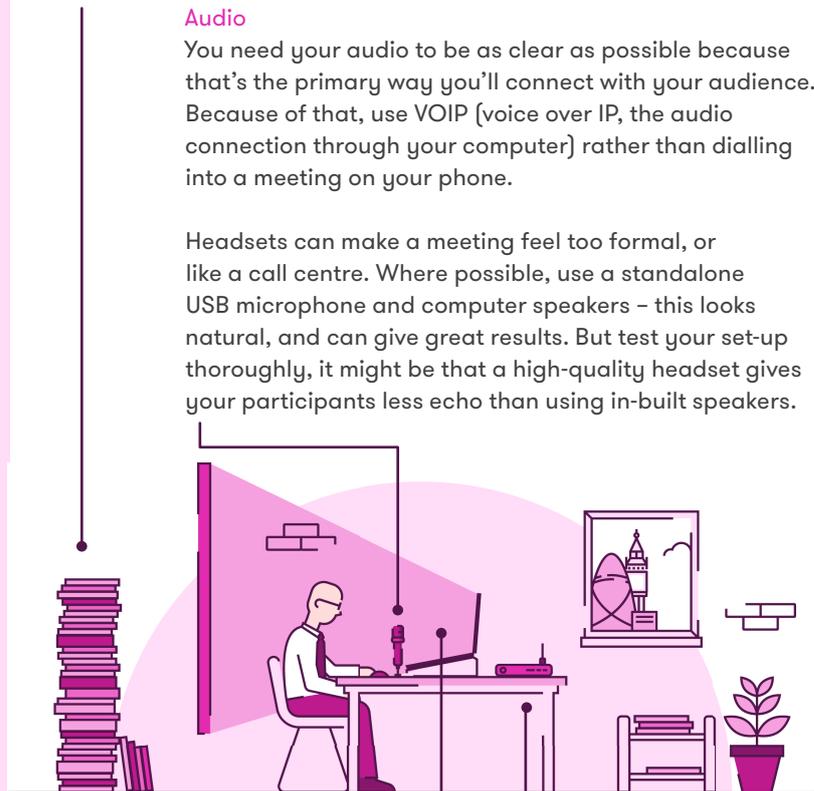
## Background

You should also consider your background. Where you can, sit in front of something neutral that won't distract your audience. Some online meeting platforms can help you out if you can't help sitting in the spare room with your laundry drying behind you. Features like background blur, or the option to switch out your video background for something else will mean you can still maintain a professional appearance even if you're having to operate outside of the office.

## Audio

You need your audio to be as clear as possible because that's the primary way you'll connect with your audience. Because of that, use VOIP (voice over IP, the audio connection through your computer) rather than dialling into a meeting on your phone.

Headsets can make a meeting feel too formal, or like a call centre. Where possible, use a standalone USB microphone and computer speakers – this looks natural, and can give great results. But test your set-up thoroughly, it might be that a high-quality headset gives your participants less echo than using in-built speakers.



## Video

Aim to position your head and shoulders centrally in the frame and make sure you are well-lit from the front. Try to have your eyes level with your webcam so that you can easily 'make eye contact' with your audience. This also avoids any embarrassing (double) chin shots. Oh, and change out of your pyjamas, yes even your pyjama bottoms.

## Internet

You can't conduct an effective meeting if your Wi-Fi can't handle screensharing or webcams, or both. Run a test meeting to make sure you have sufficient bandwidth to host and present. Use an ethernet cable where you can and, if you need to, buy a signal booster.

## Room

Choosing your room will obviously be a bit dependent on your Internet connection, but if it's possible choose somewhere small and put a few cushions or soft furnishings in there – both of these things will reduce echo. Oh, and if you have small kids, you might want to lock the door.

## What meeting platform is right for you?

There are lots of online meeting platforms out there. Different platforms suit different organisations, but if you're in a hurry to find the right one for you, we have a handy comparison table you can use to review your options.

		Microsoft Teams	GoToWebinar	Zoom	Cisco WebEx	Adobe Connect Webinar	Google Meet	Samepage
<b>Capacity</b>	Multiple hosts/presenters	Organizer can restrict participant ability to present	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘ Coming soon	No hosts in Samepage
	Number of audience members	Video conferencing up to 1000; live events up to 10,000	3000	Up to 1,000 (with Pro membership + Large meeting add-on), up to 50,000 with Zoom Events	Video: 200 Audio: 1000	Up to 1000	Up to 250, live stream up to 100,000 (enterprise)	Unlimited, it appears!
<b>Accessing platform</b>	Installed app	✔	✔	✔ And email	✔	✔ Mac, Windows	✔	✔
	Mobile app	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android	✔ iOS, Android
	Cloud, SaaS, Web	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔
	Phone dial-in	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘
	Backstage area for host	✘	✘	Hosts can start a waiting room for participants	✔ Virtual private room	✔	No, but you have to let attendees into the room they can't join	✘
<b>Video and audio</b>	Host audio/webcam	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
	Participant audio/webcam	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
<b>Sharing content</b>	Screen sharing	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔ (Only from desktop app)
	Screen sharing with audio	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔	✘
	Sharing files	✔ Present a PowerPoint file others can interact with	✔	✘	✔	✔	✘	✘
	File attachment	✔ (In chat)	✔	✔ (In chat)	✔	✔ File share pod	✔ Attach files in the calendar even (possibly only if both use google calendar), or put a link in the chat	✔ Upload or link from cloud
<b>Audience interaction</b>	Live chat	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
	Public Q&A	✘ Available for live events	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘
	Private Q&A	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘
	Polls & voting	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘
	Muting participants	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘
<b>Recording</b>	Meeting recording	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔ Saves to drive	✘
<b>Other features</b>	Branding customization	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘
	Virtual webcam backgrounds	✔ Blur or virtual	✘	✔	✔ Blur or virtual	✘	✔	✘
		Translation of PowerPoint slides	GoToStage		Real time translation. Automatically send email messages with links to the event recording and post-event survey		Use captions in video meetings, automatically generated (English only)	

# How to create compelling content

The other side to running successful online sessions is to create compelling content. Even if the presenter is doing all they can to engage their audience, it still won't be enough if their slides are a bit boring and plain.



## The importance of slides

Slides are incredibly important: probably even more important when you're presenting online. For most online platforms the slides take up the biggest bit of real estate on your audience's screen – video thumbnails tend to be off to one side. So when the slides are the major focus, they need to do more of the heavy lifting.

This means slides not only have to look good they must also change frequently – to keep attention once you have it. And – if that wasn't enough – they also need to support what's being said by the speaker to help the audience understand it at a deeper level. If

people don't understand what you are saying, or if your slides don't help them to understand, they'll start looking at other things.

Design and animation are both key but knowing how to transform your bullet points into impactful visual slides is the secret superpower you can use to ensure your message and your slides are always working together in perfect, engaging harmony.

We've not got time to get into the details now, but we have a [great article on our website that talks you through the steps for creating really effective visual presentations.](#)

## How to design compelling slides

When it comes to design as a starting point, it's easy enough to work out what we shouldn't do: dull text-heavy slides that stay on screen for minutes at a time with nothing moving or changing. All you need is a dull, monotonous voice in the background, and you've got a first-class remedy for insomnia.

But, when you open PowerPoint and see the 'click to add text' prompt tempting you into a deep mire of PowerPoint hell, even though you know you shouldn't indulge, it can be really difficult to know what to do instead.

We have a wealth of presentation inspiration for everyone, from the entry levellers dipping their toes into PowerPoint, to those with real design know-how looking to get the golden ratio involved.

## How to animate compelling slides

Presentation slides should always be visual, otherwise you just have a presenter giving a speech with a rubbish backdrop. But even if you have beautiful slides, if they aren't dynamic, don't have movement then you're still asking your presenter (remember, the tiny person in the small window in the corner of a screen) to carry the energy of your session alone.

If something is changing frequently on screen, audiences are likely to keep paying attention. Leave things static for too long and they'll drift off. We think every 20 seconds is about the right frequency for something to change on screen, certainly no more than 30 seconds. These changes could be a major build, or a new slide. It seems like a lot of animation, but it really doesn't feel like it for the audience.

If animation seems scary, or worse cheesy, try to put those preconceptions aside. Animation doesn't need to be a mystery and your audiences will be endlessly grateful that you put in the time to figure it out. We've got some great tips and hacks you can learn in a matter of minutes that will transform your static slides into dynamic content with just a few clicks!

## Presentation design resources

Follow the links, or search our website



[Three easy design hacks to make your presentations more professional](#)



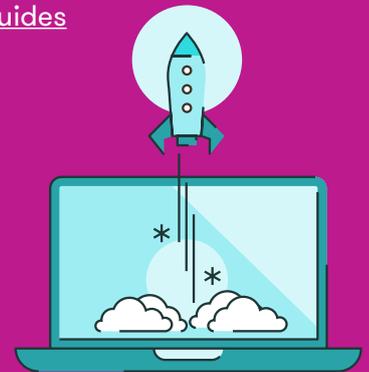
[Presentation design principles for better PowerPoint design](#)



[Stunning presentation design using PowerPoint morph](#)



[Advanced PowerPoint grids and guides](#)



## Presentation animation resources

Follow the links, or search our website



[How to be a PowerPoint animation ninja](#)



[Stunning presentation transitions using PowerPoint morph](#)



[How to take your PowerPoint animation to the next level](#)

## Webcam etiquette

With online meetings it's worth adding a note about webcam etiquette. Throughout this paper, we're assuming you will use webcam, but we can be a bit more nuanced than that.



- ✔ Use video, but not where this distracts from your slides.
- ✔ Use your webcam for introductions, for conversation, and to answer questions, but think about turning your camera off when presenting slides.
- ✔ If you have access to a greenscreen or can videocast yourself presenting in front of your slides, consider that as an option – but please practice first.
- ✔ In a much smaller meeting – like a sales meeting – turning on your webcam creates a social pressure for the audience to do the same, so as a courtesy make it clear that you are planning a video meeting when setting up the call.
- ✔ On some online platforms you can set a picture as a background image – so you could set a static slide as your background. But hacking this function to display your slide show is high risk because of the set-up and rehearsal needed to make it as slick as possible. It can work well, however, if you use the background to bring up a key visual or stat during a Q&A session.

## Presentation skills for online meetings

Online presenters need to avoid monotony. We used to think that for some presenters the best way to do that was to work hard to develop and refine a natural-sounding script. If you aren't using video while you present slides, then there's no risk of being seen reading. But very few people can deliver even the best script in a convincingly natural way. So, our advice is to:

- ✔ Speak from notes, not a full script
- ✔ Practice before hand
- ✔ Don't read verbatim
- ✔ To break up monotony further, consider playing around with the way you structure your content, and the format you use to present it.
- ✔ Break up your material every five to eight minutes, so that attention levels don't sag too much. A non-stop 30-minute presentation might make sense face-to-face, but it's not going to work online.
- ✔ Intersperse chunks of material with clean breaks in the content, use a change of speaker, or even an interview format – introducing content in response to pre-planned questions – to keep your audience engaged.
- ✔ If you're selling to a small group, show a few minutes of content at a time, and select this content in response to questions and the direction of the conversation. Create a visual conversation.

# How to run an effective sales meeting online

Even with the best presentations, virtual events aren't the same as their in-person equivalents: sales meetings can, however, come much closer. Online sales meetings can still feel quite intimate, people can jump in when they have a question or comment and, if you're using webcams, you'll probably be able to see the other people too.

But you still have to modify your approach...



**Small meetings mean greater accountability:** When audiences aren't on webcam there's no accountability, nothing to encourage an audience to pretend to stay focused or interested. And if they're on mute, they won't be expected to respond verbally either. But in a sales meeting, your prospects are more likely to be on webcam – so no checking the news or feeding the cat – and because they're observed it does make them less likely to be distracted, but that level of focus required much more energy.

**Don't overwhelm your audience with TMI:** If you overload your audience with information in this context, not only can it be very difficult to keep energy level high, but you overload the processing power of your prospect, who is putting a lot of their energy into trying to stay focused. In this situation you run the risk of your prospects turning you down simply because they didn't have the energy or focus to engage with all of the detail, let alone remember what it was about.

**Break it down:** This is why chunking is even more important in a sales context. Split your whole presentation into 3-4-slide sections and present based on what topics the prospect is most interested in, or where you see you can add most value. This keeps the pace and the energy of the meeting high, and shows the prospect that you're first and foremost concerned with their needs.

**Use interactive PowerPoint slides:** You can create a 'visual conversation' by presenting sections of slides then exiting the presentation and finding the next relevant section. Or you could create a menu slide and use hyperlinks so you can easily navigate around your presentation without having to exit show mode to find the slides you want.

If you want the low-down on how hyperlinks work, then check out [this video tutorial](#).

## How to run a successful online conference

Compared to sales meetings, events are much harder to move online without some people feeling they are missing out. This is partly because conferences aren't just about the presentations and talks. People attend events for swag, networking, and the chance to learn from other delegates.

**Move networking online:** If you're moving your event online, think about how you can recreate spaces for socialising and networking – for example schedule small discussion groups around certain topics, with cameras on so people can connect meaningfully.

**You no longer have undivided attention:** Another quirk of an in-person event is that attendees tend to block out their calendars for the duration. They stop feeling they need to answer every email. They put on their out-of-office. They put themselves on the right time-zone. They really commit. But if everyone is sat at home, scattered around the globe, things are different. Distractions are different. Calendars fill back up again. Out-of-office messages get switched off. So in order to engage delegates, you'll probably have to make compromises in your schedule so that your sessions happen in short bursts, rather than spread out over the course of a whole day.

**Wider reach:** Of course, the fact that it's less commitment to attend a virtual event also opens them up. You can attract more people, and maybe even amplify your reach by going online: it's not all negative, by any stretch.

**Save square eyes, and run shorter sessions:** Attending a virtual event is different. Being in a conference venue all day, meeting people, feeling that buzz can be uplifting. Staring at slides on a screen all day on your own is typically exhausting. Think about how to rework your schedule to account for the fact that delegates can't concentrate in the same way online. Sessions that might take 90 minutes face-to-face but only have 45 minutes of solid content need to be shortened. Some training content might make more sense on-demand as eLearning with a few tweak or recorded voice over to guide learners through.

**Make the most of your platform's interactive features:** Use the features that your chosen platform provides to make your online presentation more interactive where that's appropriate. Don't spend so much time running polls that you forget to share knowledge, but interaction can help reinforce your message, or ensure that the audience is keeping up. You might want to do a quick orientation at the beginning of your session – point out what interactivity options there are and where to find them. Just remember that you'll need to plan interactivity in advance, and that response rates can be significantly lower than with face-to-face. Most people will put their hand up when sat with peers in a conference hall, but far fewer will join in when online.



# How to create hybrid presentations

Hybrid events aren't new, but audience expectations have changed. Typically, people dialling in were somewhat ignored, but what was tolerated then won't be tolerated now! The way to create compelling content is the same as when you're presenting remotely, but your set-up needs some serious thought.

## Make sure your audience can hear and be heard:

Sound for hybrid presentations can be tricky because usually room conference phones are not great and having multiple mics open in the room at once can cause feedback. A Bluetooth mic can work well but only if you can manage muting and unmuting the room conference phone and your own mic when your audience want to ask questions. Don't just assume that people joining remotely can hear – run a sound check beforehand.

## Make sure your audience can see and be seen:

Not only should your audience be able to see you, they should also be able to see other audience members and be seen themselves. With a single display room, use the display to show slides and (in a small view) the online audience. Some platforms allow you to do this easily, with dedicated views that show dialled in audience members next to or above the slides. Microsoft Teams is really pushing this. Having the online audience visible to those in the room will remind everyone they are equal participants. If possible, use a webcam to make those in the room visible to those who aren't. The general principle is to make sure people can see the presenter and some people in the room – again it doesn't really matter if not everyone is visible. If you're using two cameras one should show the presenter and the other show people in the room.

## Leave the meeting chat on and use it:

It's important that your audience can ask questions and provide feedback. Have someone monitor the chat, field questions for the presenter, respond etc. Only encourage people in the room to join in if it doesn't distract the presenter – it might take a bit of getting used to.

## Find a balance:

Hybrid presentations are complicated as you have to cater for two audiences who are experiencing your content in different ways. Our advice when presenting a virtual presentation is to mix things up somehow (interactivity, change of presenter etc.) every 5-8 minutes or so, but with people in a room that might be too frequent (every 12-15 minutes would be fine). You need to find a balance.

## Consider having multiple presenters:

Having one presenter in the room and one remote can ensure you're not ignoring online audience members. The remote presenter can monitor the chat, respond to some points, advocate for the remote audience and present some of their own content to make it clear that remote participants are equal. This kind of joint presenting will require some practice, so have a run-through with your team before rolling it out to clients or prospects.

# Summary



Don't just take what you would do face-to-face and try to do the exact same thing online. It makes a huge difference to attention levels and energy levels not being in the room with the presenter.



Slides presented online need to be visual, and they need to change onscreen frequently. We think every 20 seconds to keep things compelling.



Use natural breaks in content, or speaker changes, or interactivity, to keep sections short. This makes it easier for the audience to stay engaged.



Use video, but not necessarily while you are sharing slides. If you want your audience to use video too, do them the courtesy of letting them know in advance.



If you move an event online, consider condensing some sessions, introduce extra breaks, and insert sessions specifically to make up for the lack of networking opportunities.



Think seriously about your set-up and make sure all audience members can see and be seen and hear and be heard.



## BrightCarbon

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