

# Q&A: Webinars

A conversation with Sharyn Fitzpatrick of Marcom Gurus



Webinars are a part of almost everyone's marketing plan, but few do them as well as Sharyn Fitzpatrick of Marcom Gurus. Let's see what she has to say about what makes a great seminar and what can turn it into an expensive learning experience.

**Q: What are some of the important keys to a successful seminar?**

**Sharyn:** First, set realistic expectations. Allow four to six weeks from conception to completion.

- ▲ Second, think about the whole process
  - What happens both pre- and post-event?
  - How are you going to follow up on leads?
  - Think outside the box for marketing your event
- ▲ Identify your target audience and understand what will appeal to them.
  - Transfer knowledge, not sales hype
  - Match the content to a pre-determined target audience
    - ▲ Don't talk widgets when an audience wanted to hear about the latest trends in eLearning
- ▲ Use a technology vendor that is easy to implement and will partner with you for success
- ▲ Select speakers who have engaging content as well as an engaging speaking presence

**Q: What should you budget for a seminar and how can you reduce costs without sacrificing on quality?**

**Sharyn:** The technology and event management costs range in price from \$3000 and up. You do get what you pay for. Since most web seminars are for lead generation, you want to make sure that you choose a quality platform that has a history of delivering problem-free events to audiences of your target size. If you use a conference call vendor, expect to pay additional for an outside service or additional service from your web conferencing provider.

Find an all-in-one vendor who will do conferencing, event management, and broadcasting both on the web and with IP telephony. It will cut your costs

Marketing also plays a big factor in the cost of a webinar. The average cost for a list of 5,000 names is \$2500.

You can control your budget by getting creative with your audience development plans – do more with less. Trade for names. If you partner with someone, use their names for audience development. Build up your own lists so you only have to pay for email services, not names.

**Q: What's the best way to market webinars?**

**Sharyn:** Use an internal list, if you have enough. Names of targets who have heard of your company or your speakers will respond the best.

Use a text email message, not HTML. Find a provider such as Boomerang (<http://www.boomerang.com/>) or Extravision (<http://www.extravision.com/>) that will send out bulk emails, but it will look like it is coming from you. You will be amazed at the response rate you will get.

Banner ads and announcement in industry eNewsletters also draw attendance.

**Q: Should you include partners to defray costs and handle some of the presentation?**

**Sharyn:** Only if you are willing to give them a share of the spotlight and they agree to play by your rules.

**Q: What are some of the gotchas in webinars that you should work hard to avoid?**

**Sharyn:** Here are a few pitfalls to look out for:

- ▲ Telephony overage charges
  - If you're doing a tele-seminar where users login to the seminar AND have to call a toll free number, understand who pays for the phone calls and if there are steep overage charges
- ▲ Tech Support responsibility
  - Who handles the attendee technical problems? You don't want your speakers to be distracted by a question about a sound issue or a computer problem
- ▲ Boring content
  - Too many PowerPoint slides with small type and hard to read graphics
  - Static presentations don't keep the audience engaged
  - Share knowledge, not sales hype – this turns them off very fast and the attendees will leave in droves
- ▲ Uninspiring and untrained speakers
  - Your speakers need to practice with the technology so they can be comfortable with both their content and the technology, so their presentation is delivered with confidence. The last thing you need is for the speaker to ask everyone in the audience how to advance the next slide (and yes, it does happen!)

**Q: How far in advance should you send invitations for your webinar?**

**Sharyn:** The rule of thumb used to be three to four weeks but that is often too far away. This really depends on your audience. An eLearning/training audience will be happy to plan far enough in advance whereas a high tech audience likes to make decisions in shorter timeframe. We have seen this over and over again reflected in attendance numbers. A good idea is to send out reminder emails so they don't forget what they signed up for. If they signed up for a webinar, more than three weeks before, then send out a five or seven day reminder. If it is less than two weeks, then send out a 24 hour reminder. Usually, a one hour or 20 minute reminder also works.

**Q: What webinar platforms would you recommend?**

**Sharyn:** It is really more than just a webinar platform. It is also what event management capabilities they offer. Understand whether they handle registration, confirmation emails, reminder emails, post-event notifications, and reporting for lead generation.

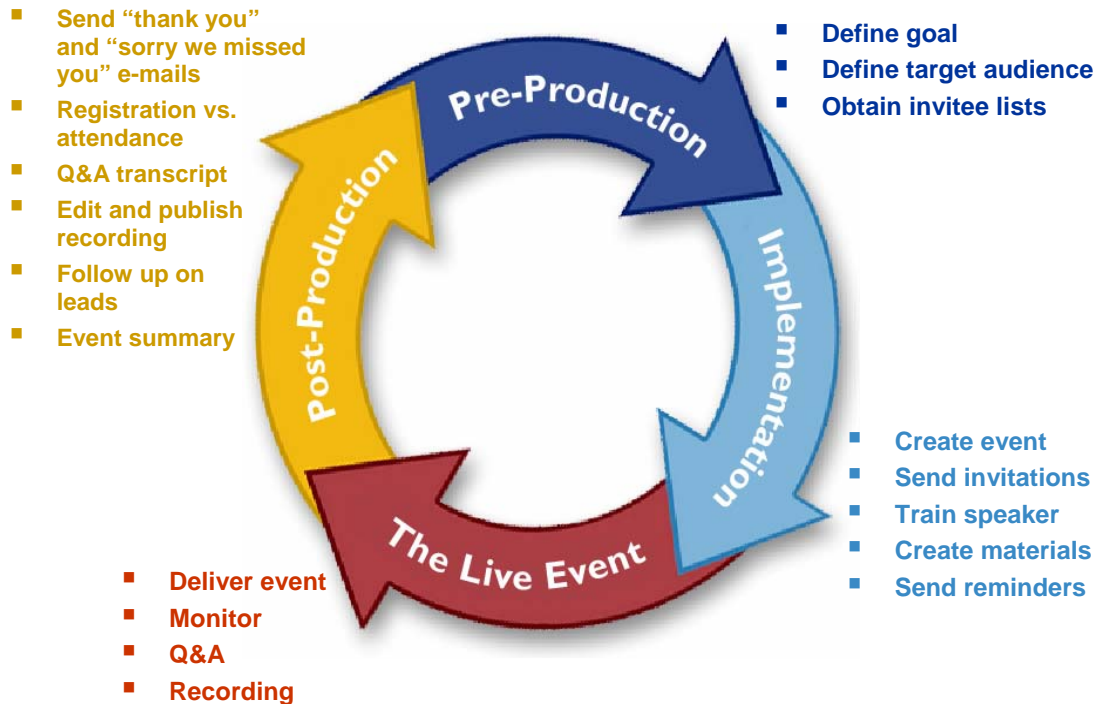
I have had good experiences with WebEx and Interwise, but I feel that Interwise offers a better all-encompassing and better performing technology platform. Their IP telephony option is better than most conference calls and it is much less expensive. You can also record the voice and data presentations together for later playback. This is not an easy feat with some of their competitors.

**Q: After the seminar is over, what's the best way to follow up with the attendees AND non-attendees?**

**Sharyn:** If you have a copy of the recording, send out “thank you” or “sorry we missed you” emails to those that registered. Offer them a direct link to the recording. If they have pre-registered, then using an event management system will help them avoid a re-registration process. They can just click on a custom link and it will play immediately.

**Q: For a company who’s never done a seminar, what’s the best way to get started?**

Follow a successful process. There are lots of best-practice ideas out there. Here is one that has worked successfully for our efforts:



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Sharyn Fitzpatrick and her team of gurus have delivered over 600 web seminars to over 80,000 attendees. Contact Sharyn at [sharyn@marcomgurus.com](mailto:sharyn@marcomgurus.com) or visit her website at [www.marcomgurus.com](http://www.marcomgurus.com) .