Virtual Engagement Dos and Don’ts

Once you’ve done the planning, hone your skills and technology to make the experience most effective. As a host, it’s your job to explain the format and set clear rules of engagement to keep your audience comfortable in an uncertain environment.

Invest in preparing well by doing the following:

For Moderators:

- **Don’t assume your virtual audience understands (or remembers) why they’ve joined the event.** Cover why the subject is relevant to them and why they should pay attention. Be practical about why they’re in attendance and what benefits they will gain. Focus on audience-friendly explanations (rather than “to learn about FCPA,” try “to make sure you don’t inadvertently pay a bribe.”)

- **Address camera usage.** Cameras are great for building rapport, but can also be highly distracting. Be clear about when attendees need to engage with their cameras on, and when they should switch them off to focus on your content.

- **Explain how you’d like the audience to ask questions and encourage their participation.** It’s not always obvious or easy in a virtual format. Be clear upfront and consider having each participant submit a “test” question to make sure they’re comfortable with the functionality.

- **Don’t fill slides with text.** Even in a virtual world, people can’t read slides and listen to a speaker simultaneously. Fewer words and more images are most effective as a visual supplement to your presentation. Consider turning off slides and using your camera when you’re telling a story or answering questions.

- **Consider having someone take notes to post in the chat area.**

- **Provide variety in your engagement with the audience.** Think visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Employ webcams, slides, music or sound, chat features, downloaded worksheets, interactive questions, and group or individual activities. Since people are easily distracted, the rule of thumb is to change it up every 2 minutes to keep people engaged. Don’t go more than 10 minutes without interaction.

For Moderators AND Participants:

- **Don’t use equipment that needs more speed/bandwidth than you have.** Higher quality audio and video require more bandwidth.

- **Use Ethernet instead of WIFI.** Your signal will be faster and more reliable through an Ethernet cable. Similarly, cabled devices (like headphones) are also more reliable than Bluetooth.

- **Reboot your router and computer before a session.** Other devices and users consume bandwidth, so consider how many devices are on your network. Some routers even allow prioritization of traffic to prioritize your devices over others where you are working.

- **Test lighting sources.** Higher quality lenses can compensate for lower light levels. Front-lit or side-lit environments give better results than rear-lit.
• **Synchronize your audio and video.** If you’re connecting external video or audio features to your computer, avoid audio-syncing issues by capturing your audio and video in the same input.

• **Treat every microphone as if it’s “hot” (On).**

• **Use high quality speakers so you can hear queues.** If you’re using external speakers, test the setup to ensure your microphone doesn’t pick up speaker feedback.

• **Position your camera at eye-level.** Set up camera at eye level to look effortlessly into the lens and directly engage with the audience. This likely involves propping up your laptop or phone. If you’re using notes, place them as close to the lens as possible.

• **Pay attention to your video background.** Hide or blur out distractions. Some video conferencing services, like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, provide free backgrounds and blurring effects.

• **Dress business casual.**

• **Close down all unnecessary background applications and windows to free capacity.**

• **Turn off push notifications.**

• **Prepare for screen sharing.** Open documents you’ll need (or may need) ahead of time and close down irrelevant windows, removing anything you’d rather not share.