

## How to Host Webinars and Online Events

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There are many benefits to hosting online events, which can bring people together without the need for travel—saving time and money for all involved. Webinars are the most common type of online event, and they can be used for a variety of purposes.

### **Promotional (Free) Webinars**

One powerful way to leverage webinars is to offer these events for free in exchange for capturing email addresses from attendees. Many businesses and online marketers promote educational webinars as a way to introduce the audience to new topics and then ultimately entice them into an “upsell” for related products and services. Free webinars can be a valuable marketing tool for reaching potential customers around the globe.



Complimentary webinars can also be hosted by organizations that simply want to offer valuable content to their members or the community at large. I serve on the board of a small nonprofit that hosts free monthly webinars featuring guest speakers, aimed at simply providing support to members of the organization. There is no upsell involved; these events are delivered as a service to the community.

Complimentary webinars can be offered by places of worship, all kinds of businesses, industry experts, nonprofits, and anyone who wants to reach a broad audience. These are inexpensive to host and are easier than ever to deliver.

### **Paid Webinars and Online Courses**

Another way to leverage webinar technology is to charge event attendees for participation. All kinds of organizations, from private businesses to nonprofits, offer educational webinars. These often feature guest instructors, and charge the attendees fees ranging from \$10 to \$50 to attend the event.

A series of webinar events can also be compiled and delivered as part of an online course. For example, you could offer a 6-part course delivered each week with 90-minute instructional webinar events. These live events can allow attendees to interact with the host and each other, ask questions, and feel they are part of the program. Webinar events can also be recorded for later viewing, or sold as a bundled course offering.

### **Online Conference Events**

Since 2010, we have hosted an annual [Nonfiction Writers Conference](#), delivered entirely online. This event features 15 speakers over three days, each delivering lecture-style presentations. Some conduct their presentations using PowerPoint slides, others lecture directly into the camera, and some use screen-sharing for live demonstrations. All of these methods can be effective for event delivery and attendee engagement.

Utilizing webinar technology allows attendees to gather from around the globe from the comfort of their homes or offices. This saves on travel expenses and the time involved in traveling to and from an in-person event, making it an efficient and economical investment for attendees.



Truth be told, I often wonder why more organizations don't host online conferences. The overhead expenses are minimal, especially when compared to the cost of reserving hotel meeting space, coordinating audio/visual equipment, purchasing meals for attendees, blocking hotel rooms, and enlisting staff to coordinate all that's involved in running a live event.

Online events can be just as powerful, profitable, and effective. If you're interested in hosting your own webinar, online course, or online conference, following are steps to get started.

## **How to Host a Webinar, Online Course, or Online Conference**

1. The first step is to decide on your format and topic.
  - a. Will it be a Q&A with a guest, will someone interview you, or will you be the sole speaker leading a lecture or interactive discussion?
  - b. Will it be a series of events conducted as a summit or online conference?
  - c. Will it be based on a topic you already speak about or a topic you need to develop?
  - d. What questions do you find yourself answering often? These can be valuable in building new content.

- e. You could also create a list of potential topics and survey your audience to find out what most appeals to them. Tool: <http://SurveyMonkey.com>.
  - f. Can you do something unique and hold an open Q&A with the audience for an hour? Get creative!
2. Decide if the event will be free or paid.
    - a. Free events are great because you can require people to register to attend and build your mailing list as a result. This is how most should get started with teleseminars. If you're in the process of building your audience, free events can be a great way to cultivate that relationship.
    - b. Paid events require that you have an engaged audience that is willing to invest in learning from you. This works best for those who already have an audience established.
  3. Write a compelling title and description of the event, with sales copy that makes your target audience *excited* to participate.
  4. Sign up for a webinar hosting service. We use and recommend [Zoom](#), which is user-friendly and affordable. [GoToMeeting.com](#) is another option.
  5. You will need to follow the steps to schedule your event, or series of events, in Zoom or other webinar provider.
  6. Set up a registration page. There are several ways to approach this.
    - a. Zoom offers registration pages within its system, so you can use those for both free and paid events. For a paid event, you'll need to integrate your Zoom account with Paypal for payment processing.
    - b. Another option is to create an account with [eventbrite.com](#), which is an easy-to-use tool for event registration management. There is no charge to manage

registration for free events. They charge a small transaction fee for paid events. You can also use this in addition to other registration options since Eventbrite can be used for promotion purposes.

- c. You can also create registration pages via [leadpages.net](https://www.leadpages.net) , which is a paid service.
  - d. A free option for Wordpress users is a plugin called [Optimize Press](https://optimizepress.com).
  - e. You can also create a Facebook event, provided you know your audience is already using Facebook.
  - f. If you're charging for your event, you will need to use an ecommerce solution such as [Paypal](https://www.paypal.com), [1shoppingcart.com](https://www.1shoppingcart.com), or [e-junkie.com](https://www.e-junkie.com).
7. Once your event is set up, promote it in as many places as possible. Promotion can begin a month or more in advance, though you'll likely find you get the best response within two weeks of the event, and especially in the days leading up to the event. (People tend to procrastinate!). Here are some promotion opportunities:
- a. Create an event on Facebook and promote to your fans and friends. Be sure to include a link to the registration page.
  - b. Paid ads on Facebook can be a great way to promote an event and generate new registrations.
  - c. As mentioned previously, you should create an event with [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com). Whether you use their ticketing system or not, this service cross-promotes events and can bring added exposure.
  - d. Announce your event via all of your social media networks and repeat several times before the event takes place.
  - e. Post to [craigslist.org](https://www.craigslist.org) events section for several cities.

- f. Announce to your email list, and remind them the day before the event.
  - g. Also post to any other sites where your target audience is located. This can include newsletters, message boards, classifieds, forums, online groups, and any place that can bring exposure for the appropriate audience.
  - h. Share details in your blog.
  - i. Ask guest speakers to share with their audiences.
8. Prepare to deliver your event.
- a. Be sure to schedule a practice session. If you've never hosted an event before, you'll want to practice connecting to the event, starting the recording, and leading the event. You should also be sure you have the right amount of material to deliver in the time you've allotted for the event.
  - b. Send participation instructions to all attendees, and send them again the day before or day of the event. These frequently get misplaced and will help assure attendees are able to participate.
  - c. Create a script for your event so that you have a strong opening and closing message. For the opening, welcome people and lay out the guidelines. Will you be taking questions during the call or at the end? Let them know what to expect.
  - d. Consider how you want to address the audience. Allowing questions at any time can disrupt the flow of the call. I recommend muting participants during the presentation and then opening up the line for questions a couple of times during the event or at the end. Zoom offers a Q&A box where participants can type in their questions, which you can read aloud on their behalf.

- e. If you have a guest speaker for your event, you will need their bio to read as an introduction. Try to keep it to a paragraph or less and ask for clarification on names or titles that are hard to pronounce.
- f. Keep an eye on the time so that you can meet your goals before time is up. It's better to finish early than late since listeners may have other commitments at the top of the hour, and you can always use extra time for questions.
- g. Sometimes the audience is shy and won't ask a lot of questions. Be prepared by collecting some questions in advance that you can address without them.
- h. Your closing script should thank them for attending and invite them to take a next step—like buy your book or your online course.
- i. Don't be discouraged if you don't get a lot of participants on your first event. This will grow over time so keep at it!

Hosting your own online events can provide tremendous exposure for you and your guests—which can also provide guest speakers incentive for participating. As a bonus, these events give you a reason to reach out to peers and industry professionals and invite them to participate, helping you to build alliances. And over the long-term, these events can have a solid impact on helping grow your business, cultivate an audience, and build your community.

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