

OUR INSIGHTS

Practical advice on common business challenges
direct from our International team of business experts

INSIGHTS, JULIAN MARCH, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION



9 steps to TV production sparkle in your next webinar

The sun is coming out, the daffodils are making an appearance, vaccinations are rolling out, and the world is getting #backtobetter. We all know that video conferencing is here to stay as a key element of hybrid working. It's efficient, it's green, but it can also be boring.

It's more important than ever nowadays to dial up the story-telling and communications in our leadership, and make our new virtual get-togethers exciting, engaging and rich in information and inspiration.

Highly produced webinars have for too long been the preserve of the C-suite and the big annual company all hands, but now they are in scope for quarterly division meetings or monthly updates.

I recently produced a series of interactive webinars for the global Property team of a large multinational bank, and I was able to bring over a decade of live TV production experience to that project. Here's the 9-step plan for adding TV production magic to your team video events:

1. Plan your content, build a run-down

It all starts with preparation. Decide what you want to say, what story you want to tell, and what you want your audience to come away with. Think about how long you want your event to last, but also how you can keep your audience's attention.

One trick is to vary the texture of your session by mixing up live discussion with pre-recorded videos, graphic slides, interactive elements and changes in tone. More on these later.

Build a run-down, or a running order. Broadcasters have expensive enterprise software for this. I've put together [a rundown template in this spreadsheet](#). At the most basic level you can

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simply list your elements, give them a duration and then calculate the timings of your show so that can tell whether you're staying on time while you are on air. If you want to script any segments for use with an Autocue app, then my template calculates the read time of your script.

2. Set up a production team.

Depending on how rich and varied your production is, you may not be able to do it alone.

In the run-up to the event, divide and conquer: Assign owners to segments. They may be 'guests' or panelists, in which case get them to think about the questions you want to cover, and maybe think about whether they want any visuals to illustrate a particular answer.

As for 'on-air', if you're an expert in patting your head and rubbing your stomach, then 'self-opping' (operating) is for you, but at the very least you need a side-kick to your presenter.

I've sat in the exec producer's seat for at least 3000 hours of live breaking news. It's a key role to be the 'silent' partner to your 'on-screen talent'. My presenter was fellow Partner [Matt Crabtree](#). You could have someone else on hand to play out slides and videos, or manage polling or break-out rooms. In this case, our colleague Asti Neville was co-producer. Read on, and I'll explain how to make it all work together.

3. Create your content

Your content can take many forms. It could be a well structured monologue, without visual aids. The story is what people will remember, not necessarily your PowerPoint game. If you do want to use slides, either use well-chosen images full frame, or if you must use text, follow my favourite rule: you should be able to read it and get it if you were watching on a tiny black & white tv with the sound off while cooking supper.

Videos are wholly within the realm of possibility: in our latest project for the bank we commissioned team members to make videos with their phones which brought to life a particular aspect of the strategy.

Give your colleagues a chance to shine, and they will rise to the challenge – we certainly unleashed a star or two. I added lower thirds and graphic bumpers using an online tool called [viddyoze.com](#), also great for opening titles.

Snappy graphic animation videos are great way of bringing a strategy to life with crisp scripting and arresting visuals, and can have a shelf life way beyond the event.

While videos can be a great way of landing your story, they also give your presenter & producers a chance to prep for the next segment.

4. Get interactive!

One the biggest causes of Zoom Doom or Teams Malaise is the failure to involve your audience. The common conferencing tools all have chat functionality which you can use to gather questions or give your viewers a chance to engage.

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Votes, Polling & Q&As

If you want to step it up a level, use apps like Sli.do, Pigeonhole or AhaSlides. Viewers can snap a QR code with their camera phone to open up a web page and take part in polls, quizzes or (un)moderated Q&As

Breakout Rooms

Get your audience huddling over specific topics, and play back to the group. Break-out rooms work better in Zoom than in Teams in our experience. In both, however, you can assign them either automatically (just say how many breakouts you want) or manually (put specific names in specific groups).

Our Positive Momentum record is 250 guests in 20 breakout-rooms. Asti our co-producer built the rooms in the background ready for the segment. If all your users have Zoom logins, you can pre-allocate them before the event. But if a participant's connection drops out before you launch breakouts you have to re-allocate them, so be on your toes!

5. Get on talk-back!

In a studio setting, talk-back is the audio loop which enables the studio crew to talk to each other and the presenters. It's essential to keep everyone informed, give directions, and deal with issues (yes there are always issues!).

We had our own talk-back, via a separate Teams audio call between Matt (presenter), Asti (co-producer) and me. Matt had a single wireless AirPods in one ear, I borrowed my son's gaming headphones.

Good talk-back technique is crucial:

1. **Use sparingly**
2. **Give short, simple, clear instructions**
3. **Pick the right time to speak**
4. **Mute by default (to avoid heavy breathing in your presenters's ear!)**

5. Rehearse

Fail to prepare, prepare to fail. One of the biggest sources of unnecessary nerves is unfamiliarity with the material or the set-up. Always do at least one run-through so you can get used to the conditions. You will always uncover moments where you need to tweak the choreography and refine the process, and those moments won't make themselves known until you actually do them.

Have a notepad handy to write down these nuggets. It may be a checklist, or a reminder. Have some Post-its around just in case too, for sticking up prompts in the right places.

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6. Framing & Eye Contact

It's an area which is so easy to get right, yet so many events let themselves down when it's not done. It's all about the rule of thirds: Camera at eye-level, eyes two thirds up the screen. Make sure your speakers are well lit – that involves a top light in front, and not sitting with a bright window in the background. My favourite trick is to cut off the corner of a sticky note and place like an arrow pointing at the camera lens.

7. Demystify the process

Television is all about smoke & mirrors. Video-editing is an artifice to warp the space time continuum – that's how the cutaway came into being. We don't have to be like that anymore.

You can buy yourself extra engagement and good will if you de-mystify the production process. Say what you're going to do, explain what's going to happen next. Presenters can even help their producers by dropping subtle directions into their delivery:

"We're going to bring up the voting screen for you now"
or
"we've got a great video coming up".

We also like to introduce the team behind the scenes at the beginning ("I'm your host Matt Crabtree, and I have Julian & Asti with me helping make the magic happen, say hi to them now, because they'll have their cameras off for the rest of this session").

8. Record it! And cut a promo!

This should probably be Rule #1. Your live events are amazing pieces of content – particularly if you've put all this effort in. So make sure you record the event for colleagues who may not have been able to attend the live event. You should make sure everyone knows in advance it is being recorded.

It's a small step requiring minimal effort, but securing maximum reach. Check your recording settings in your webinar platform to ensure the right output is being recorded (eg. webinar output with screen shares). I have fallen foul of this before. You can also set up a spare laptop to screen record the event as a stand-by.

My final pro tip is to cut a short promo, no more than two minutes long, with some highlights which give a sense of the energy and pizzazz of the event. You can post this in a team newsletter, and it plays two important functions: the first is to encourage others to watch the replay, and the second is to make sure they know what they missed so they're sure to join your next one.

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Julian March
Partner

We've been to thousands of physical meetings in our former lives, many of which were probably totally unnecessary, and unfortunately we can now add pointless remote meetings to that tally. We need to say 'that was a great meeting' far more often than we do now.

The technology is in our hands, and it's time to take group video communications to a new level of production values and engagement.

If you'd like to add some pro TV sparkle to your team events, get in touch!