1080 Group

22411 NE Halsey Street, Suite 201
Troutdale, OR 97060
p: +1.503.476.1080

b: TheVirtualPresenter.com
e: info@1080Group.com

11 Tips for Moving Your Training Online

Web conferencing isn't the answer to every challenge. In my experience, however, there are *very* few organisations who can't benefit from moving at least some of their communication, including training, into a dynamic, live audio/visual environment.

This handout summarises the key ideas in the webinar, kindly sponsored by Citrix Online UK (GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar/GoToTraining). It is not a word-for-word recap...since we were delivering an interactive experience, no document would do that justice. Watching the recording is *highly* recommend for that.

Best of luck to you as you move training online!

Roger

Roger Courville
Chief Aha! Guy
TheVirtualPresenter.com

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Moving training from an in-person classroom to a virtual classroom isn't hard, but it is a little different. In this webinar, these answer frequently asked questions, tackle a couple rookie mistakes, and generally avoid simple features (it's *really* easy to get a free trial of GoToTraining and see them for yourself...and I don't work for Citrix, so this webinar wasn't a sales pitch :).

Answer the moderator/producer question
Some trainers like having someone "ride shotgun" with them. Whether you do so or not isn't a question of a right or wrong way to do it....there are valid reasons either way. An extra person costs money, takes a little additional coordination time, and for many trainers and situations it's not needed. However, if the extra person helps manage the class and provides support, answers questions behind-the-scenes, or even serves as a second voice of experience in the curriculum deliver itself, it's a benefit. In reality, it comes down to a cost-benefit analysis for your organisation.

Design a new audio/visual/interactive experience

Blend the overall experience

To be fair, "move training online" is a slight misnomer. *Truly optimal* live, online training might be designed or adapted specifically for the environment. Tips two and three go together. Here's why.

Most organisations who move training online first notice what "is lost." True, in the new environment, you may not have the same eye contact or other parts of the communication experience you're used to. But remember this...*any change of communication not only "loses" something, but it "gains" something as well*. Give yourself a little grace...you WILL discover that there are things you can do online better than you do them online.

Blending learning means utilising multiple modalities. Online this might mean taking the same six hours of classroom curriculum and transforming that into three 90-minute live virtual session but *also* assigning inter-session work of watching a video on YouTube while taking notes on a .pdf participant guide. A significant benefit...moving some of the lecture or content delivery to other media might free you up to make your live class more interpersonal, interactive, and community-oriented.

Call on delegates by name

When getting started with virtual classrooms, it's common to focus on what's in front of you...PowerPoint and making sure you operate the web conferencing controls. Remember your learners are sitting at a computer by themselves. Open up your attendee list and use other ways of "seeing" them to see who's speaking and respond personally. You'll create a sense of presence for everyone, and they'll feel a lot more connected and engaged.

Design for a new visual/interactive environment

Attending a virtual class is on a computer (right, you knew that). It also means that the size of your font or how visual you make your slides will go a long way to engaging them (we don't usually watch television and see slides with a lot of text and bullet points). Remember, too, that screen sizes vary. Just be aware and plan accordingly.

Ask explicitly for attention

Online environments are a little easier to multitask in...if we're honest. BUT...if you ask people in a straightforward way for their attention, you'll find many or most respond. For a longer class, plan a break. Tell them in advance that you'll give them a break to catch the most important email or phone calls. Attention will never be 100%, but then it's never 100% in the physical classroom either, is it?

Tap into delegates' wants/needs/desires in advance

Most virtual classroom training happens with known participants, and most commonly we simply send an Outlook (or equivalent) calendar invite to them. Missed opportunity. You might not do it every time, but the registration tools built into GoToTraining provide an excellent way to survey opinion or pre-assess knowledge, skill, attitude, etc. GTT also has polls, tests, post-event surveys, etc., so you can test before and after or many other things you'd otherwise do for a class. But do yourself a favor...just because the class is known, don't always pass up the opportunity to gather additional insight that will help you serve your learners more effectively.

Learn new ways to get and keep attention

With our delegates focused on screen, our "virtual body language" can be improved to get and direct attention. An annotation/drawing tool or a virtual highlighter or pointer will help you direct attention, but I wouldn't stop there. Consider making the pace of your slide changes a little more quickly (not "speak more quickly," but like you saw in the live webinar, I spread content out over more slides so the visuals change more frequently).

Keep an eye on attentiveness

Teaching via web conferencing is a bit like a pilot flying a plane by their instruments. Your "instrument panel" can give you a lot of input about what your class is doing and how they're responding. You just practice new ways of "seeing hands up" or, as you saw in the live webinar, GoToTraining has an 'attention meter.' It's actually really nice, it doesn't take long to get the hang of it, and it's vastly superior to the old conference call.

Make a case for getting the right "room"

I mention this because I work with many organisations who are doing training (a more complex communication paradigm) using web conferencing solutions designed for meetings (usually a less complex communication paradigm). This isn't *wrong*, but often either trainers are unaware that there are solutions with more features (compare GoToTraining to GoToMeeting), or they just take what IT sourced and supplied (which is always a meeting tool because we have a lot of meetings). By analogy, you can design a newsletter in Microsoft Word, but more advanced users might really appreciate Adobe InDesign. Just know that as you grow, you'll want to at least explore your options (if not make a business case for why you need more tools in the toolkit).

Get everybody on the same page

Earlier we talked about designing a new experience. A common rookie challenge, however, is to do what we usually do (go down to the conference room), PLUS add a couple people in the virtual classroom. THIS IS THE HARDEST SCENARIO YOU WILL HAVE TO MANAGE. Why? You're trying to design for, deliver to, and engage two different audiences. How will you have them chat with each other? Do an exercise? Chat with you? Where will you look for hands up? It's actually easier to manage everyone in the virtual classroom than to mix it up. Trust me. :)

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Book Roger to speak or train

Want to inspire, educate, and motivate your team or audience to take virtual presentations and classrooms from good to great to a stellar level? Inquire at bookings@1080group.com.

About Roger Courville

Roger Courville is author of *The Virtual Presenter's Handbook* and *Successful Webinars with GoToWebinar,* an expert in the human factors of web conferencing, and an internationally sought-after speaker on the use of webinars and virtual classrooms deliver organisational results.

- Contact 1080 Group at info@1080group.com, +1.503.476.1080, or www.twitter.com/1080Group.
- Roger's blog, curriculum vitae, et al can be found at www.thevirtualpresenter.com.
- Subscribe to 1080 Group's newsletter and get a free bullets-to-visuals tutorial here: http://bit.ly/cyKZUJ.