

How Webinars Save You Time, Money and Carbon Emmissions

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At this Point in Their Evolution, Webinars and Remote Collaboration Tools are Easy Sells

It's been more than two decades since the emergence of webinars and screen sharing solutions. Today, most solution providers in the segment enjoy walk-in business because enterprises are already sold on the cost savings, the ease of use, the ability of a dispersed team to collaborate, and the ability of marketing to broaden its reach and capture and qualify leads.

What qualifies a technology as a “remote collaboration” tool? There are numerous services that providers offer in the category; for example:

- Webinar hosting
- Video conferencing
- Audio conferencing
- Online training
- Web conferencing with screen sharing
- Social communications

Each has its unique benefits – what could be more useful to a marketer than to be able to influence and engage hundreds, even thousands of prospects and customers all in an online, interactive environment, or for a virtual team to use video conferencing to meet online as if they were face to face?

But few companies consider the ability of these tools to be strategic or transformative for the entire organization. Often a tool will be in place for several months before a company will come to a realization like, *“I've reached prospects and customers on a global scale without leaving my office,”* or *“We've saved enough in travel to hire two more people!”*

But organizations may soon recognize the transformative potential of webinars and remote collaboration tools, and begin to design strategies around them.

Webinar Functions and The Many Ways They Can Be Useful

Frequently, a webinar makes for the best and most efficient of remote collaboration tools, even if it's not the most obvious tool for the job.

Webinars are excellent as a sales and marketing tool, and that is where they are chiefly used. Today, webinar solutions include features beyond the basics of years past. They include rich registration and attendance tools, audience management tools, and large group utilities, as a webinar typically has more attendees than a meeting or classroom session.

As Table 1 details, the audience management tools provided through webinar solutions are closely akin to classic team management and meeting tools and techniques. For example, lead capturing functionalities are useful for identifying sales prospects, but they can also be used to gather team member contact information, which can then be distributed to the rest of a team. And, monitored Q&A is a perfect utility for managing press briefings and quarterly investor calls (more on these utilities later).

Table 1: Webinar Features that Replicate the In-Person Experience

WEBINAR TOOL	IN-PERSON TECHNIQUE
Customizable invitations and registration	Meeting scheduling
Automated reminder and follow-up emails	Schedule enforcement Keeping track of responses and attendance
Polls and surveys	Brainstorming tools Consensus measurement/vote taking
A mechanism for attendees to “raise hands”	Team member participation
A dashboard to monitor attendee participation and attentiveness	Overcoming the challenge of team members leaving the work to others
Detailed reports on participation and attentiveness of attendees (pre- and post-session)	Attendance monitoring

Common Webinar Features

Registration

- Ecommerce (as needed)
- Invitation and registration
- Lead capture

Audience management tools

- Customizable invitations and registration
- Automated reminders and follow-up emails
- Polls and surveys
- Mechanisms for attendees to “raise hands”
- Dashboards to monitor attendee participation
- Detailed analytics reports (pre- and post-session)

Large group utilities

- Ability to host multiple panelists and organizers
- Pre-session practice sessions to confer with organizers
- Monitored and private Q&A capabilities

“Land and Expand”: How Webinars Can Go Enterprise-Wide

It is Citrix's experience that, more often than not, webinar technology is purchased for use by sales and marketing – a company's revenue centers. The cost centers, like management, HR, and support, typically trail in adoption of webinars, or purchase the most obvious utility for them, like GoToAssist for customer support teams, or GoToMeeting for collaboration.

However, once the webinar solution has proven itself, sales and marketing are often eager to purchase more licenses, and also to try other tools that they can integrate for a more strategic, enterprise-wide usage of available webinar services.

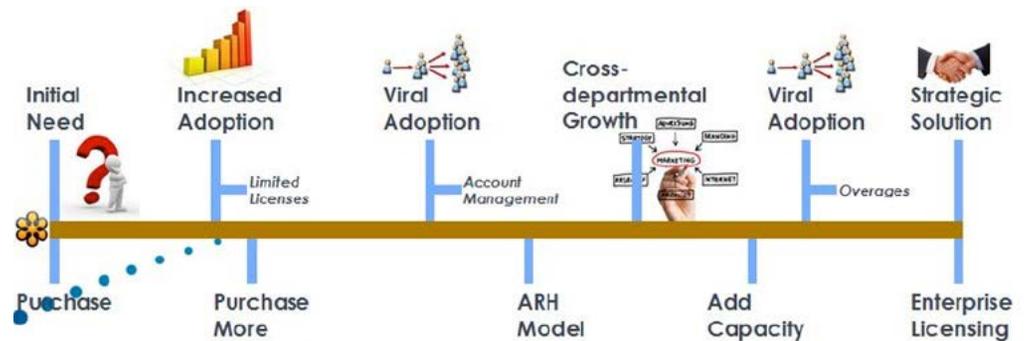
So the company purchases more licenses, and then begins “viral adoption” throughout the organization. For example, management may see webinar as a method of conducting sales meetings or company-wide meetings; pre-sales and sales might adopt it for product demonstrations; product managers could use it to explain product updates to user groups; or perhaps the C-suite uses it for press briefings and investor calls.

All the while, the enterprise has been using the webinar functionality for lead capture and qualification, and has been archiving the webinars it has created. Now, new salespeople can “learn from the best” by playing back the webinar recording, and sales prospects who missed a marketing webinar can watch the recording at their leisure.

However, for some companies, particularly smaller ones, webinars are not quite the right utility for internal collaboration; these customers may be looking for something aimed at smaller group collaboration with video technology and mobile applications, in order to collaborate face-to-face from anywhere. So, the company adopts a more suitable tool in the suite.

At this point, the enterprise has recognized the broad utility these services provide and purchases enterprise-wide licenses. It recognizes that this once-practical solution has become an enterprise-wide strategic solution that has extended the company's reach, enabled a higher level of customer support, and solidified the organization's ability to learn from itself and standardize its processes. It has changed the way the business does business.

Figure 1: The Typical Progression from a Tactical to a Strategic Solution



The Strategic and Transformative Power of Webinar Solutions

A select few companies, like those detailed in the following sections, think beyond the tactical utility of webinars. They see the technology as an enabler to achieve enterprise goals, like expanding within the U.S. or globally, or improving customer service.

Expanding Business Growth

Citrix's own experience is that webinars and remote training substantially lower the barriers to global expansion in terms of both cost and time. As of 2008, the Citrix had offices in the U.S., Ireland, and Australia. The company has since expanded to Japan and Germany, and plans to expand into Latin America.

The company entered those markets remotely at first, demonstrating its products from the U.S., before sales warranted expansion. France is at that stage now, and the company has a French-speaking U.S.-based team to support customers in France, without having an office in the country yet.

But using remote collaboration does not necessarily mean you won't have employees in those beach-head countries; in fact, it allows Citrix to have a greater presence in these locations. At first, the online services division had to conduct in-person training at those overseas offices for eight to nine people per session, at a price tag of about \$600,000 per year. Switching to remote training using GoToWebinar and GoToTraining freed up that \$600,000, which the company used to hire more personnel in its new regions. Now, the company can train up to 20 individuals at a time.

So, webinars and remote collaboration do more than enable a company to expand globally; the savings enable it to have an even larger presence, and in shorter order.

Cutting Costs

Companies that use remote collaboration technology for cost cutting typically think in terms of business travel. That is just one way to eliminate costs, but let us consider it first.

The Papa John's restaurant chain uses GoToMeeting to train its franchisees. A typical training session educates eight franchisees who might be located across the U.S., or even outside the country. Papa John's estimates that, if a corporate trainer had to travel to each city or restaurant location, those sessions could take up to three weeks and cost \$10,000 in flights and lodging (a fairly conservative figure). But using GoToMeeting, the company completes about five sessions per year with up to eight attendees per session, and in under a day. The savings: An estimated \$50,000. The company further estimated that it saved \$12,000 when one of its overseas directors attended an operations conference in Florida remotely from Portugal, where he was opening the first Papa John's in that country.

So a company may examine its year-to-year travel budget, and set a firm and achievable goal of, for example, substituting 25% of that travel with remote collaboration, and at a quantifiable savings.

Travel is of course just one area of cost cutting. Labor and productivity savings from existing resources are another, and they are also the "deepest well" for cost cutting.

Let us consider the case of a \$100,000-per-year employee who travels 10% of the time. That individual is paid \$48 per hour. Now, fly her from New York to Los Angeles for a meeting – a day's travel each way, for a total of lost productivity of two days, or \$768.

Now, rent her a car for three days, put her up in a moderately priced hotel for two nights, and give her a reasonable travel and expense allowance and the costs might look like this:

\$850 – flight

\$768 – productivity

\$250 – car rental

\$250 – hotel

\$150 – meals

\$2268 – Total

That is a fairly conservative estimate of business travel. If she makes one trip per month like this, that amounts to 24 days of lost productivity, costing \$9,216, and \$18,000 in travel expenses, for a total of \$27,216. Compare that to a \$5,000 per year license for a remote collaboration solution, which is useful not just to this employee, but to others like her within the company.

Going Green

These days, it is not just manufacturers that are interested in reducing their carbon footprints. Service organizations like insurance companies, consultancies, and law firms are equally concerned, and usually limit their carbon footprints by cutting back on travel.

Just how much in carbon emissions does a single commercial flight put out? According to EPA figures for the United States, the transportation sector accounts for approximately one-third of greenhouse gas emissions. Using a calculator created by the University of California at Berkeley, a one-way flight from New York to Los Angeles emits 0.8 tons of carbon dioxide – 1.6 tons roundtrip. An average automobile, by EPA calculations, releases 5.6 tons per year with average daily use. So even an insurance company can be, in essence, a polluter, and if being a “green” is part of the company’s mission statement, then reducing its need for air travel is an opportunity to be more green-friendly.

The American Institute of Certified Tax Coaches (AICTC) is such an organization. It is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that trains and certifies tax professionals for Certified Tax Coach (CTC) designation.

Upon starting at AICTC, new members attend an intensive, three-day training academy and, once certified, attend 24 additional hours of additional education each year – almost entirely using GoToWebinar. Initially, co-founder Dominique Molina and her instructors traveled from San Diego, CA, to run training in cities such as New Orleans, Chicago, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. Molina observed that time restrictions disabled the organization from servicing more members, but was also concerned with the environmental impact of that travel.

CTC chose webinars as the solution to both challenges. Molina calculates that GoToWebinar reduced carbon emissions by 200 tons per year. To arrive at that figure, she took the average number of attendees per session and multiplied it by the average emissions associated with traveling to an AICTC event. Molina calls the reduction in the company’s carbon footprint by using webinars “tremendous.”

Fostering a “Learning Organization” Environment

Webinar and meeting services that offer archiving capabilities provide a handy method of creating a “learning organization”, which learns from its successes (and failures), and standardizes its processes to recreate those successes.

Consider how Toyota, with its legendary quality, took on U.S. automakers in the 1980s. It did so because it standardized its successes such that every Corolla that came off the assembly line operated as faultlessly as the one before it.

Citrix has observed several opportunities for standardization from real-life uses by its customer base:

- **Sales presentations:** Meeting hosts can record online presales or sales meetings to be reviewed by the sales team for training or perfecting skills.
- **Marketing presentations:** A recorded marketing presentation can set the standard for professionalism, pace, and Q&A management. And it can be used to orient guest speakers, using the practice session utilities.
- **Employee and partner onboarding:** A regularly occurring or archived webinar is a flexible and cost-effective method of producing onboarding materials, combining audio and video. They can easily be updated as often as necessary.
- **Instructional materials:** Here too, production costs make customized instructional materials cost prohibitive for some organizations. In a webinar, between screen sharing, audio, and archiving capabilities, any process can be broken down step-by-step and explained at the instructor’s pace.

A quick call to three video production companies revealed that the cost of producing a corporate training video is, nominally, \$10,000. And in most cases, it is overkill. The audio and visual capture available with webinar technology is perfectly suitable for professional use, and enables an organization to capture *more* of its intelligence for more knowledge transfer.

Improving Customer Service

Organizations can improve both the quality of their service and the volume of service they provide from its existing resources, using online collaboration tools.

For example, restaurant chain Papa John's reaches franchisees worldwide using online meeting technology to conduct educational sessions on topics such as quality management and how to operate the company's store software.

Kronos, the industry-leading time-and-attendance application provider, uses GoToWebinar to conduct regular best-practice sessions for its existing customers. Leslie Reilly, the company's marketing program manager, credits these sessions with generating customer loyalty by providing value-added information and immediate feedback. Kronos also uses the lead capture and reporting features to identify which customers require follow up, and to help it do so within 24 hours. And, importantly, Kronos is able to identify which customers are ripe for an up-sell to other Kronos applications.

Improving Press and Investor Relations

An instance in which webinars are on the rise is in place of investor conference calls, quarterly earnings calls, and in press announcements. While companies typically use audio conferencing, or sometimes a blend of audio conferencing from one provider and web conferencing from another, a bundled service is far more efficient and cost effective.

A typical audio conference is handled one of two ways – per-minute, usually for smaller calls, and flat rate. Both use toll-free numbers so the attendee pays nothing, but the company that arranges the call does. For a smaller group, you multiply the number of attendees by the cost per minute by the length of the call. Assume \$.10 per minute (fairly low). Such a call for 20 attendees in a one-hour call costs:

20 attendees X \$.10/minute X 60 minutes = \$120

A company is more likely to use unlimited flat rate conferencing for a large call with an indeterminate number of attendees (like an investor relations or analyst call). A company can expect to pay perhaps \$4.00 per line for 20 lines, or \$.80 per line for 1,000 lines, or \$800.

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Compare that to a moderately priced web conferencing service like GoToWebinar, with audio conferencing bundled and with additional visual features, at a flat rate of \$499/month, and the choice is clear.

Beyond the costs, a webinar solution with audio simply makes a superior and more engaging audio-plus-visual presentation: Investors may participate in a two-way conversation using the polling and Q&A features.

Finally, the registration and reporting features give the company intelligence it cannot gather with audio conferencing alone. With registration, the company can gauge which of its investors or stakeholders are most engaged with the company, and reporting tools enable it to capture which investors (or press) asked which questions, or answered which poll questions. The lead capture features summarize those details, and enable the company to follow up with those investors as needed.

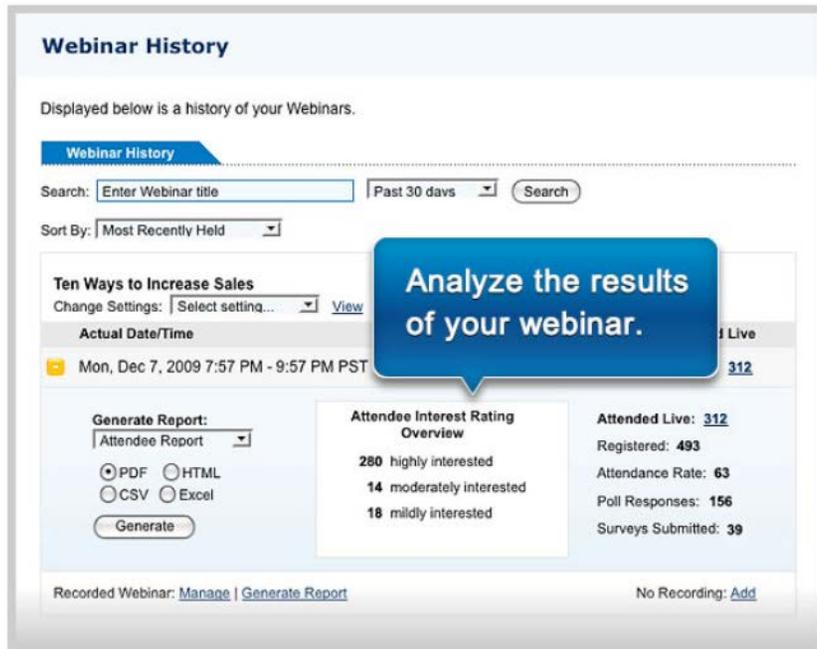


Figure 2: A Webinar History report gauges attendees' interest and participation, based on their activity during the webinar (e.g., asking questions, multitasking, answering polls).

Creating the Win-Win Webinar

In a recent Content Marketing Institute webinar, **6 Key Metrics that Impact Webinar Performance: Before, During and After**, **Mike Agron, Executive Webinar Producer** for **WebAttract**, asserted that the objective of a webinar is to get business results while offering a high value to the audience – a benchmark that Agron calls High Performance-High Impact (HP-HI). This is the content marketer’s “sweet spot” for reaping the greatest returns on their webinar efforts.

But, as Agron stresses, these HP-HI webinars don't just happen; to create one, you need to have a well thought out plan. Here are five considerations to help ensure predictable outcomes:

- **Objectives:** What do you want to happen as a result of the webinar? For example, is your goal to bring in more sales leads, develop stronger thought leadership, or achieve better customer retention?
- **Audience value:** Is your content timely and relevant? Are your messages and information targeted to your desired audience?
- **Success factors:** What are your target benchmarks for the number of registrants and the number of attendees?
- **Calls-to-action:** What do you want the audience to do after the webinar, and what are you going to do in order to ensure this happens?
- **Analysis:** How will you determine whether your objectives are achieved?

Measuring Webinar Success

Regardless of the technology or solution you use, not every webinar is going to achieve optimal results. Fortunately, there are some simple techniques to help you identify potential problem areas and get your program back on track.

According to Mike Agron, it's best to start by looking at these six key metrics, which can help gauge how well your messaging is engaging the audience and aligning with their informational needs.

1. **Click-through rate (CTR):** **CTR** measures the number of people who registered for your webinar compared with the number of those who clicked to the registration page. This data can give you vital information to help you predict:
 - How strong your registration and attendance may be
 - The effectiveness of your registration landing page
 - The quality of your message and its value proposition for your target audience
2. **Attendee ratio (AR):** **AR** measures the percent of people attending as a ratio of those who attended compared with those who registered. This data can give you vital information to help you predict:
 - Your audience's interest in the topic
 - The demographic value of your content
 - Best practices for post-webinar follow-up
3. **Online polls:** Online polls provide an opportunity to find out what your attendees are most interested in about your webinar content. This data can give you vital information to help you analyze:
 - Your audience's level of engagement
 - Audience members' perspective on the topic
 - How you should be shaping your message

Ways to Use the Webinar Data You Collect

To use the metrics you've compiled to start a "warm conversation" that can convert prospects to customers:

Step 1: Archive a copy of the recorded webinar.

Step 2: Within 24 to 48 hours, send a follow-up/thank you email and include valuable content, such as the slide deck, or link to reporting.

Step 3: Do final registration, attendance, and performance analysis.

Gather insights by individual attendee, including capturing any special questions they asked throughout the webinar process. This way, when you follow-up, you can start a conversation that incorporates their questions, and you can integrate this into your marketing automation processes.

– Mike Agron Executive Webinar Producer, WebAttract.

4. **Exit surveys:** These measure how well you met your audience's expectations, such as whether the information you provided was aligned with the webinar description and whether the difficulty level was appropriate for the audience you were targeting. The data can give you vital information to help you learn:
 - Your level of thought leadership
 - Future topics you might want to cover
 - Lessons that can help you as you develop your next webinar
5. **Audience retention:** These metrics evaluate how well your webinar kept the audience interested in your content and business offerings. The data can give you vital information in terms of:
 - Whether or not you delivered on what you promised in your promotional materials
 - Whether there were audio or technical issues
 - Your brand's level of thought leadership
 - What post-webinar follow-up opportunities might exist
6. **On-demand viewing:** These metrics indicate post-webinar interest and, according to Agron, is the phase where the real opportunities for content marketing begin. Data you gather that can have an impact on your strategy include:
 - Fresh, new sales leads
 - People who attended the original webinar but watched it again
 - Those who registered but didn't attend
 - What your audience considers to be must-have content

It's helpful to look at attendee counts at 15-minute intervals throughout the webinar. We want to see 80 percent of the peak audience is still there by the Q&A portion.

– Mike Agron Executive Webinar Producer, WebAttract.

In Summary

Webinars have a strong tactical value proposition: They can save a fortune in travel costs, while expanding reach and reducing carbon emissions. But companies like those listed above think beyond the tactical to the strategic value propositions. Several of these strategic uses, like improving service and training, are well proven, while others – like press and investor relations – have yet to become common.

Meanwhile, more risk-averse companies will “test the waters” with a tool like webinars or online meetings before they are sold on the concept and implement it enterprise-wide. But these now two-decades-old technologies have proven themselves time and again at large organizations like Papa John's, and at smaller organizations looking to expand their growth and reach like AICTC. Not only are organizations now able to use these tools strategically, they are wise to do so.