



From Event Expert to Webinar Whiz

The Event Marketer's Guide on How to
Host Webinars & Other Virtual Events

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Think back to the end of 2019. Like other event marketers, you probably spent some time figuring out what you want to achieve over the next year.

Your goals might have sounded something like: Develop a new event marketing strategy. Increase field marketing event attendance by 50%. Generate 600 new leads across five in-person events.

We're guessing it didn't sound something like: Become an expert at [hosting webinars](#).

And yet, here we are.

A global pandemic has forced company travel bans, citywide and statewide lockdowns, and event cancellations every single day. But rather than simply surrendering to this crisis, event marketers are looking for ways to activate these events and continue their [event marketing momentum](#).

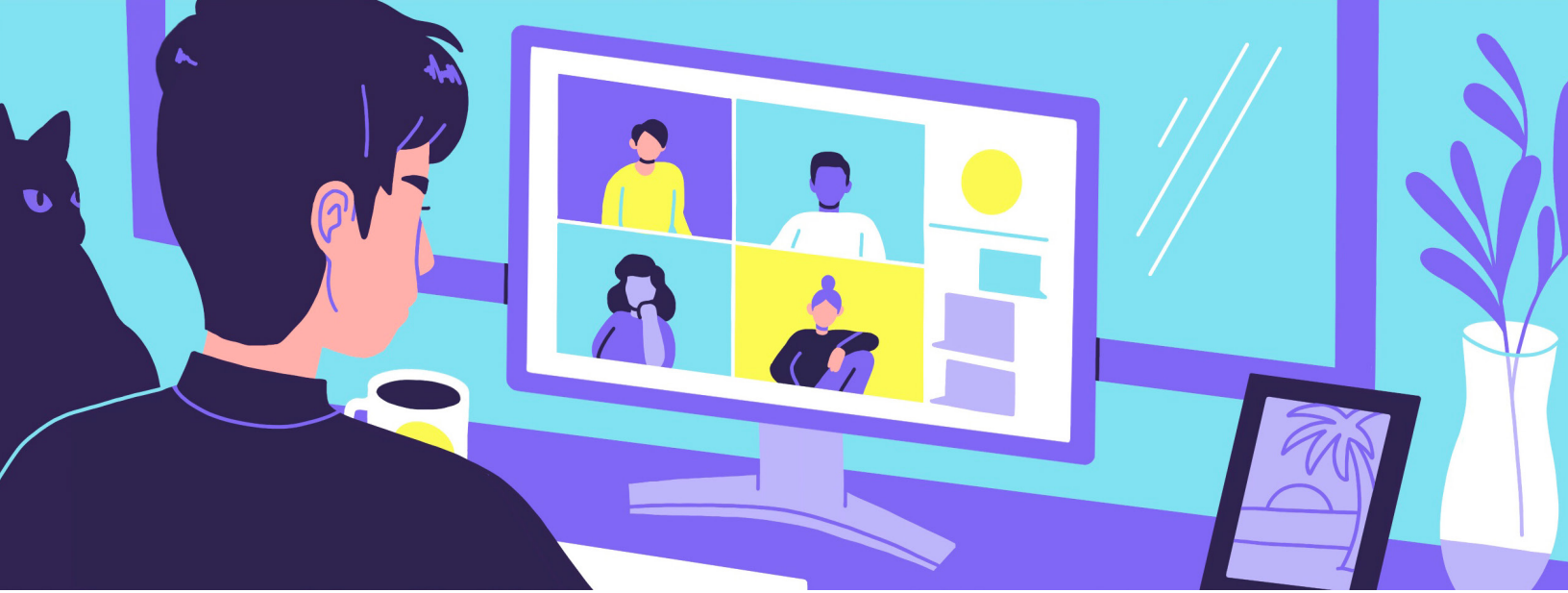
Webinars are taking over the event world right now. And we know that you, as an event marketer, probably haven't focused much on webinars — until now.

We've talked to many who have said they're feeling pressure to create unique, valuable experiences online. They need support learning the fundamentals of webinars. They're looking for [tips to engage their audience](#) before, during, and after these virtual events.

The good news: We know webinars, and we've got your back.

In this guide, we'll explore everything you need to get your feet off the ground, from defining your goals to choosing a platform to sharing best practices.

But first things first: We're going back to basics. Let's define a webinar.



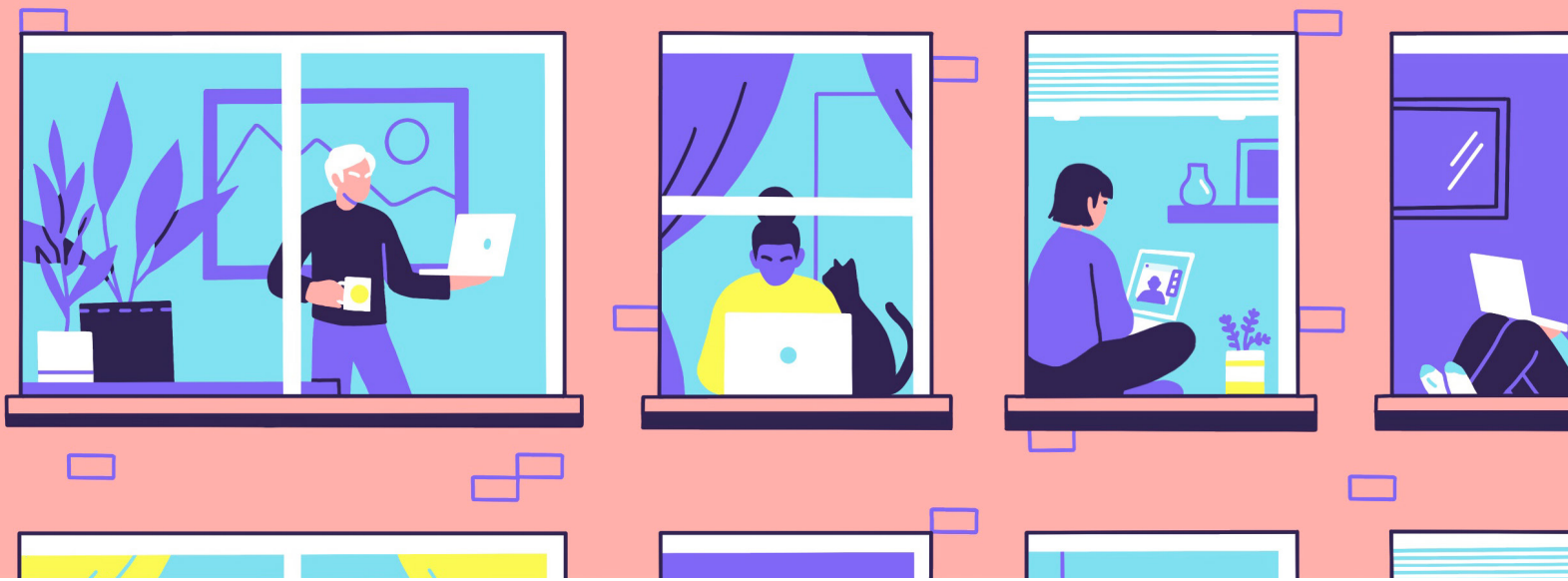
What is a Webinar?

Simply put, a webinar is an event delivered online. They are often single-session events shared live with a real-time audience and offered on-demand later to reach an even larger audience.

Just like [in-person events](#), webinars can take many formats depending on the content you have to present and your goals (more on this later). Traditionally, webinars have been keynotes, seminars, workshops, and product demonstrations.

No one wants to be in the situation we're facing today. But it's forcing event marketers to get creative and push the boundaries of these virtual events. (After all, when was the last time you virtually attended a networking event, panel discussion, or even a happy hour before all of this happened?)

Event marketers are putting the effort into building unique, relevant webinars because they have to right now. But it's more than that. There are actually some incredible benefits to hosting webinars, which is why they're probably here to stay, even after this crisis ends.



The Benefits of Webinars

We all know webinars are becoming more valuable than ever before. [A form of agile event marketing](#), webinars are fast to market, execute, and measure, and they are easily scaled across an entire organization.

This means marketing teams can host more webinars, reach more people, and see more return — all without requiring more resources or time.

Sounds pretty great, right? That's not all.

Webinars Don't Break the Bank (& Do Boost ROI)

Compared to in-person events, hosting webinars is extremely inexpensive. Think about it: You're automatically eliminating the need for a physical venue, food and beverage, technical equipment, printed materials ... you get the idea. All of these alone mean huge savings for the business, and when you spend less money, you increase your event ROI.

One caveat to this benefit: If you haven't run webinars before, you may need to invest upfront in technology and infrastructure to create an impactful webinar experience. We'll get into recommendations (and how to evaluate solutions) later in this guide.

Webinars Reduce Your Risk

Event marketers know better than anyone else that things outside of our control happen all the time. When extenuating circumstances like a natural disaster or global pandemic happen, event marketers must **pivot quickly** or cancel their in-person events altogether.

Before the coronavirus pandemic reached its peak, events large and small were canceled across the globe. From a 250,000-person festival to a 15-person user group, companies did not want to risk spreading the illness through human contact.

During the same time, companies hosting virtual events did not necessarily have to change their plans or cancel those events, because they had little to no risk.

Webinars Reach Anyone, Anywhere

With no travel involved, hosting webinars means you can reach your target audience no matter where they're located. You're able to educate, influence, and have a conversation with hundreds of people at the same time, all of whom can benefit from or have an interest in what you are selling.

Plus, event marketers can record webinars and make them available on-demand after the live webinar is over. This means that as long as your webinar topic is relevant, you can continually adjust your messaging, promote it, and reach new people.

A webinar is essentially a revolving door for new leads.

Webinars Support Green Efforts

Corporate sustainability is no longer a temporary campaign or buzzword — it's a permanent movement. Customers, prospects, employees, and stakeholders expect companies with which they work to engage in green programs, and that includes event programs.

Virtual events help companies minimize their carbon footprint by eliminating materials and activities that often come with in-person events: production and shipping needs, staff and attendee travel, and even the single-use plastics used at most events.

If you've canceled your in-person events altogether without transforming them into virtual events, now is the time to rethink that approach. Companies still need events that drive business — they simply need to work in a different environment.

And to determine what your virtual event program should look like, start by defining your webinar goals. We told you we've got you.



Defining Your Webinar Goals

Think about webinar goal-setting like you would any other event. Whether you're planning an in-person event or a virtual event, your goals play a huge role in building, promoting, and running your event. And if you don't define what webinar success means for you, there's no way to effectively identify whether or not they're actually working.

So let's review some common webinar goals.

Build Brand Awareness

Increasing brand awareness is one of the most important things you can do for your company, whether it's been around for 20 years or 20 minutes. It's not necessarily about closing a sales deal right then and there, but rather making your company, product, people, and mission recognizable to your target audience.

Although it's extremely valuable, measuring brand awareness isn't always black and white because it can be more subjective than other goals. After your webinar, look at any channels that may show you've increased exposure to your brand, such as social and website traffic.

Increase Thought Leadership

Thought leaders are experts who educate, influence, and inspire others in the industry. These are the people you want as part of your virtual events program. Whether they are all part of your company or a mixture of in-house and external leaders, associating with thought leaders will help show prospects and customers that you are an industry leader.

Like building brand awareness, increasing thought leadership is also a somewhat-subjective goal. It's not as simple as counting the number of new leads or checking on the latest customer retention rate. But there are a few metrics that can mean increased thought leadership, like social and website traffic, external website referrals (backlinks), and media mentions.

Generate New Demand

Webinars are a great way to generate new demand for your product because they can increase the size of your subscriber base with highly responsive and qualified leads. People who register for a live webinar or watch an on-demand one are looking for information on the topic you're presenting, so they're already engaged.

The best part of this goal: It's really easy to measure. Generating new demand is much more objective than building brand awareness or increasing thought leadership. Some numbers to focus on include how many people registered (honing in on the number of brand-new leads), how many of those moved on as a sales-qualified lead, and the overall cost per lead.

Improve Customer Retention & Loyalty

No business can survive without bringing in new customers. But equally, if not more, important is keeping your existing customers happy and loyal. Webinars are a great way to engage and educate customers so they know your company continues to support them. Plus, customer-only webinars are opportunities for you to gather valuable feedback on what's working well and what needs improvement.

After your webinar, keep tabs on the customers who attended. Which ones are still customers after three months, six months, or a year? Were there at-risk customers who attended the webinar, and are now in good health? How much revenue did you generate from customers who expanded their accounts after the webinar? Did any customers reach out afterward to establish a partnership? These are just some of the questions you can ask to measure how your webinar impacted customer retention and loyalty.

Impact Revenue Goals

At the end of the day, any marketing or event goals you have eventually flow down to supporting your revenue goals. Even if your webinar's immediate goal was to build brand awareness, generate new demand, or something else, the ultimate goal is that those successes translate into more sales.

This is where tracking your webinar's attendees from the moment they register to the moment they become a customer comes into play. And to make this easy, it's important to use a webinar platform that integrates fully with your marketing tech stack and customer database. (Yes, we're still here for you. We cover this topic soon.)

What Kind of Virtual Event Should I Run?

The format you choose for your virtual event should reflect both your content and goals. Let's look at how each of these event goals can influence what kind of virtual event you should run.

If your goal is to build brand awareness, you are looking to make your company recognizable to new people within your target audience. To help get the word out, round up a few well-known partners and host a traditional webinar that helps your audience better understand a challenge they're facing and actions they can take.

(Yes, using your solution should be an action they can take. No, we don't recommend getting salesy and pitching it on the webinar. Keep it high level.)

If your goal is to increase thought leadership, you are looking to influence and inspire your target audience. This is the time to position yourself as an expert and share what you know with the world. Try gathering some internal (and external) thought leaders to host a virtual panel discussion on a topic impacting your industry.

If your goal is to generate new demand, you are looking to add more qualified leads to your marketing database. The keyword here is “qualified.” Use your webinar to tell the story about how one of your customers exceeded their business goals and expectations. Sure, your solution was one of the ways they did so — but tell the rest of the story too.

By marketing this kind of webinar with the right messaging (for example, How ABC Company Tripled Sales Amidst a Global Crisis), those who register are already more qualified because they more likely see the need for a solution. Bonus points if your customer is willing to go on the record and tell their own story.

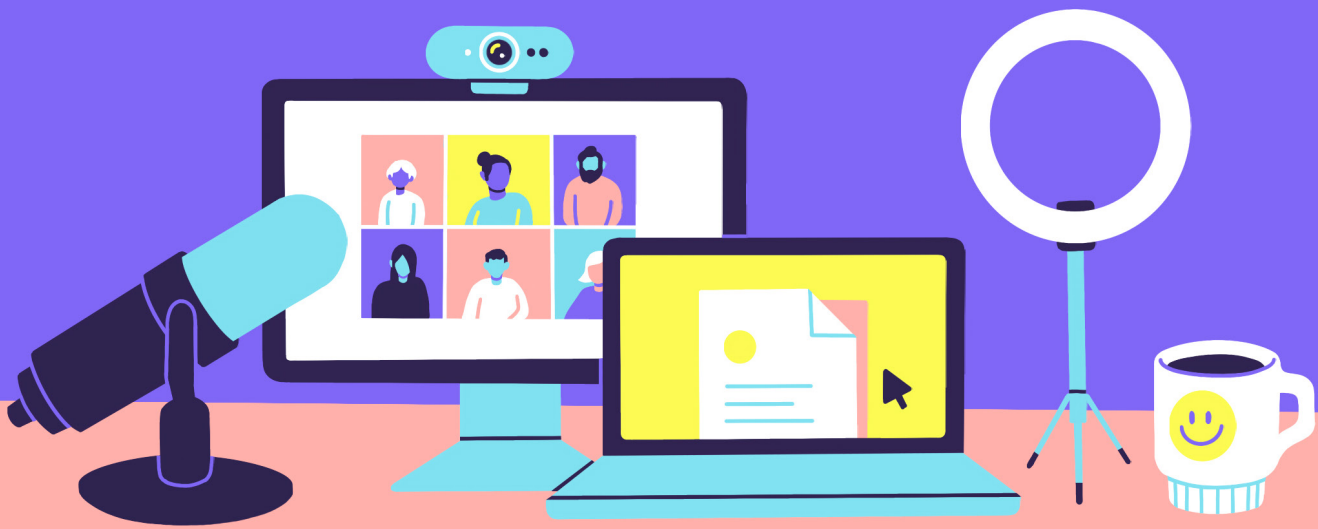
If your goal is to improve customer retention, you are looking to keep your current customers happy and loyal. Host a [virtual user group](#) where they can share feedback and experiences with you and likeminded peers. They will leave knowing their voices matter, and you’ll leave with tons of ideas for your product team.

Pro Tip

Of course, your team should be responsible for managing the event build and marketing. But let your customers lead the charge. If you’re starting a San Francisco user group, for example, recruit one of your power users in that region to be the user group’s leader and determine what to present.

If your goal is to impact revenue goals, you are looking to support sales and drive new business. If this is your only goal for an event, you’re probably working with a very targeted group of high-value prospects who are fairly close to a purchase decision.

These are the people you want to wine and dine — literally. Host an event where you send guests a wine flight and then a sommelier joins the event for a virtual wine lesson. Or send guests a meal kit and ask a professional chef to join for a virtual cooking class. Tap into that creative superpower of yours. We know it’s there.



Elements of a Webinar

If you were planning a dinner party, would you start making lasagna without the noodles, some tomato sauce, or a baking dish? We didn't think so. Just like you need to plan ahead to make sure you have the tools and ingredients to cook dinner, you need the right resources to run a webinar.

And we're not just talking about the technical requirements, although those are obviously critical to running a basic webinar. We're also talking about the people, materials, and solutions you'll use to host an interactive, high-caliber virtual experience.

Let's dive into the elements you'll need for this.

The Topic

First and foremost, what do you want to talk about? The topic is often the biggest reason why people register for and attend webinars, so make sure it resonates with them. But also remember that, just like your event goal drives event format, it should also drive the topic.

Here are four ways you can identify webinar topics:

Talk to your sales and customer service teams. When it comes to tapping into your prospects' and customers' minds, get close to the source. Your sales and customer service teams speak to your target audiences every day, so they know things that can influence webinar topics: their biggest challenges, common questions, knowledge gaps, and more.

Review questions from past events. The Q&A portion of an event — whether virtual or in-person — is a goldmine for new content. Is there one question that was asked over and over? Are there a few questions that could roll up into one webinar topic? This is an ideal way to identify new webinar topics because you know your audience is already interested in learning more.

Leverage your existing marketing content. Do you have a piece of content, such as a blog post or an ebook, that performs extraordinarily well? If so, that likely indicates your audience is interested in learning more about that topic. What's great about this approach is that you already have content available, so a lot of your work is already done. You can also use your existing content as a follow-up piece after the webinar.

Look at what's trending. If you're like most other marketers, you're regularly seeking out information about what's new in your industry. Whether you attend webinars or other events yourself, or peruse a weekly industry newsletter, ask yourself: What are people talking about? Are there current events that will impact your industry?

The People

Every webinar has specific roles for people to play, and it's important to fill those roles with people who can enhance the quality of your webinar. This means choosing people who have knowledge, experience, or a vested interest in your webinar topic.

Let's look at the people resources you'll need to support your webinar.

Host: Your host is the individual responsible for introducing the webinar, moderating the conversation, and asking questions from the Q&A at the end. This is most often the first person attendees see and/or hear, so it's important to think of this person as the first impression. Find someone who is energetic and can keep your attendees engaged.

Presenters: Your presenters are those responsible for delivering the majority of the information on the webinar. They should be energetic, knowledgeable, inspirational, articulate in their speaking, and personable.

Technical support: Not every webinar requires technical support, but it sure can make your job much easier. Especially if you are using new technology for the first time, it might be worth having a technical support person available if anything goes wrong (like audio going out or the platform not behaving as you'd expected).

Audience support: Similar to technical support, not every webinar needs audience support. But again, it can make your job (or your host's job) much easier. If you have a large attendee audience, you might be looking at dozens, possibly hundreds, of attendee questions. Having someone available to sift through the Q&A — in addition to any surveys or polls you take — can ensure a more seamless experience for your attendees.

The Materials

Technically speaking, you could spend the entire time on your webinar just speaking to your attendees or having a conversation without any presentation deck. But you want to keep your audience engaged, right?

Your webinar materials are a huge opportunity to not just keep your audience engaged during the webinar, but after the webinar as well.

A webinar presentation deck is used to highlight the key points of your webinar. To keep your audience's attention, keep words to a minimum, include visuals, and don't be afraid to use color.

Create **supplementary materials** that you can send to attendees after the webinar. These may be templates, checklists, or other kinds of handouts directly from the webinar. But even better: Involve your content marketing team to develop blog posts, an ebook, or a case study your team can use to continue the conversation afterward.

The Technical Requirements

Aside from people resources and other materials, there really are only a few technical tools you need to run a successful webinar:

- A computer (laptop, desktop, PC, Mac — webinars don't play favorites so the choice is yours)
- A webcam, either built in or attached, to show your host and presenters
- A microphone (either built into your computer or, for an upgraded experience, a USB microphone)
- A webinar platform that includes interactive elements, such as surveys, polls, chat boxes, and Q&A functionality

There are also tools available that, although not critical like the above, can help create a better experience for your attendees:

- A soft, small LED light if your environment is too dark or doesn't have a lot of natural light
- Two monitors: one that you can use to share your screen with attendees and the other to maintain webinar controls
- A portable webinar station with a complete setup that's easy to move around to the perfect location

Pro Tip

Package the technical requirements together into shippable kits that you can send to your remote hosts and presenters. Send the kit a few days before your webinar with simple instructions. Everyone's computers, webcams, and other technology are set up differently, so these kits can make all the difference for webinar quality.



Choosing a Webinar Platform

We briefly mentioned above the need for a webinar platform. But because this technology can single-handedly make or break your virtual event programs, we're dedicating an entire section to this topic.

When it comes to marketing, managing, and measuring in-person event programs, event marketers know their stuff. But up until recently, they haven't been as closely involved in virtual programs, like webinars. Now, they're up against the clock trying to convert their in-person events to virtual experiences. As a result, one of the most common questions we've heard lately is: How do we know what to look for in a webinar platform?

The good news is that choosing a webinar platform is actually quite simple. Sure, there are several important features you don't want to miss out on — but with the right platform, you can get those webinars up and running quickly and easily.

Let's pause for a second because the next thing you're going to read is incredibly crucial, so get ready for it.

If there's one thing you need to take away from this: **The most important thing to consider when choosing a webinar platform is its integration with your event marketing platform.**

Connecting Your Webinar & Event Marketing Platforms

Webinar platforms traditionally can't double as an [event marketing platform](#). Even if you were planning to nix every single in-person event moving forward, a webinar platform itself still won't cut it. Here's why.

There are five things you absolutely need from a webinar platform, but we have yet to find one that offers all five in and of itself. And honestly, no one expects that a webinar platform would offer all of these — it's not what they're made for. But an event marketing platform is made for these and can easily be integrated with a webinar platform to create the ultimate virtual events solution.

The five things you need are the abilities to:

Create experiences that capture your brand: Events are an opportunity to bring your brand to life for an audience. As a marketer, you need to approach this for online experiences the same way you would for in-person events. If anything, it's even more crucial right now to create [engaging event pages](#) that stand out from the crowd and clearly show your webinar's value. And the number-one rule about event pages is they should be on-brand (and beautiful, of course).

A webinar platform typically doesn't have design capabilities. At the most, you may be able to upload a logo and change a background color.

Integrate with your other business systems: A webinar is one of the most effective marketing activities for generating leads, so it's critical that you can [capture those leads](#) and act on them, without a lot of tedious, manual effort.

A webinar platform alone may gather attendee information through a registration form, but where does it go? Unless you manually export the list and upload it into your marketing automation and CRM systems, those names are going to stay put.

Provide data visibility to your internal teams: Integrations, like the ones described above, move attendee [data across systems](#). This means the data updates as often as your systems sync with each other, letting your sales and customer service teams see that data in real time. Why this matters: With this access to data, your internal

teams can send more meaningful and customized communications to prospects and customers — and we all know they crave that level of personalization.

A webinar platform alone only provides visibility to those who have a user account (like the event marketer, demand generation manager, or webinar admin).

Ensure consistency between in-person and virtual events: If you're like every other event marketer, you're optimistic that in-person events will return at some point with a vengeance. And when they do, you need to ensure that everything you're doing today with virtual events aligns with your future in-person events. This is why it's important to have one robust solution that connects all of your marketing tech stack.

Scale your webinar programs: While some companies are outright canceling their in-person events today, many are looking to replace them with virtual events. This means that the number of events hosted by many companies isn't simply decreasing. Events still [need to be scaled](#) so different internal groups can run webinars and other virtual events.

What to Look for in a Webinar Platform

With all that said, it's clear why integrating your webinar and event marketing platforms is important to create on-brand, connected, and measurable webinars. But what does that mean tangibly when evaluating webinar platforms?

Look for a webinar platform that can fully integrate with your event marketing platform. We can't say this enough: This is by far the most important feature to have. If you don't already have an [event marketing platform](#), there are a few things you'll want to look for on that end.

First, an event marketing platform should offer customized, branded event themes and pages. Getting your audience's attention for webinars starts with beautiful, [on-brand event pages](#), social share cards, and email invitations — any digital assets that'll encourage them to register.

Second, an event marketing platform should connect the rest of your marketing tech stack, including your webinar platform. Specific [integration features](#) you should look for include campaign tracking, lead scoring across all kinds of events (in-person and virtual), and automatic syncs between systems.

Lastly, an event marketing platform should give you registration functionality. This allows you to gather the attendee data you need and keep it consistent across all events and all systems. Plus, this kind of functionality can also keep your company compliant with consumer privacy laws like [GDPR and CCPA](#).

Look for a webinar platform that offers interactivity functionality. Keeping webinar attendees engaged online can be challenging. You're competing with their phones, emails, and the constant ping from Slack notifications.

This is why it's important to choose a webinar platform that supports interactions, like survey, polling, chat, and Q&A functionality. Some platforms even have social media widgets, interactive speaker bios, and quizzes. If that won't get people to engage, we don't know what will.

Look for a webinar platform that meets your required attendee capacity. This is especially important today, as in-person events have been largely canceled and companies are using even more digital space.

Popular Webinar Platforms

There's no shortage of webinar platforms to evaluate out there. Where is an event marketer to start when webinars suddenly become the primary way to connect with prospects and customers through events?

Start here. Below are five webinar platforms that we've used and can fully recommend for most companies starting their webinar journey.

BlueJeans

BlueJeans is a video conferencing tool that lets you collaborate with video, audio, and web conferencing from anywhere and on any device. With this solution, you can engage up to 25,000 attendees with immersive video, Q&A, and polling.

Some of the things we love about BlueJeans:

- Meeting highlights and transcription capabilities
- Simple, one-touch access to meetings on a variety of devices
- Integrations with dozens of other technologies

When to use BlueJeans: BlueJeans works for everything from small, intimate video gatherings to large, globally reaching livestreams and interactive events. Its interactive capabilities and large-meeting controls make BlueJeans an excellent option for traditional webinars and other widely attended virtual experiences.



GoToWebinar

GoToWebinar is an easy-to-use solution that lets you create and host webinars quickly. With this platform, you can prepare your webinar in only a few steps and know that engagement won't be an issue with features like presenter webcams, polls, and surveys.

Some of the things we love about GoToWebinar:

- An engagement dashboard that shows attentiveness and hands raised
- Flexible scheduling for a one-time event, series, or on-demand experience
- Webinar templates to skip steps and save time

When to use GoToWebinar: GoToWebinar's sweet spot is for marketers looking to host a lot of traditional webinars for medium and large crowds. Its engagement dashboard also makes GoToWebinar ideal for internal and external virtual training events.



ON24 is a solution that helps you create and deliver engaging, data-rich, and interactive digital experiences. It offers options to host live, simulative, and on-demand webinars, so you can always engage your audience on their terms.

Some of the things we love about ON24:

- The 20+ interactivity tools, like Q&A, CTA boxes, and Twitter widgets
- The ability to bring your brand identity into the virtual webinar room
- A presentation setup that helps you more seamlessly run the actual webinar

When to use ON24: ON24 has solutions for nearly every virtual experience you're looking to offer medium and large crowds. Its robust library of interactive features and real-time insights make ON24 an exceptional choice for traditional webinars, delivering multimedia content, and recording webinars for post-event lead generation.



Webex's webinar product lets you host online events for thousands of attendees. With this solution, you can engage with prospects and customers with its video conferencing, Q&A, polling, and chat features.

Some of the things we love about Webex:

- Access to real-time technical support and certified Webex producers to help during your event
- One-click recording of your webinar
- Broadcast-quality audio for a polished event

When to use Webex: Webex is a great option for event marketers looking to scale their traditional webinars for medium and large crowds. Its intuitive platform and quick recording capabilities let you quickly set up on-demand webinars that draw in even more leads.



Zoom is a single communications suite that offers quick and easy video conversations for entire teams or one-on-one chats. Drive better experiences with engagement features like virtual backgrounds, polls, integrated chat, and emoji reactions.

Some of the things we love about Zoom:

- High-definition video and audio that deliver no matter your bandwidth
- Easy collaboration and participation controls, even on the mobile app
- Personal meeting IDs to make webinar setup fast and easy

When to use Zoom: If you're looking to host a webinar with active, verbal participation (such as small-group trainings or roundtable discussions), Zoom is the way to go. Its automatic mute feature also makes Zoom a great option for internal town hall meetings.



3 Best Practices for Your Webinar Strategy

There's one chapter left in this guide, which means it's time for a reality check. We've gone through a ton of information so far — everything from defining a webinar to choosing a specific webinar platform. Before setting you free, we have a few best practices that will help you elevate your [webinar strategy](#) and get the most out of this new world of events.

Align your webinar strategy with your broader event marketing strategy. We mentioned this earlier, but it's worth another mention. If you think of your webinars as separate from your in-person events, they'll never be connected at a strategic level.

Webinars, just like in-person events, fall into your marketing and sales funnel. It's important to understand how your webinar topics fit into this funnel, as that determines who to invite, how deep you should go with content, and post-webinar follow-up tactics.

Identify your calls to action. Speaking of following up on your webinars, make sure you've defined the actions you want your attendees to take next. Do you want them to take advantage of a special offer, get on a call with a sales rep, or start using a new product feature?

While you may have a different call to action for each of your individual webinars, we recommend sticking to only one call to action per webinar. Consider where your attendees are in their buyer journey and pick the appropriate next step from there.

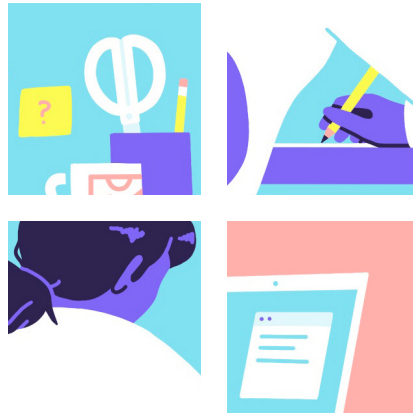
Integrate your webinar strategy with your content marketing strategy. At the end of the day, your webinars are also content, just in a different format. And one of the best things about content is that it can be easily repurposed for more touchpoints. Some of our favorite ways to leverage content marketing and webinars together are:

- Record webinars and make them available on-demand. This is another way to generate new demand and gain new leads. With these now available at any time, you can update existing, related channels and content — like nurture programs, blog posts, and ebooks — with a link to the on-demand version. The fine print: Make sure anyone who speaks on the webinar (even if they aren't a formal presenter) has given consent to be recorded and repurposed for marketing materials.
- Create related content for follow-up communications. For those who attended your webinar, your call to action could be to download a piece of content or read more about the topic on which you just presented.
- Search the webinar Q&A for more content ideas. This is a great way to fill your content pipeline because you're getting questions and insights straight from your target audience. They are the ones in the weeds every day, so they are a great resource.

That was a lot of information. We're just going to be real and say it: This new world of events is tough.

You didn't sign up to run webinars from behind a computer screen. You miss the community that in-person events build. Heck, you may even miss running around an event venue, making sure everything is perfect while racking up 30,000 steps for the day at the same time.

It's okay to acknowledge this and feel upset about all of it. The reality, though, is that webinars and virtual events are here today. Learning as much as you can about them will help engage your audience, support the business, and reach your goals — even if one of those goals is to become a [webinar whiz](#).



**One platform. One process.
All your events.**

Discover an event marketing platform that does it all: helps you create memorable virtual event experiences, generate audience insights, and measure impact.

[Take the Splash product tour today.](#)

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