

Ten Tips For Better Web Meetings

Staying focused on meeting content instead of conferencing technology can lead to more productive virtual meetings.



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Executive Summary

In modern business, hosting successful meetings is more critical than ever. When ideas are shared and concepts become strategy, an effective meeting can drive productivity, communicate essential programs and build the foundation for action plans. With today's challenges associated with frequent business travel and the constant drive to increase daily productivity, more professionals are choosing to communicate via conference calls. Web conferencing remains valued for worker productivity and cost savings.

However, there are pros and cons to meeting virtually. Several dynamics come into play that can impact the effectiveness of the average conference call. With over a decade of expertise in managing winning conference calls, PGI has identified ten easy ways to pump up your next meeting using Web conferencing tools.

Consider this: have you ever tuned out or multi-tasked during a conference call? If you were hosting the meeting, were your attendees actively participating and listening to you... or were they focused on instant messaging, Web surfing or a myriad of other desktop distractions? At the end of the meeting, did you accomplish what you wanted with each of your participants?

As a meeting host, these are necessary questions to ask yourself before you ever schedule the time or send the required dial info. After all, why host a meeting if not to accomplish your objectives? With readily available technologies today, your next meeting can include the audience interaction and engagement you require. Web conferencing tools are a quick and easy addition to any meeting and will increase your ability to visually increase audience interaction.

Remember, focusing on your meeting objectives, not the technology. The technology is there to support the ideas above and help you achieve your desired outcomes. Choose the tools and capabilities that best suit your needs in accomplishing your goals... the tools are fun and rewarding, but content is still king.



Getting to First Base

With any meeting, there are basic steps to ensure success. Of course, every meeting needs an agenda. There are also other actions to take before, during and after the meeting to ensure the meeting maximizes the time and commitment your audience has made to you by attending. Use this basic checklist as your guide:

PLANNING

- > Define the meeting objective and outcome
- > Determine who should attend
- > Identify the best way to communicate

PREPARATION

- > Define the agenda
- > Determine agenda timing and limits
- > Define meeting goals and objectives

INFORMATION

- > Determine the invitee's expectations/preparation
- > Outline content to be discussed
- > Communicate what preparation is required by each attendee prior to the meeting

STRUCTURE & CONTROL

- > Begin on time and keep to the agenda
- > Stay tuned into the needs of group
- > Restate and confirm conclusions drawn from the meetings
- > Document action items & responsible persons, respectively

RECORDS & ACTION

- > Record discussions, action items and take-aways
- > Follow-up with documented meeting notes and action items
- > Most hosts typically spend 10% of their time on planning, 80% on the actual meeting and 10% on follow-up.
- > More planning means more successful meetings: spend 50% on planning, 20% on the meeting and 30% on follow-up.



The Ten Tips

Once you have planned out your meeting, add in a layer of collaboration and interaction. The following are simple ideas easily applied using Web conferencing features.

1. EVERYONE HAS AN AGENDA

Like reading the batting order or watching the opening credits to your favorite TV show, your agenda should be the first item to walk through in your meeting. Instead of just emailing it out to your participants, go ahead and show it real time. Simply by sharing your desktop, or isolating your agenda document whether it be Word or in some other program, you can interactively run through the objectives and elements of the meeting. This is particularly helpful if you need to update the agenda on the fly - everyone will see the updated agenda. Also, try to keep the agenda to one page. Spend your time wisely by showing visuals related to the topic at hand.

2. SHARING IS CARING – PRE-LOAD POWERPOINT, KEYNOTE, AND OTHER PRESENTATIONS

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3. HAND IT OVER

Many meetings require more than verbal interaction from the audience. If pre-meeting homework was assigned to one or more participants, you can easily give them the ability to present/show their material to the group. Do a test run of handing over controls, it's less clumsy when you know the tools and how to use them. For larger meetings, it also helps to have a colleague serve in a co-presenter role to watch the chat window and handle Q&A. That way, you can stay focused on the content.



The Ten Tips (cont.)

4. SHORT ATTENTION SPAN

Trying to make a point to your audience... literally? Use annotation tools, such as highlighting, underlining or even typing onto the document or slides you are sharing, to emphasize key points. Live on-screen movement by the host will corral short attention spans. Make it even more interesting with multiple presenters each with their own ability to highlight the same document. But, don't go overboard...it could get messy

5. TAKE THEIR TEMPERATURE

One of the toughest elements of a virtual meeting is knowing whether your audience is checked in or checking their email. Engaging your audience members is important if you want their input in the discussion. People will be more "into it" if they have something to look at and are engaged with questions.

Take the pulse of your audience through polling questions. As part of planning for your next meeting, think about how you would normally engage participants in-person. In a live meeting, you ask questions, look for verbal or visual cues, get folks to interact and share their perspectives or information. Polling questions are not only easy to incorporate, but they keep the meeting momentum going.

6. MOVING PICTURES MAKE GREAT CINEMA

If you're giving a presentation or a training session, liven it up with an audience attention grabber. This is one of those times when you really want to make sure the participants remain interested in the topic. Share a Web page or hosted video and audio. There's no need to load the video or audio in your conferencing portal – the Web does it for you and typically loads and renders at the same speed. Keep in mind, anytime you use hosted audio, be sure to tell participants to turn up the volume on their PC speakers prior to the audio start.



The Ten Tips (cont.)

7. BE AN ARTIST

What is a meeting without a white board or flip chart? Obviously, it's not much help to participants in remote locations. If you're capturing notes and action items, or even trying to draw a picture, do so on a virtual white board for everyone to see. It will get your point across and allow for notes and sketches to be shared in real-time. Remember, you can also give control to other participants to add to the white board too.

8. PRIVATE CHAT

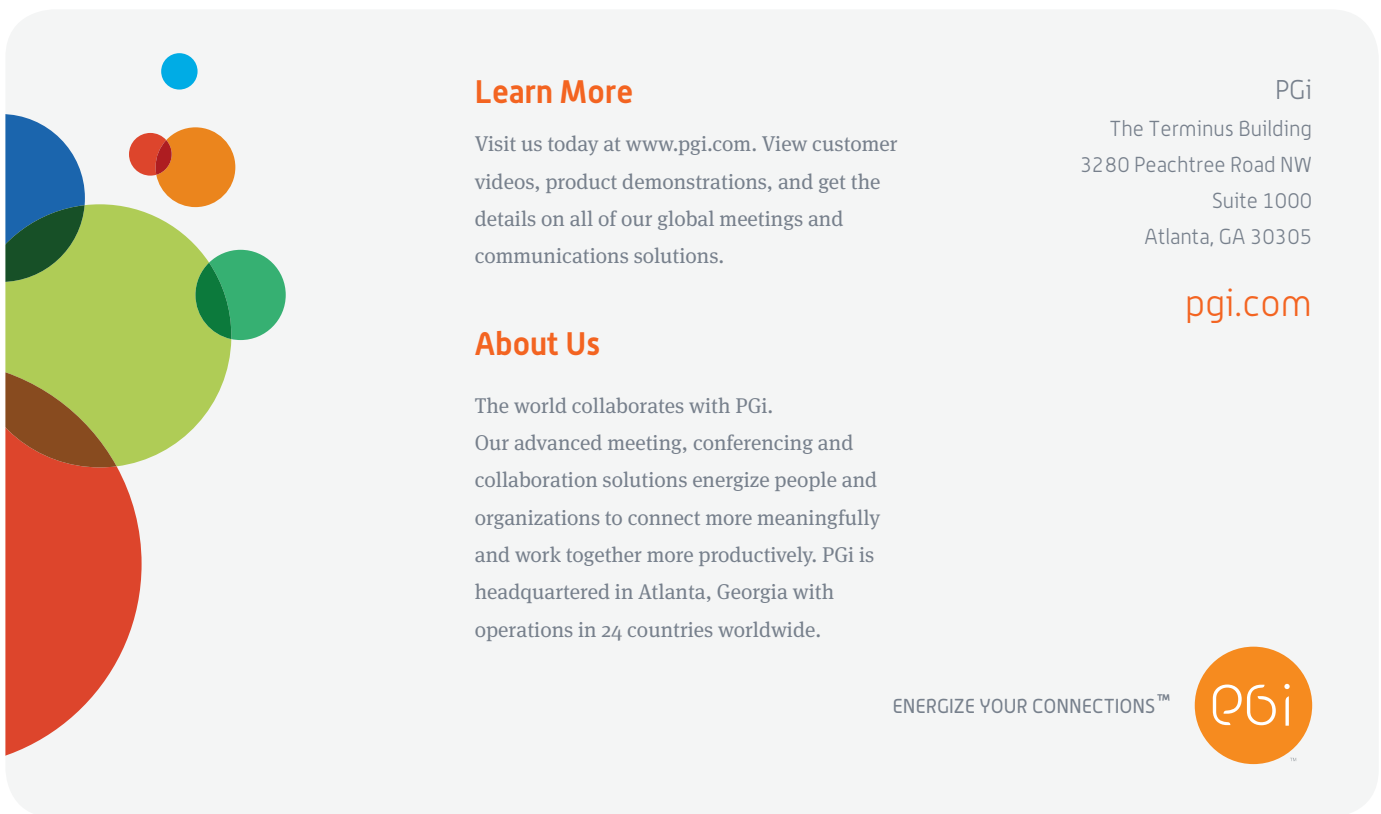
With larger audiences, such as town hall meetings or presentations, it is important to stay connected with the audience and/or other presenters. Similar to instant messaging, you can privately chat with participants on the call. Most Web tools also provide you with the ability to check the pulse or "mood" of the audience through a color coded seating chart or participant list.

9. BE CONTROLLING

Questions are a great way to keep the level of interaction up and everyone engaged... except when time is of essence and who is asking the questions can be a deterrent to maintain control and flow of the meeting. As a presenter, you definitely want to encourage questions. The Q&A function allows you to receive questions during a presentation that can be answered later. You can then review the questions, and who asked them, at the appropriate juncture and decide which ones to answer. You can also make someone else on the call a presenter, so they can be answering questions throughout the presentation.

10. KEEP A RECORD

Keep a record of what was said and presented during the meeting. If your business requires a record of conversations, whether for Sarbannes-Oxley or training purposes, then you want to be able to have an accurate record of the discussion. Use the recording functionality and be sure to tell participants where and how they can get their own recording.



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The world collaborates with PGi. Our advanced meeting, conferencing and collaboration solutions energize people and organizations to connect more meaningfully and work together more productively. PGi is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia with operations in 24 countries worldwide.

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