webinar

I

WHAT IS A WEBINAR

From the day the internet launched proper, it has continued to replace the way human beings interact, meet and conducted transactions. Every single facet of human life from health, technology, transportation and sports has been transformed and has received a new face that has made the web a viable platform to host almost all types of human activities. Gone are the days when the yellow pages ranked as the primary source of information. Directories no longer occupy a pivotal role in communications. These are just some of the few ways the web has changed our lifestyle. At the beginning of the new millennium, a lot of attention became focused on using the web to improve communications and commerce. This gave birth to new features and developments that have drastically altered the way we receive information, interact, and respond among ourselves. One of the new features that sprang up much later is the concept of webinars.

In the pre-Internet areas, apart from the mass and print media, there was only one other great way to get to speak to many people at once; through seminars and lectures. If you wanted to conduct self-improvement classes or share business tips, you took out a hall and invited members of the public to listen to your lectures and seminars. Great public speakers like Dale Carnegie produced landmark success using this structure to reach a wide swath of people across different localities. The only catch was that they had to visit each locality. Public speakers travelled far and wide, conducted lectures, shared products and services and generally hoped to build a following. Apologies to these great personalities but such a plan may not exactly yield high returns in the current world. The inconvenience attached with hosting or attending lectures meant that sooner or later, the growth of technology would eventually render them obsolete and so it has proven. Technology as is often the case turned to its most trusted lieutenant, the internet, to provide viable alternatives and of the different alternatives it provided, webinars stand out for their ease of use as important tools for dispensing information.

“WEBINAR” is an amalgam of the two words; “web” and “seminar”. It represents a fusion of the web and the traditional roles of seminars to deliver even more impressive results. Standing in as a short contraption of “web-based seminar”, a webinar is a lecture, presentation or conference shared over the web in a live video format to viewing

audience. A webinar integrates all the traditional values of seminars into a smooth-flowing video presentation format that allows members of the audience to watch in real time, ask questions and share different files, documents, audio files, presentations and applications among one another. The key to a webinar is the fact that you can easily transmit, receive or respond to information generated from your listeners. It literally brings seminars and lecturers to the members of the audience right within the comforts of their homes and offices. Presentations and lectures like TED talks and Reith lectures still command a huge following but such are either already keying into the potentials the web offers them or becoming very scarce and impractical.

Webinars key into the existence of clear video and audio feeds that leave you feeling like you are within the walls of a class without leaving your home. They are mostly live events and members of the audience often need to register in advance to attend a webinar. Most webinar platforms have now enabled the ability to downloaded recorded webinars. Clear audio lines are also a must to enable clear feedback and a high quality experience

A webinar needs a host platform. These are various software or online applications and platforms designed to help you set up a new webinar. Some of the more common platforms include AT&T Connect, Intercall, Skype, Xisco, Zoho Corp and Zoom. All of them have certain unique features that can help you decide which one of them to use when next you have a webinar to host. However, as a general rule, webinars have the following features;

Ability to support multiple presenters

Presenters have the choice of bringing on a partner(s) to help them deliver thrilling webinars.

Video and files exchange

The lecturer and attendees have the chance to exchange relevant files and video to further ease understanding of webinar topics.

Live chat for attendees

Speaking while a lecturer in a hall is speaking was termed generally poor behaviour but webinars offer us the chance to discuss and chat about the ongoing webinar without really running the risk of distracting the presenter or causing interruption.

Prerecorded videos and past webinars

Webinars can be rebroadcasted to further inform and help audience learn new insights.

Conference options

In very much the way your conference calls are structured, webinars are like structured video conference calls between a presenter and the millions of his subscribers.

Chat filters to connect attendees and presenters with social accounts

Webinar platforms incorporate social media links to enable attendees follow presenters and continue to share information. They allow presenters to be able to garner more social media following from attendees of their webinars.

Q&A tools, polls and feedback forms

Most platforms also offer a chance for attendees to ask questions and get immediate answers from the presenters. Aside from the orderliness that they espouse, the lure of real time answers is very great. Other tools like polls about the topic of discourse or feedback forms can also be available to enable presenters gauge the level of engagement and opinions during their webinar.

Calendar scheduling and invites

With most webinar platforms, the risk of missing out on new webinars or forgetting them is reduced to the barest minimum. First of all, presenters themselves can make use of the calendar scheduling feature to inform their potential viewers of when the next webinar

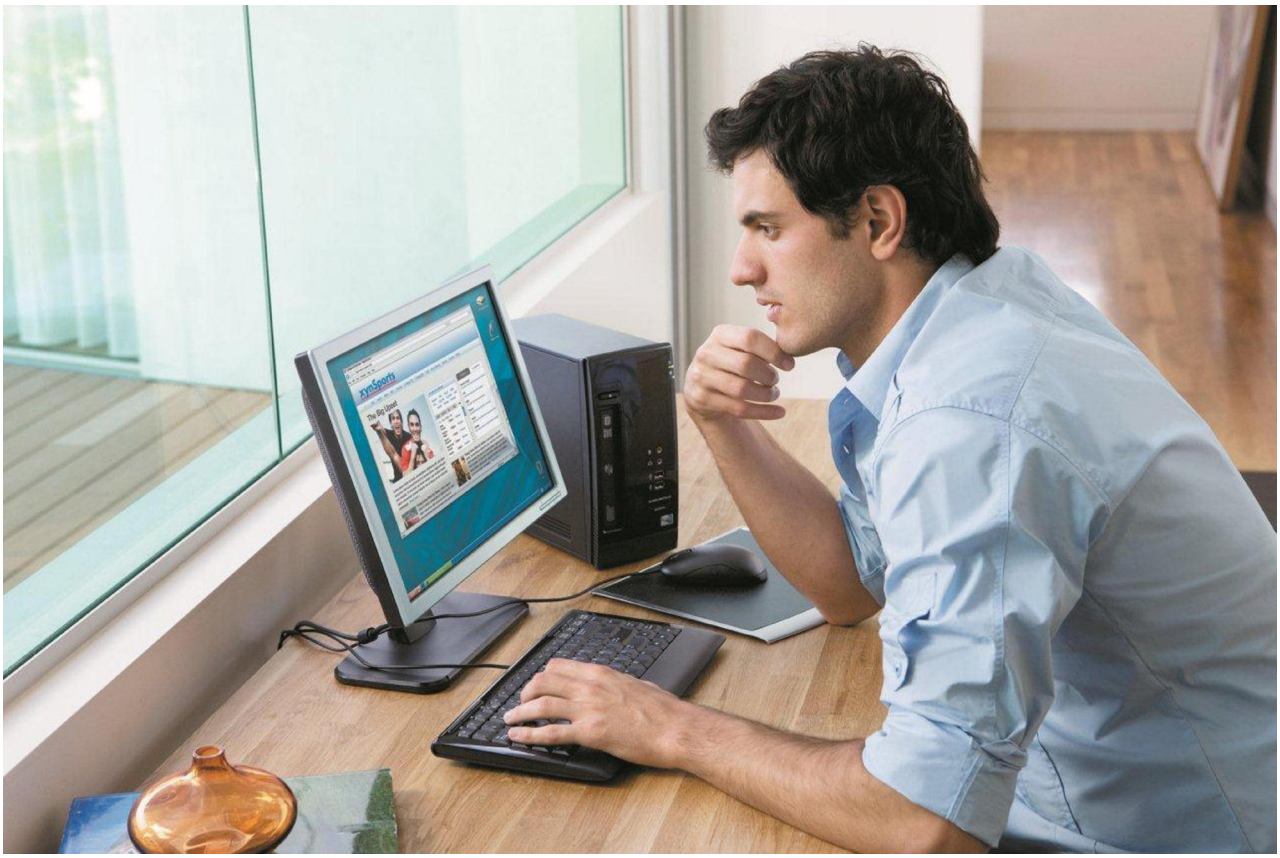
will be taking place. What this means is that most times, attendees who have signed up will get periodic alerts to remind them of upcoming webinars. This further ensures that nobody gets left behind.

All these features combine to make for a smooth, free-flowing video conference experience that allows a presenter to deliver his lecture and attendees to make useful suggestions and ask for clarifications. Webinars have made huge strides since they were introduced and they now stand as one of the best ways of capturing the attention of a target audience. Given the visual and audio interface they provide, they trump reading texts, articles and emails, and the real time format allows them to provide more feel than ordinary videos. The flow of information is usually unilateral; from presenter to attendees and that helps tune out distractions and interruptions. Webinars have come to represent a main stay of academic and non-academic discourses by enabling the classic feeling of attending a good, old lecture or seminar presentation all from the comfort of your armchair while at rest. It is a win-win for everybody.

II

HOW TO USE WEBINARS FOR LEAD GENERATION

The internet plays a huge and pivotal role in modern commerce. A lot of traditionally offline aspects of business have gone online and can now be fully managed from the comfort of your office or home. The goal of business and advertisement is to generate wide interest in strangers who may therefore decide to purchase your service or product. Advertisement however has gone online in the form of PPC, paid ads, Social media ads etc. It is no longer enough to float ads in newspapers or place bills in strategic places. People want to be able to have interactions with businesses and consider the services and products they are offering. It has therefore become pertinent to understand the possible ways to improve traffic and sales to your products online. This has brought on the need for proper lead generation.



Who is a lead? A lead is any stranger or non-customer who has shown any form of interest in the goods and services on offer. If for instance, you complete an online survey on a website that sells shoes and you then receive a call from the website promoting a particular brand of shoes, then, you would have represented a successful lead. Lead generation therefore is the act of trying to attract, invite, impress and convince total strangers to show interest and make purchases of the services and goods on offer.

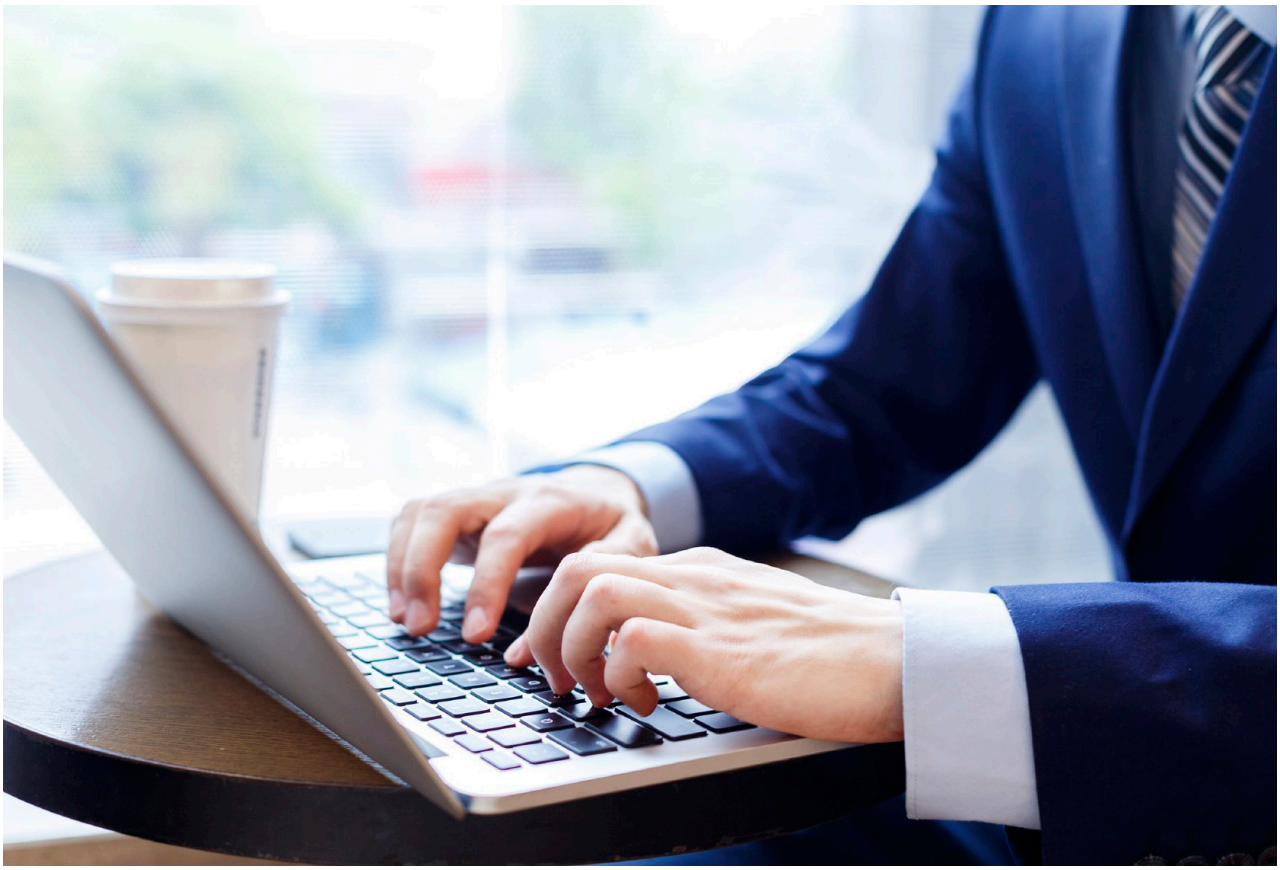
Lead generation is a specific help to marketers as it means they have high specificity when they get in contact with prospective customers. Imagine if you had not taken that online survey about shoes and somebody had just called you and enquired if you would be interested in them, what would be your reaction? Consternation? Indignation? This is exactly what lead generation aims to avoid. By only targeting those who have expressed initial interest, it increases ROI and allows for more effective and concise marketing campaigns. Lead generation simply helps you build up a catalog of probable consumers who have expresses a higher than average interest in your services. The focus of lead generation is to help you gather and pull information from these prospective customers that might enable you serve them better, fine-tune your services to their wants or just keep them in the loop for further advertisement. Lead generation could have a simple focus as just gathering enough email addresses from your potential users. You can use these addresses to build up an email list of people who have already expressed some form of interest in you or your businesses. The catalog could help you when you decide to start up a new product offering or service.

How then can webinars work to help generate leads? Webinars are a source of a huge number of interested consumers. You only need to find a way to get their contact address, email and name to open up a vista of new opportunities. However, this cannot be the sole reason why you create webinars. You must create webinars to share valuable content. It is only by sharing useful content that your audience will be willing to drop their contact info for your marketing campaigns.

In registering for webinars, consumers often have to input certain personal details that can serve as great lead generators for your campaign. There are a variety of ways users could drop the information and details you need. Apart from during question and answer series, in registering for the webinar, they could be required to;

- Fill out forms for downloaded content
- Share contact information for a coupon
- Subscribe to an RSS feed or email list etc.

Also, by regularly hosting webinars, you can easily generate a large social media presence with news of the value your webinar holds allowing it to spread through referrals and word of mouth. This all serve to help you generate further leads. It is simple logic really. A lot of people attend webinars and you can tap into their preferences easily to offer your own products and services.



III

WHY WEBINARS ARE IMPORTANT FOR LEAD GENERATION

Why have webinars and other internet options such as webcasts being at the forefront of online marketing since the advent of the internet? Why have the print and mass media taken a back seat in the new revolution that spread across business empires? Why are webinars gaining more traction as premier lead generation tools? Why are many large corporations and personalities taking to webinars to generate more traffic for their business? The answers are simple really. Incorporating a larger population of prospective customers, the very essence and advantages of webinars are built upon a wider reach, ease of use and access, and high specificity. Below are some of the reasons why webinars are very good tools for developing a big following and lead generation.

Customer Service

To host a webinar speaks of confidence and credibility. Most webinars last for an average of an hour. You will agree with me that it is quite hard to deliver a video lecture of more than one hour without being sure of what you are saying. To deliver an online lecture tells prospective customers that you are worth your salt as a brand. It reassures them and helps convince them to want to stay on your list for further webinars, adverts and promos. Furthermore, doing thorough justice to the topic you have chosen surely opens up new vistas of opportunities. Even if you had not designed your webinar for lead generation, chances are quite high that a lot of attendees would like to keep in touch with you. Therefore, webinars are tailored and well optimized for engaging prospective customers. It gives you a platform to prove that your services are no hype or fluke. You are not just throwing flyers in consumers' face and asking them to take what is essentially a blind leap of faith based on a few words of confidence. No!!! Instead, your hosting of a full lecture and probably taking time out to answer a few of the questions that may have arisen from the lecture demonstrates that you know your onions and are worth a try. If you carve out a niche for yourself as a successful webinar host with great impact, your credibility will soar. New customers will trust your services and products and all attendees would be very interested in dropping contact details that can help you build a catalog of potential customers.

Real time feedback

With webinars, your attendees can connect with you directly and ask questions. You then have the chance to make even further make clarifications. All these, if professionally done, will impress upon your attendees that you care deeply for their welfare. Nothing sells your future services faster than a first impression of being professional and efficient. Webinars give you the chance to connect with people probably looking for such services as you render but who have one or two questions. By interacting with them, you can convince them to part with their details and take further part in other webinars.

Collect Real Time Data

With various form of online adverts and lead generation tools, it can be quite hard to collect data describing how far your campaign has made an impact. Most operate under quite just a blanket approach where you just hope that some of your leads would respond. However, with webinars, you have an exact idea of the number of people who have indicated interest in attending. During your presentation, you can also easily monitor the number of people watching or attending. In fact, with webinars, you can get the exact data of where most people were impressed with. If more attendees replayed a particular section over and over, or linger over a particular frame, you can easily decipher that the section might have struck a chord and further tailor subsequent presentations along the same lines. If on the other hand, more people left your presentation at a particular point, it shows you that you may need to improve upon your presentations or cut out that section entirely.

Ease of Setting-up Webinars

Webinars are so very easy to set up. With the various platforms on offer, they have covered pretty most of the technical areas and simply provide you with a simplified interface to customize to your own liking. You don't need to engage a professional to help you set up a webinar. With a simple webcam and the appropriate platform that suits your needs, you can be live and running in the shortest timeframe possible. This works to help you keep down expenses and running costs.

Genuinely Interested Leads

The biggest problem of advertisement has always been how to get adverts across to those people who are genuinely interested in them. Advertisement isn't as easy as just running campaigns on TV or creating social media ads. You need to constantly find a way to get your adverts to those who may be interested in it. With webinars, you can be sure you are not just getting the details of random individuals who may or may not be interested in what you have to offer. Every single lead must have expressed a genuine interest before he gets captured in your lead generation process. With this, it means you will be spending less for genuine leads and it is actually a cost effective process. Also, you can be sure you will get more conversions as your leads are genuinely interested.

A Wide Reach

As with virtually every process online, webinars as tools of lead generation are not hemmed in by geographical barriers. They give you legs beyond where you can reach. With the web, you have virtually unlimited access to everybody online. That means you can drive quality traffic from beyond even your continent. Instead of offline ads that have to be seen physically by your targets, webinars allow you connect with people of all categories form across the world. Your local target market may be small but webinars suddenly expand your reach and you can get across the world easily. You can hold the attention of thousands of people from thousands of miles away and there is no limit to the potentials this holds.

Create Partnerships

Webinars can be jointly co-hosted. You can partner with a similar outlet or startup with the same ideals and goals. So long as you are not direct competitors, you can mutually benefit from being able to reach the people on the other outlet's list. It means you can double or triple your reach at once. Care must be taken thought to choose a startup with equal commitment and the same ideas.

IV

THINGS TO AVOID ON WEBINARS

What are the most important errors you must avoid while setting up your webinars?

Technical Glitches

As easy as it is to set up and host webinars, any process is open to glitches; technical or personal. Carry out dry runs to test your equipment and ensure you fully understand how to operate and maneuver your platform. Test your webcam and microphones for video and audio quality. Check ypur internet connection and ensure you are good to go. Remember, webinars are in real time and there is no allowance for glitches. There is no bigger turnoff for your audience than having to hang while your webinar is interrupted or you have to fix up something after you have captured their attention. It can lose you goodwill, affect your composure and present you as unprofessional and unorganized. Those are the last things you need from people you are hoping to sell a product or service too.

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Be Prompt

People don't like being kept waiting especially when they are looking to pay for a service. Nobody appreciates leaving other tasks to focus on you and then, you hold them up. The web is dynamic and fast-moving. Delays even by few seconds and minutes can see you lose a big part of your audience. If your webinar is slated for 0900GMT, then, let it begin at 0900GMT. Delays say a lot about a negative attitude. It states that you are not well-prepared or do not care enough for your audience. Get everything prepared well in advance. Practise, familiarize and rehearse well in advance to avoid delays. They could be dangerous and pose major credibility questions about your brand.

The Wrong Partner

The right partner can help you generate a wider reach. He can help you present even more enthralling content during your webinars. Conversely though, a wrong partner can literally prove to be hell and affect your webinars. Care must be taken in selecting the right kind of partner. Select somebody with a similar idea. Make sure you are not at odds. Also, select somebody who is not your direct competitor. You cannot afford to have a direct rival or another outlet with similar services on your webcast. It will leave your attendees confused and split the attention you need. They must also be ready to put in an equal amount of effort at promotion of the webinar. There is no worse thing as a partner with less commitment. He may look to profit equally from the little effort he has put in. Always remember, partners are good but the wrong partner is hell.

V

HOW TO STRUCTURE A WEBINAR

Define Objectives

The very first decision you need to make is decide the goal of your webinar. Is it an initial effort to build a following by proposing the solution to a problem? Is it an attempt to further whet the appetite of attendees? Asking yourself these questions will give you clear focus to decide on the approach your lead generation should follow. Also, you can set target goals you will like to achieve with your webinar. Every other decision you make will be based squarely on the objectives you have set. It is therefore important for you to set down clear and appropriate objectives to allow for a smooth webinar.

Select Your Audience

Who are your target audience? This is the next question you need to answer in the series. Your target audience will determine a lot of factors. It will tell you the format of your presentation. In fact, it will determine the contents you choose to include in your webinar presentation. By having a clear idea of your target audience, you will also have a clear idea of how to go about the promotion of your webinar. It will give you the proper insight in what channels you choose to create awareness about your webinar.

Choose the Best Platform

We have discussed about the existence of numerous platforms that enable you host webinars. You need to decide on which platform you will like to host your webinar. Each platform has its own unique attributes. It is only by having a clear idea of your objectives, your target audience and the features of each platform that you can decide which one to adopt. Your primary considerations should include ease of usage and simplicity of navigation for your attendees.

Promote Your Webinar

You may have the greatest content the world has ever seen but if people do not know your webinar is holding, you won't get the following your content and brand deserves. You need to tap into online resources to get the date and time of your webinar across to as many people as possible. Social media remains the biggest community in the world. Consider investing effort and a little token in getting your message across several social media platforms for more awareness and to generate more interest. Social media marketing is powerful tool to get more people to listen to you and allow you capture leads. Referrals from previous attendees are powerful too. By using their own reputation to support your claims of credibility, you can get more people from them to attend.

Create a Landing Page

A landing page is essential during promotion. Before people decide whether to attend or not, they need further details. You can include information about the speaker and topic to stimulate interest. A landing page should contain enough information and attract attendees to drop contact details for your lead generation. It could even be your own blog so that they can continue to follow up on your progress and new developments. Include call to action buttons to ensure your lead generation can progress smoothly. Make the page title catchy too. Landing pages are a must in lead generation.

Great Content

Ultimately, content is king. You need to present engaging content that will stimulate your attendees to build trust in you. Webinars provide a platform for people to listen to you. They enable you engage the attention of people but ultimately, you are responsible for keeping the attention. Webinars will give you the chance to speak but what you say is down to you. Churn out consistently high-quality

Great Content

Your lead generation does not end with your webinar. Follow up your webinars with helpful articles. Make good use of the leads you have generated. You need to consistently engage your attendees to stimulate them to get the products and services you are offering.