

13 Tips to Hold Virtual Meetings Like a Pro

A virtual meeting is still a meeting. It may seem less formal in many ways but there still needs to be behavioral expectations and standards. Someone needs to take control, and planning is perhaps more important than a traditional face-to-face.

1. Identify your needs and choose a platform.

The pandemic created a huge opportunity for holding virtual meetings, there are loads of options on the market. Learning how to operate a virtual meeting platform can be easy if a few simple tips are followed.

2. Find a quiet place to hold the meeting.

A barking dog or shouting neighbors are not the background noise you are dreaming of. Before you hold the meeting, ensure there aren't any distractions surrounding you. If you're in an office, ensure your employees, colleagues, or managers know that you're in a meeting. The same applies if you're at home – alert family members you're about to jump into an important video call.

Pro tip: If you're at home, try to find a room with more furniture and a carpet. This can drastically reduce the echo sound.

3. Invest in equipment.

While virtual meetings can give birth to a lot of memes, you don't want to be the main "face." Nobody will notice your clear microphone output and high image quality, people quickly identify low resolution and surrounding sounds.

The built-in microphone on your computer is often okay, but it lacks many functions – like noise cancellation. Also, laptop manufacturers often cut costs by lowering the quality of the camera. A decent camera can support Full HD resolution (the benchmark for virtual meetings).

4. Practice online speaking skills.

Holding a virtual conference requires you to be the one in control of the whole call. If you're used to office meetings, then you might know some techniques to keep participants involved. But things can change quickly when you're speaking in front of an online audience.

Virtual meetings must be tight and collected. You should start with some ice breakers that take no longer than a couple of sentences, and then you should go straight to the point. Introductions of any speaking guests should be supplied in the Meeting invite and then summarized online. If you're presenting visual information, you should speak according to your slides. Since attendants can be distracted from the meeting, you should involve them regularly. This way, you can keep them

focused. Another benefit of asking questions to particular people is it makes everyone listen intently, as they could be the next ones to speak. And if they aren't prepared, they might embarrass themselves.

5. Utilize the “little things”.

Body language – Visual cues play a massive role in face-to-face communication. Since you cannot get the full benefits of gestures, you must utilize everything you are left with. Exaggerate movements, speak into the microphone, don't fixate your eyes on the camera, look around the screen.

Tone of voice – Your speaking is by far, the most essential factor. You should speak loud enough to be heard but avoid shouting at all costs. You should speak in clear and concise language. Do not mumble, do not use a casual tone.

Clothes – if you're attending a meeting, it's sometimes okay to wear a good-looking T-shirt or a hoodie. However, if you're the host of a business meeting, dressing up is the only way to go. Formal clothes can make you look more authoritative and boost your own confidence.

Background – Virtual meeting backgrounds should be neutral. In a best-case scenario, your background should be a plain wall. Family photos, colorful flowers, and even furniture can distract your audience.

Caution: Complex virtual backgrounds eat up bandwidth, you might need to simply blur your background if you have a poor connection.

6. Keep eye contact with your audience.

Virtual meetings cannot fully replace face-to-face ones. However, you should try to keep as much eye contact with your audience as possible. During web conference calls, it's crucial to look at the camera, rather than the screen. It's easier said than done, however. If you have an external web camera, you should never keep it down. It looks unprofessional and ugly.

By default, laptop cameras are positioned on the top of the screen. Most external cameras can also be attached to the screen bezels.

During any virtual meeting, attending or presenting, distance yourself from your desk. This way, you will create a better viewing angle, and it won't appear as if you're staring at the screen.

7. Prepare for the call.

Just like the checklist pilots fill before each flight, you should have your own checklist before hosting a virtual meeting. First and foremost, you should ensure your own devices work properly. During the second stage of preparation, check the background – is there an item that might distract the audience?

Another important thing to mention is to mute all notifications of your own before joining the call. Prepare a plan for how to carry out the call. If you have a presentation, you must spend some time rehearsing. It can help you speak with confidence and authority.

8. Schedule the virtual meeting properly.

Schedule – The first thing to do is schedule the meeting. You must send invites to attendees and check who will participate and who will not. For small 1-on-1 meetings, it's okay to send an invitation a day earlier. For big gatherings, consider a week in advance at least.

Topics of discussion – You should send an email that will mention the topics of discussion. Regardless of whether you will be the speaker or it will be a discussion, everyone in the meeting should know what will be discussed, prior to the meeting.

Importance – You must stress out virtual meeting importance to all members who will participate. If you think someone won't get much value from attending the meeting, you shouldn't invite them in the first place.

Meeting length – Everyone has their own plans. You should mention the online conference length and stick to it.

Questions – You can leave room for questions so that people can address their concerns and ideas for the meeting.

Pro tip: Always remind your attendants to avoid using the "Reply All" option if they want to answer your email.

9. Layout the rules.

There are unwritten rules that everyone should follow. Ensure you personally notify the attendants to follow a simple guideline before joining the call. Simple things like finding a quiet space, checking their web cameras and microphones, Internet connection, etc. beforehand. They should join the virtual conference on time and mute notifications.

During the call, speakers should introduce themselves. Attendees should keep their cameras on and stop doing anything unrelated to the meeting. They should also act according to the meeting type – if it's a discussion, they should participate actively.

10. Interact with your audience.

One of the biggest problems of meetings is how fast attendants lose focus. This is particularly true for virtual meeting interactions. To keep your audience engaged, you should involve them regularly.

Not only will you keep your audience on pins and needles (which sometimes should happen, as bad as it sounds), but they can also add value to the meeting by offering solutions and sharing their knowledge and opinions. After all, your success as a presenter is measured by the results you have managed to achieve after the virtual conference.

11. Follow-up after the meeting ends.

One of the most important tasks to complete once the virtual meeting has ended is to follow up with an email about what has been discussed and the agreed actions. If you have been presenting, you should also attach the presentation.

One cool tip about email follow-ups is to write a draft, cite the details from the meeting minutes you didn't mention, and send it as soon as possible. It's crucial to send the follow-up email right after the meeting, as information is still fresh.

If you procrastinate for a day or two, there's a good chance your audience has already forgotten what has been talked about. It's also not impossible for you to forget to send such an email at all, which is the worst-case scenario.

12. Ask for feedback.

No one is born great. For you to host virtual meetings like a pro, you need to gain experience in how to lead web conference calls. This experience will also help you manage a remote team successfully.

But to learn, you should also write your homework. Asking for feedback is a great step toward progress, as attendants can provide you with valuable advice on how to better present information so that you keep audiences engaged during the whole virtual meeting.

13. Record your meetings and watch them at home.

One of the best pieces of advice is to record your virtual meetings and then watch them at home. It doesn't mean you no longer have to ask for feedback, but if you create recordings, it will be easier to spot areas of improvement which you wouldn't otherwise notice.

After you watch the recordings, you can take notes, so that you avoid making similar mistakes the next time around.