INNOVATIONS

Modern Strategies for Top Financial Professionals

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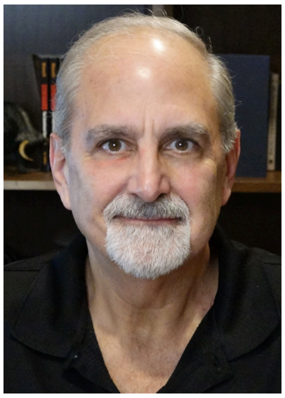
WEBINARS: *6 PRO TIPS*

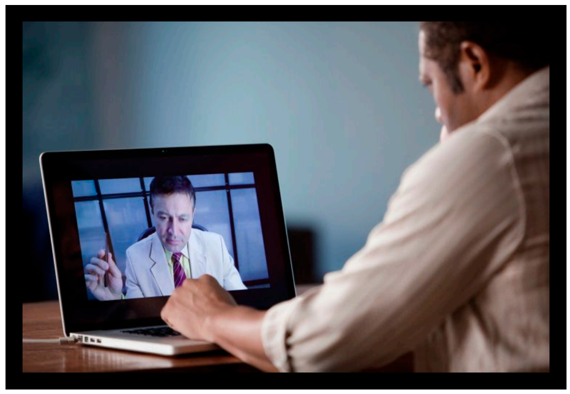
Summary

Everyone wants to do webinars these days. And why not? They're easy to set up, very cheap to do, and no one has to leave their home or office to join in. But as great as they can be, webinars are not easy to do well. In fact, for many top presenters, they can be extremely challenging. Here are a few tips I've learned along the way that might help you make webinars much more successful, enjoyable, and profitable!



Frank Maselli is a former U.S. Army officer and a 38-year veteran of the Financial Services Industry. He has a Ph.D. in Psychology and is one of the nation's premier keynote speakers and business coaches. He has written three best-selling books and has trained thousands of advisors at nearly ever firm in the industry. He has also spoken to many thousands of investors and helped them build great relationships with their financial professionals.

Social distancing won't be the norm forever, but right now, we need to stay in front of our clients and reach out to new people who desperately need our advice and guidance. Webinars (or "virtual seminars") can be the ticket.



You might even find that once the whole COVID-19 pandemic is over, webinars can still be a core part of your marketing and communication effort.

Can they replace live seminars and workshops? Absolutely not! I do not believe that any other form of human communication can equal the power of a live event. There is simply no better way to create the emotional energy and audience dynamic – two powerful elements that combine to magnify your professional impact. But when you can't meet live, then going on-line is a viable and effective option. And to do webinars well you need to know some slightly different rules and techniques.

ProTip #1: Keep it short and focused

This one is easy and you've probably heard it already. People have a very limited attention span and a ton of distractions when watching a webinar, so start by planning for a maximum time of 30-40 minutes. Longer than that and audiences start to drift off and lose interest, particularly toward the end which is usually the critical "call-to-action" phase.

Your topic needs to be simple and actionable and the title needs to reflect that. A webinar title like *"Retirement Income Planning"* just sounds way too big and boring. I'd be more interested in something called ***"3 Steps to Protecting Your Retirement Today!"*** Just using a small number gives it a finite and structured feeling the lends better to the webinar format.

If you can't change the title of an approved program, then just focus on shortening the delivery. I might tell my audience something like this at the start of the program,

> "Folks, I know this topic title sounds like a very long and detailed exposition. But for today's webinar I want to focus on the three most critical things you absolutely need to know that will make a huge difference for you right away. I will make myself available after the workshop to anyone who has more detailed questions or needs more in-depth help"

That relaxes people and let's them know that you're going to give them real value without the boredom. It also says they have a way of getting more info if they need it. This sets you up perfectly for those important follow-up conversations.

ProTip #2: Streamline your "call-to-action"

A Major Plus of Virtual

One of the hidden powers and benefits of a virtual seminar even over a live event is that your audience does not need to wait until the end of the workshop to take some kind of action.

If they like what you're saying and are ready to move to the next step, they can do it immediately...while you're still talking!

It's a breeze to click over to their second monitor and go to the website you have highlighted on the screen. Or they can do it right on their phone while they're watching the show.

Make it easy for them to order something, check a box or request info. This leads to a live conversation where the client relationship can begin.

I know some experts suggest that you encourage the audience to stay for the entire webinar by offering something special only at the end. But I have a different philosophy.

If people are willing to take some action and set a virtual appointment with me before the end...I'm thrilled! Why not give them that option?

The ultimate goal of any presentation is action that leads to a deeper connection. Let your audience take that step whenever tthey're ready.

The idea of a call-to-action applies primarily to prospecting events since you can implement actions for your clients much more easily.

For prospects in a live workshop, your "call-to-action" is almost always a face-to-face appointment. But that's a tough ask for webinars in general and nearly impossible right now. Instead, give your audience two different choices as a follow-up to your webinar. And make is as easy as possible for them to say "YES!"

Choice #1 is a private phone or virtual appointment. This would give them a chance to ask any detailed questions and for you to get to know them better and personalize your guidance based on the information they share with you.

Choice #2 is the "baby step." It could be some kind of information request like a one-page summary of the key points of your talk, a white paper with greater detail on the topic, or even a simple tool they can use to get some answers to basic questions.

Whatever you might offer at this early point in the follow-up cannot require in-depth financial analysis. You may not even know if they're qualified potential clients yet. So what you're offering is low effort for you to do and leads them to the next step in the journey, which is a live conversation. But to get to that point you must offer something tangible and valuable that prepares you both for the follow-up call.

For example, offer a one-page **"Retirement Income Planner"** or **R.I.P.** *(Retire In Peace is a possible point of humor.)* This could be a quick survey and listing of income sources and possible tax consequences of taking money from deferred, taxable or tax-free buckets in retirement.

Create a web landing page where they could simply check a box saying *"Please send me the free one-page Retirement Income Planner."* And have that link on the bottom of every slide. Don't make people wait until the end of the webinar to connect with you. They may get interrupted or have to jump off for some reason. You want your action step and your contact information, to be visible in a subtle way throughout the entire show.

The power of a "baby step" is enormous! Influencers in every industry from sales to religion have recognized for centuries that getting people to commit to a simple, small step today makes them much more willing to take a bigger step tomorrow. By allowing them to request information or download a simple form, you're making that critical initial action easy and relaxed. This still gives you a chance to follow-up personally. Too many action choices is also bad, but just giving them two simple things they can do will significantly expand your potential business results.

ProTip #3: Energize your slides

In the audience's mind, webinars are less like live presentations and much more like television. And one of the major elements to great TV is editing. Take a sitcom like **The Big Bang Theory**. In one 21-minute show (which is a half-hour minus the commercials) they will use over 300 different shots edited together to form the final production! That editing process is a highly advanced art and science that sets the pace and tone for the entire show. It can actually make or break a production.

Now you don't need 300 different slides for a 30-minute webinar, but you absolutely need to use text and graphic builds in your program. PowerPoint makes easy to tweak an existing static program and make it come alive for a webinar.

Your goal is to add some simple action to the visual experience and make it more exciting and fun to watch. This keeps audiences engaged and paying attention. By contrast, showing one complex slide on the screen while you talk through the whole thing destroys the energy and drama of your presentation. Remember, the way you display content on the screen is absolutely critical to helping the audience understand and connect with your presentation and with you.

Go through your program and cut out any slides with huge paragraphs of tiny text, spreadsheets of numbers that no one can see, or unrelated pictures that take up 75% of the slide space. All of these design elements may be clever in a print format like a brochure, but they severely harm the impact of the program...especially virtual ones.

So that leads to one major recommendation – **learn how to use PowerPoint!**

I'm not saying you need to become an expert, but you or someone on your team need to learn some of the basic functions of good slide design and tweak the presentations you're given as needed. Two very simple things you should learn are how to enlarge the text and create animated paragraph or image builds. You could master these skills in 15 minutes and they would be useful for the rest of your career. While they are not advanced techniques, they offer a radical improvement over most of the shows I've seen.

Remember, you're not changing the content! That's already been approved and signed off on by compliance. All you're doing is slightly altering the way the material is organized and appears on the screen. That alone will make a gigantic difference both in a live show but especially in a webinar where static images and text are the kiss of death.

More advanced users could spice up the show with some fun video clips and games. Both add excitement and interactive elements to your program. Throw in some short clips from famous movies or play a game like ***"The Price Was Right"*** which you can learn more about at maselligroup.com.

Certain webinar services let you do live polling of the crowd during the show. It's also good to do a check-in poll before the show starts where you ask people to text "YES" in the chat box if they can hear and see you clearly. This gets everyone comfortable with the interactive elements of the program and makes for a more engaging performance.

You're probably saying...

"I'm a financial professional...I don't have time to learn technology!"

You're right...I get it! So let me help you. I've worked with PowerPoint for so long now that I can make it sit up and deal cards. It truly is one of the greatest tools you have and it can help you deliver a message that's clear, powerful and drives your audience to action...if you know how to use it!

Conversely, a dull and boring slide show can drag your presentation into the mud and cut way back on the audience's response.

Email me your PowerPoint and I will massage the design elements to make them come alive on the screen. We're not changing the content...just the delivery. But that can make a world of difference.

This services costs a little money, but it will pay for itself about twenty times over the first time you use it.

My email is **frank@maselligroup.com.**

ProTip #4: Fall in love with the camera

The camera is your audience. Make direct eye contact with it as much as you can. That sounds obvious but it's very hard for most people to do.

When you're looking into the camera lens, the audience is seeing you look directly at them, which is much more powerful than reading from a PowerPoint on your computer screen.

Professionals like newscasters and other TV personalities, use a teleprompter. You think they're looking right at you while in fact, they're reading from an invisible screen in front of the camera. This skill takes a little time to master but it makes a world of difference. A basic teleprompter system could cost as little as $150 and it can make your programs look a lot more polished.

An audience picture taped to the webcam helps you remember live people are watching.

One very simple trick may sound crazy but it worked for me. I cut a hole in a picture of a live, happy audience and taped it to my webcam. This helped me remember that there were real people watching my program and it reminded me to keep my eyes on them instead of the screen.

You don't have to stare at the camera all the time. But try to limit the time you look away to short glances at your notes or to the slides. Bring your focus back to the audience as much as possible.

Typically in a webinar, you will have the slideshow on the main part of the screen and your face on a smaller side section. If you need to refer to the material often because the program is new to you, it's better to keep a slightly wider shot of your upper torso and head rather than a tight shot of your face. This way it will be less noticeable when you look at the presentation or at notes

Triple-Check the Tech!

This is something everyone should know but I feel remiss in not mentioning it.

Make sure your webinar technology is working perfectly before you go live. You can lose an audience's interest and respect within seconds when some tech issue screws up your event.

Sign on at least 30 minutes before start time and check everything, the video, audio, PowerPoint, chat room, sign-in process, etc.

Ideally, you will have someone act as the host or controller for the program so you can focus on the delivery.

In my experience with webinars, something is bound to go wrong. That's just the nature of the medium...so don't get mad. As we say, "Tech happens!" But you can minimize glitches with great preparation. So if you're going to do it...do it right!

ProTip #5: Keep your energy high and quicken the pace

In a live program, a speaker can draw energy from the crowd. You get immediate feedback and can tell when they are bonding to you, laughing, and connecting on an intellectual and emotional level. But in a typical webinar, the only energy source is YOU! You get nothing back. There's no way to "feel the room" or to gauge the audience's reaction to your program. It's all push and no pull. That's a challenge for many speakers and it can be very draining and a bit scary at times.

Also, your ability to move around and use expressive gestures is limited. This means your voice needs to carry more of the energy and emotional load of the show. That calls for greater vocal variety by mixing up your pacing, voice pitch, tone, volume and intensity during the presentation.

Take your natural delivery style and juice it up a bit. For example, whisper, shout, laugh, use dramatic pauses, asides, throw-aways, vary your speed and use humor. To the audience, that creates a feeling of intimacy and personal connection which they will appreciate.

If you're able to use interactive tools like live chats or mini-surveys, use them. They can break up the monotony and give you some insight as to what the audience is thinking. In this way, a great webinar almost as much energy, intensity, and passion as a live event.

Prep some questions

Pacing and energy can drag during the critical Q&A session. One trick is to simply have some questions ready to go and just use them as you would if they came from an audience member.

I will simply say, ***"We've got a question here about the change in the new tax law."*** Obviously, insert something about your topic. That gets the ball rolling and avoids the uncomfortable and wasteful dead air that often comes while waiting for people to type in a question in the chat box.

And just like in a live event, never end on the Q&A! You still need a PowerClose!

For more details about why and how to run a great Q&A session, check out the Resource Vault at maselligroup.com.

ProTip #6: Trust that you are providing real value...because you ARE!

The one-sided energy flow of webinars may cause you to wonder if you're really connecting to that audience. Don't worry…you are! Trust that you are providing real value and that your audience will benefit from your program even if they can't respond to you in real time. It can feel like a leap of faith, but it's almost certainly true. Just by sharing important information and reaching out to people in a critical time...you ARE helping them very greatly.

Think of it like this: who the heck is going to waste forty minutes of their time unless they are really interested in the topic. There's no free steak dinner here…just pure education. So you're reaching people who WANT to hear from you. As a speaker, that's very exciting!

Understand that the webinar format has limits and that you can't control everyone on the other end of the line. You are going to lose people. They may be distracted with two screens going at the same time. You're simply not going to get the reverse energy that you would in a workshop…and all of that is okay.

You're demonstrating the courage and professionalism to reach out with wisdom and insight. And frankly, you're doing it when most advisors are not. This is a powerful message about who you are and what you do for people. It can distinguish you in a very valuable way.

In conclusion…

Virtual seminars or webinars can be an excellent communication, branding and business growth tool...especially in difficult times. While they may not equal the emotional impact of a live event, they can definitely impart real value, generate excitement, peak curiosity, and drive business. And they are extremely cost-effective and time-efficient. Add them to your arsenal of tools and learn a few advanced skills. You will be very glad you did.