

TIPS FOR PRESENTERS AT THE BTS WINTER MEETING

We appreciate that many of you will have become skilled at presenting at virtual meetings. However, to provide the best possible experience for speakers, chairs and delegates, here are a few hints and tips from ETM productions, the Winter Meeting online platform producers.

There are many presentations skills and best practices that are consistent for live, hybrid and virtual events. For events that are 100% digital there are adjustments that should be considered to match your approach with this new media.

When we are at a physical event, we are used to having a largely captive and reasonably well-behaved audience. Our delegates make their way into designated auditoriums or meeting rooms and happily give us their attention – especially if we get them to turn off their mobiles! But with digital events the rules are somewhat different and with the ever-present distraction of delivery drivers, barking dogs, work priorities, etc, we can see easily why we must adapt our approach somewhat.

Our delegates are now watching via a relatively small screen on a computer, laptop or mobile device in the comfort of a home or office environment. It is reasonably high definition, more akin to watching a TV programme or a film rather than the main stage of a conference.

Think about your content and delivery. How can you change things up every 5 minutes or so? Do you need to shorten what you are saying and include other interactive items that will involve your audience? Consider moments of light and shade throughout your presentation.

But what else should you consider? Here's our 12-point plan:

1. **Think about your background.** Try to use a background that enhances the image that is aligned to your presentation. If you are wanting to present a professional image, consider what's behind you. Avoid a cluttered background or anything that can be distracting. Your background can either add to your presence or detract from it.
2. **Play to the camera.** When you are the one speaking, look directly into your camera, not on the screen or at the other participants. This takes some practice, as it is almost the opposite to the adage of making eye contact with the back corners of a room. But it makes the viewer feel as if you are looking right at them. Some presenters turn off their self-view so that they aren't distracted by their own image.
Put the camera at eye level. Try not to have your camera too far above or below you. If it's too low, then you run the risk of creating a double, or worse still a triple chin! And viewers seeing the inside of your nostrils is not usually a good look. A camera too high makes it difficult to maintain eye contact, as you'll find your gaze dropping as you speak.
If your camera is integrated into your laptop think about where it is located. A simple use of old reference books can help to adjust the position to eye level. If you are part of a panel or a team of presenters, make sure you are aware of when your camera is on. If you are not speaking, don't get caught out. Make sure you look like you are paying attention regardless. Experienced presenters understand the importance of making eye contact with their audience, so this means you should simulate the same effect virtually.
3. **Get the lighting right.** As a presenter, it is essential that people can see you well. Make sure you have good front light—meaning the light shines on your face. If your back is to a window, close the shades. Natural light is often the best choice.

4. **Get close (but not too close).** You want the camera to frame your face, neck, shoulders and arms, especially if you use your hands to enhance your expressions. You don't want to lose that connection by being too far away, but equally you don't want your face to take over the whole screen.
5. **Consider standing up.** Use a standing desk or position your laptop so you can stand at eye level with your computer. Standing up provides a higher energy level and naturally makes us put our body in a more presentation-like mode. Not many presenters will try this so it can be an easy win if you are looking to differentiate yourself from the crowd and it is, of course, the usual way to present at a physical event. If you plan to stay seated, lean slightly forward as if you were presenting at a real meeting or as if you were a TV news anchor. Avoid slouching. You may feel you are looking relaxed; the truth is that you are more likely to send a signal through the camera that you are disconnected from the audience.
6. **Be animated.** Just like in a live presentation scenario, you want to present with a little energy and animation. Too slow or too monotone in your voice makes it easy for folks to disengage and tune out. Keeping people engaged virtually requires you to actually be engaging.
7. **Pace yourself.** Without cues from the audience, getting the pacing right can be difficult. Even though you want to infuse some animation and energy into your presentation don't pump up the speed too much. If you tend to be a fast talker in real life presentations, practice slowing down a bit. If you're a slow talker, you may want to speed up just a bit.
8. **Know the technology.** Nothing kills a presentation faster than a presenter who fumbles with the technology. **This is a TV-like performance moment, and the great news is that you have a production team to support you so that you can concentrate on your presentation. Along with these notes we have scheduled several training sessions so that you can find a convenient date to join. We are also allocating a technical production time specifically for your session to ensure you're comfortable as a group with the platform, and that we have tested your set up to ensure everything works fine.** Please take advantage of the support that is offered and contact us if you are unable to attend or are concerned in any way. If possible, plug your computer directly into your internet modem using an ethernet cable. This will potentially give you a stronger and more stable internet connection than WiFi, which can be unstable for no apparent reason whatsoever. It is helpful if you can close all other applications, particularly emails that may run in the background and affect the speed of your connection. Importantly, please make sure you practice and attend the technical set up with the same set up (computer, devices and internet connection) that you will use when you deliver the presentation.
9. **A sound check.** If your sound is garbled, people will tune out. While delegates may forgive a less than perfect video, if they can't clearly hear you, they will simply use this as an excuse to go for coffee. Practice with someone on the other end. Consider an external microphone or a set of headphones. Usually they provide a far better-quality sound than the built-in computer audio, and again these are items that are readily available. Consider any potential background noise during your presentation. Again, you should practice with the same technical configurations and location that you will use for your presentation.

10. **Slides.** Here's the worst kept secret. Slides are meant to enhance your spoken words, not replace them. If you are using slides, try to make them visually appealing. Use high-quality graphics, charts and tables and limit the amount of text on each slide. PS. It's your job as presenter to deliver the content and not rely on slides to do that for you. Please make us aware if you are using slides, videos, or animations so that we can plan for the correct support and we can have a backup copy readily available - just in case.

11. **Engage your participants.** Craft your presentation to engage the audience. Consider how you might incorporate chats, polls, Q&A. We'd be delighted to work with you to maximise the production opportunities that are available to enhance your presentation. Try not to speak for more than ten minutes without some sort of change or audience engagement. However, don't get side-tracked by the chats during your presentation. I know you think you are a "Master of the Multitask" but you'll be shocked at how distracting it is to your train of thought if you attempt to read the chats while speaking. Instead, ~~have~~ have your co-chair and/or producer will monitor the chats and support you. If you're going to ask people to chat, answer or comment on a question you've posed, build in time for a response. Plan to pause your talking and engage directly with the questions by acknowledging them, reading them out loud, and commenting on them.

12. **Be yourself and have fun.** Just as in a face-to-face presentation, audiences tend to connect to authenticity, so be yourself! Let your personality show through. If you look like you are interested and are enjoying delivering the presentation, that will come across to viewers. The audience will largely take their cue from you.

Finally, remember, whether you are presenting in-person or virtually, all presentations are performances, and all performances are in service to your audience. Their time is valuable, as is yours, so honour that time by delivering the best presentation you can.

ETM Productions
bts@etmproductions.com