

Communicate Virtually Anything

Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips on Running Better Virtual Meetings

Whether you have thousands of employees and offices in 20 countries or three people in two time-zones, these 8 tips can help you run your virtual meetings more effectively.

1. Know how to use the virtual tools

Are you using video or just the phones? Can people also use headsets? Does everyone planned to attend the meeting have the correct equipment and the training to use it? This is something you need to review before you run the first meeting. Another thing to plan for? Things will go awry on occasion. As a backstop measure, make sure you communicate other ways people can contact you, like IM or cell phone just in case.

2. Determine how you want to organize your meeting

Some of this depends on your situation – sort of a combination of the overall goals of the meeting and the tools you have available. Do you have small groups in places where they can meet together or is it a meeting of individuals? From the tools side; are you using a video center or individual cameras or just telephones Take a look at your logistics and who should be attending and set your plan. It also helps to have a detailed presentation to keep everyone literally on the same page.

3. Give people as much notice as possible

It's hard to get everyone in one room at the same time, now try that in rooms in many offices at once. Give them at least a week. It helps them set their calendars and if the attendees have to download some tool or content, this gives them a chance to be prepared. Regardless of calendar reminders, you might also want to send out a reminder the day before, just in case (it also shows you want them to attend and really gives them a chance to download that tool). To give them notice of the content, you should include an agenda.

4. Know who is in your meeting

If the meeting is not a giant affair and you are anticipating interaction, you need to know who is in the meeting. You can keep a list of names so you can call on people if needed (out of sight, out of mind). If you have the time, or this will be an on-going meeting with this group of people, have people introduce themselves and give some kind of overview of their experience so everyone can hear their voice.

5. Let the group determine the pace

Nothing is worse than lectures rather than meetings. As often as possible, reach out to the group to get them involved. At the start, have people identify themselves when they start with a comment “This is Kelli and I think...” At some point, with your list of names and great memory, you will begin to recognize voices so when someone starts talking you can add, a “Go ahead, Rosi” so people know who has the floor without their need of introduction. At the start there might be some “stepping on each other” – in time the group should establish their own rhythm and sort of work this out themselves

6. Just because you cannot see them, do not let participants hide

Let people know how you expect them to act in the meeting. If you are looking for participation and you have not heard from someone for a time, don’t be afraid to call on them, sort of “So, Anna, what do you think of what Ralf had proposed...” or “Hey, Montreal, any other comments on that?” If you hear some mysterious keying in the background, ask something like “Are you taking notes out there?” or something like that and if it continues ask for it to stop.

7. Work on virtual encouragement

That nod you would do to encourage someone when they are talking in the room you need to do with your voice when someone is talking on the phone – or even when you are on camera. People on the phone cannot see you smile (or frown) either, you have to say what you are thinking. Again, have you seen what you look like smiling on some of the video feeds? Work at it.

8. Do not make virtual teams a chore

By happenstance, virtual meetings occur because everyone needed in the meeting are not all in the same location. If you make it sound like a chore or problem during your meeting, funny enough the participants will pick it up and make a chore or a problem. If you have it all planned out, go ahead and enjoy working with colleagues from different locations – the different points of view will give you a better overall product. And it’s even better when they are having crummy weather and yours is glorious.