

Creative Web Conferencing: *how other associations do it...*

By: Richard Finstein, CEO, CommPartners

There are many ways to successfully communicate with stakeholders using Web conferencing...

- Certification programs
- Software training/Web tours
- Virtual trade shows
- Annual meetings' segments
- Discussions between headquarters/chapters

Well-planned online programs offer a convenient, cost-effective tool for member outreach. There are great self-serve tools like EventPartner for instant online meetings; and, there are times when enlisting the help of an online event management company, like CommPartners, is

Example: Real-time Chats with Experts

National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) recently held a live, ask-the-expert event using Myspace.com's forum.

Think about it... Like NACA, you can host real-time chats or create moderated lectures. An e-meeting room becomes a full-scale chat session with streamed/online and/or dial-in audio. This is a great grassroots venue—e.g., your organization's executive director, or board president, could lead a dynamic online discussion about how upcoming legislation will affect members and how to support lobbying efforts.

Case Studies

Webinar Series

In 2006, Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) created their first e-seminar series, available through a members-only learning center on their Web site.

ACFE was experienced with in-person seminars, but realized it would take time to adjust to an online venue; so, they planned only a handful of sessions, later expanding to include dozens of Webinars.

Challenges included:

- Concern about members' network security
- New AMS being deployed, wanted integration
- Desire for consistent branding throughout
- Very busy staff, needing program support

Outcome:

- Realized integration with internal systems evolves over time
- Online programs don't take months to implement
- Ramp-up period can be important for internal "selling"
- Archives very important (>30% sales)
- Offering additional materials generates revenue

Webcast

Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) educates members via Web events. Goals/challenges creating their highly-regarded Desktop Learning Series included:

- Produce highly-professional, efficiently-managed, interactive Webinars that enhance member value
- Save staff time/resources—automate manual tasks/manage other tasks with a skilled support group
- Ensure polished sessions via speaker preparation/content evaluation/tech training
- Establish accountability methods
- Create stringent standards through custom reporting/detailed review/documentation of each facet of their Webinar program (pre-registration, survey management, advanced polling, etc.)

Outcome:

- Internal strategy alignment is *critical* and can take some time
- Integration between event components provides big benefits
- Online events attract potential members
- It doesn't take abundant staff time to run multiple programs
- Cost savings by repurposing programs from in-person meetings to online

What about my association?

Web conferencing has nearly-endless options for meeting your educational/marketing/financial goals, while protecting your association's reputation. Working with a reputable online event management company, as the above associations did, will save you time, headaches and potential missteps. To get started, contact ASAE Services, a great resource for finding endorsed, reliable technology partners offering discounted services.

Richard Finstein is an online e-learning specialist and co-founder of CommPartners. He has 25-plus years of consulting and serving as a guest speaker at many association educational sessions, as well as devising technology solutions for associations and non-profits. In 1998, he co-developed the technology partner program with ASAE Services. Rich holds a marketing degree from University of Maryland.