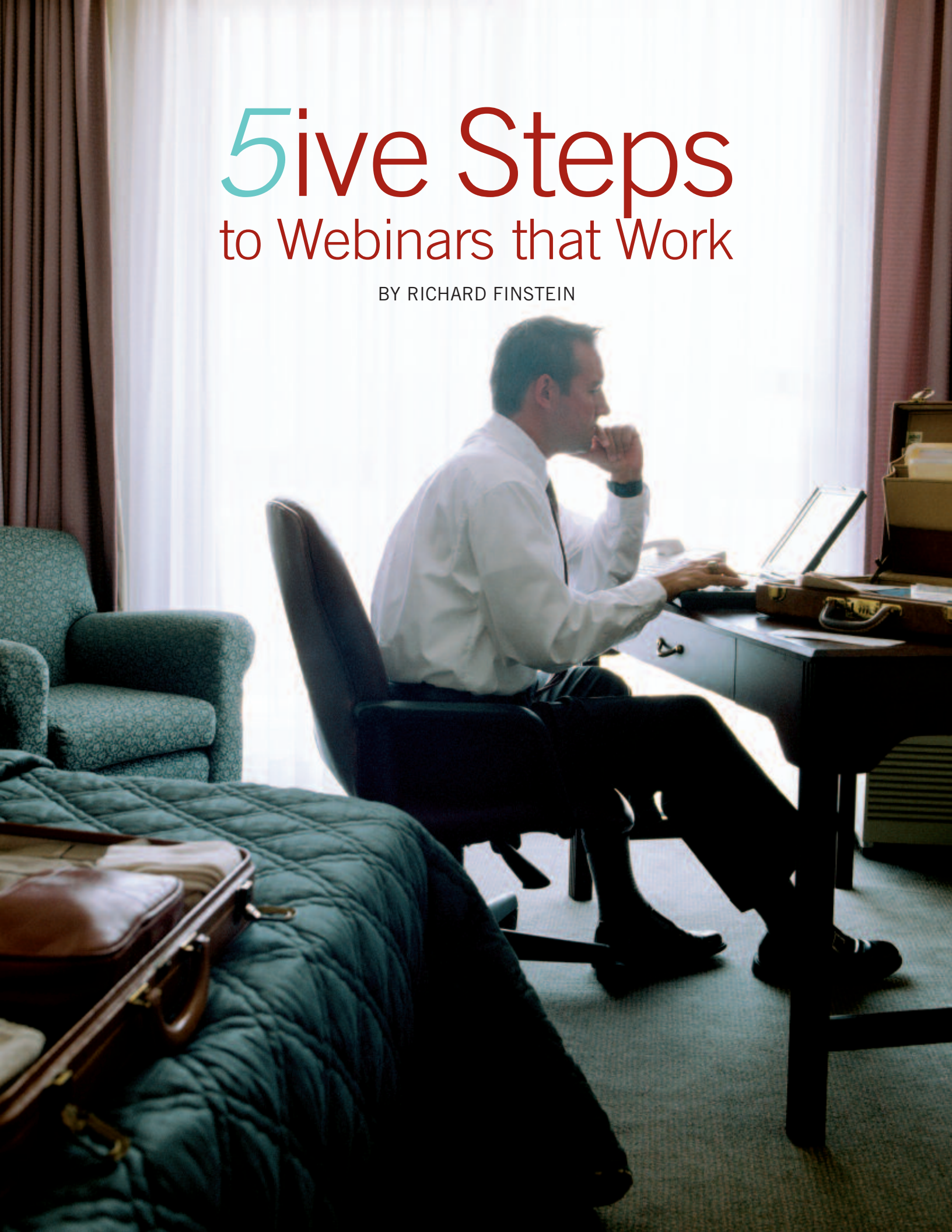


# 5ive Steps to Webinars that Work

BY RICHARD FINSTEIN



As your association considers creating Web-based educational programming, keep this in mind: Your identity and brand are not just online; they're on the line.

Why use Webinars? In contrast to static online educational tools, Web seminars provide real-time opportunities to inter-relate with content experts. Associations provide a natural setting to bring together geographically dispersed stakeholders into a dynamic learning environment.

The challenge is recognizing that successful Webinars take substantial planning, as well as understanding the interactive relationship between the faculty, hosts and attendees. While many e-technologies, such as pre-recorded Webcasts and podcasts, are primarily coordinated by IT, Webinars require a multi-layered, five-step approach that includes communication with presenters and attendees before, during and after the sessions. Moreover, energy created from engaging participants is the difference between average and outstanding results.

Here are five key points in creating a Webinar that is beneficial to your organization, the presenters and your participants:

## 1. Program Development

- Is the content "newsworthy" or is it an enduring-material presentation?
- Can the content be accessed in an alternative way? If so, is there a need to repurpose the information via a Webinar?
- Webinars provide an ideas-exchange forum for colleagues. Will your content work in this format?
- Is the program relevant enough for attendees to invest time/money while at their workplace?
- Do you have faculty that can carry the weight of the program on their shoulders?
- Would participants tune in just to hear from these individuals?

Once justification for moving forward and objectives are confirmed, you can begin partner/vendor selection and branding. It's important to understand your association's in-house capabilities and select an external partner that appropriately supplements your efforts. Choices include:

- Self-service conferencing e-tools.
- An online event management company that provides tools, support

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services, training, facilitation and post event-programs.

- A multimedia provider that offers Webinars and other e-presentation options.

The less experience you have with interactive media and online programming, and the less time you have to manage details, the more you should consider a full-service provider.

It's also important to consider *how* to give your efforts an identity that extends from event promotion to e-registration, login screens, meeting windows, handouts, continuing-ed certificates and post-event surveys. Many organizations give their Webinars unique names/logos to create expectations for excellence.

## 2. Faculty Selection

Once you determine the "what" pieces, it's time to select a host and faculty. Be aware the most significant mistake organizations make is not realizing the differences in presenting online vs. in-person. E-presentations require hosts and faculty to carry programs with the vigor of their voices, and skills at drawing interest via visual Web elements. Obviously, humor and spontaneity with the audience aren't easily integrated into a program. First-time e-presenters must understand the necessity of adjustments.

Faculty need to be familiar with this unique medium, while practicing delivery and formatting of sessions, to maximize value of the available tools. Your presenters' commitment will go a long way toward every Webinar's success.

Many e-conferences have a host/moderator and a presenter/multiple presenters. Since in most cases these people are in disparate locations, it's critical to script the interaction. If you find your subject expert is not a dynamic presenter, consider putting more

responsibility on the host by using an interview format.

## 3. Session Structure

It's time to build your program. You have attendees at their places of work, with all the typical distractions. How do you keep them engaged? Can you replicate the nuances and advantages of an onsite meeting? The answer is yes; however, it takes careful planning and cooperation from all involved.

One method is to incorporate annotation into the session. By guiding attendees' eyes as you verbalize the points on each slide, the presentation becomes dynamic. Use of annotation requires thoughtful consideration about slide formatting, since the agenda is presented visually and completed during the delivery.

For even more immediacy, and to mimic the feel of in-person sessions, Webinars can show presenters via live Webcam or by pre-recorded video segments.

A third strategy is to build-in interactive components such as:

- Warm-up (get their attention right away)
- Directed-question (to create initial conversations)
- Audience polls
- Panel discussions
- Case studies (have audience present experiences; you lead discussion using e-whiteboard)

The entire program should be planned down to the minute. Remember, the conveniences of communicating at onsite meetings are gone. Backroom logistics, transition moments, introductions and closings have to be handled flawlessly.

## 4. Technology Selection

Now that your session structure has been determined, you must select appropriate technologies. When considering Webinar tools, some event planners opt for familiar names (WebEx, Live Meeting) without regard to their association's specific needs/requirements. Before selecting a technology, talk to IT and research features offered by various online meeting tool providers.

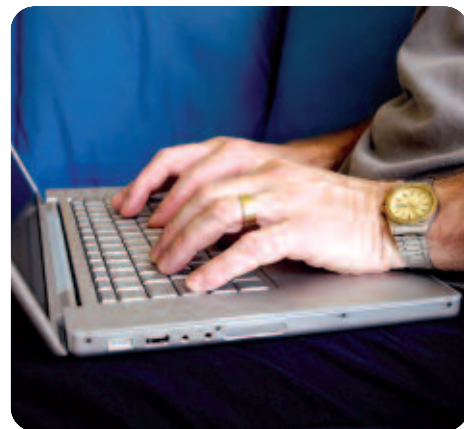
Most Webinars have 30 to several hundred participants. With these numbers, it's critical to select a solution that offers simple access which supports your program objectives. If the Webinar is scripted

properly and has the right faculty and appropriate teaching techniques, the meeting technology's chief role is to not inhibit the process.

There are three leading Webinar user interfaces: Flash, Java and proprietary meeting tools requiring downloads. With downloads, some participants won't have administrator rights and will be frustrated when unable to login. Flash and Java don't require downloads.

In addition, presenters will need Web tools, including:

- PowerPoint slide viewing area with full annotation.
  - A robust Q&A function for announcements to attendees and communicating with hosts/presenters privately.
  - An instant, e-poll function.
  - The ability to record integrated Web/audio, to easily develop a program archive.
  - A whiteboard to note key points and run interactive exercises.
- For the audio component, the tried-and-true method remains fully managed,



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dial-in telephone audio. Streaming audio is less expensive; however, online sound is not as reliable because you're dependent on attendees having proper access and audio systems to participate. Streaming audio also eliminates attendees' ability to voice thoughts during the program.

## 5. Event Logistics

Organizations often underestimate Webinar coordination details, such as:

- Event marketing
- E-registration
- E-commerce for online payments/credits/collections
- Handouts and download mechanisms
- Communicating login Web/audio instructions
- Coaching and run-through with faculty/presenters
- Pre-event technology checks (sound, Internet, login, multimedia recording)
- Live-event management
- Dissemination/collection/evaluation of pre/post-event surveys
- Online assessment
- Attendance certificate generation
- Creation and posting archives

As many details as possible should be automated. For example, as soon as participants register, they should receive login and system testing instructions, be given a pre-event survey and have access to handouts. Reminders/updates should be automatically re-sent as event dates near.

These criteria are the foundation of solid Webinar management, along with establishing a flow map of how each participant will be taken from initial promotion to post-event evaluation. ■

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