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Webcasts as a Lead Generation Tool

Introduction

A basic function of marketing departments is lead generation. Traditionally, this was done through advertising, direct mail, tradeshow, and seminars. Promotional seminars where prospects come to a large room and listen to a presentation are a proven method of lead generation, but have several basic drawbacks. Both presenters and prospects need to travel, they are complex and expensive to set up and rely on some degree of prior lead generating for invitation lists. Online Webcasts solve many of these problems. Using online webcasts to solve these drawbacks is a growing trend and it is having a positive impact on lead generation programs and their results.

In this article we will show how webcasts are an effective tool for lead generation and how to create a successful webcast. We will also present a case study of a webcast that was delivered by Interwise. At the end of this article, you will find an appendix with tips on how to select a webcast vendor that will answer your needs.



Case in Point

During the first six months of 2002, a large customer of the Interwise Lead Generation system was able to collect the names and details of 60,000 people interested in their products.

A few Definitions for Starters...

Lead Generation

The activity of identifying potential customers. Also known as lead gen.

Leads

For the purpose of this article, all references to “leads” are to contact information of those who are not-yet-qualified or self-qualified. Not-yet-qualified are people that have expressed interest in the subject matter of a given Webcast simply by responding to your outbound marketing efforts. Self-qualified people have provided demographic details about themselves and their company during the registration process. In both cases the people that are classified as leads have not yet shown that they are in the position to buy or influence the purchase process in their company.

Webcast

A presenter-led web based event where a group of people convene and interact. Webcasts include both visual medium (slides, whiteboard, streaming video) and the voice of the presenter.

Advanced Webcast products allow for interaction with the audience, demographic reporting capabilities and provide for pre and post-production features.

Why Use Webcasts as a Lead Generation Tool?

Webcasts are becoming more prominent as a lead generation tool in the Marketing department's arsenal.

- They are significantly cheaper for the presenter and many times more convenient for the participant than physical seminars, as participants do not have to travel.
- They allow for fast rollout of knowledge. When products and services are changing rapidly, there is a need to get information to customers fast, and before the competitors do.
- Pre-qualified target audiences can be matched with the ideal prospect's profile. Events can then be planned to focus on what they would be interested in. During the event, the presenter can quickly learn whether or not they are interested in the offering. Relevant leads can then be moved to the next stage in the sales cycle.
- They facilitate reaching larger and broader audiences. With some webcast systems, there is no practical limit to the number of participants in a webcast.
- They are simple to repeat after an event has been delivered the first time.
- They can be recorded and offered as downloads for access 24x7x365. Recordings have viral marketing capabilities, thus exponentially increasing the marketing reach at a marginal cost.
- They allow for targeted segmentation of the subject material. Offering and delivering a presentation on a subject that only has a small number of interested participants from remote locations becomes cost effective. Rather than one seminar covering dozens of topics, webcasts allow you to have dozens of seminars with very specific topics.

Low Acquisition Costs

- A Direct Marketing Association survey found that the cost of acquisition of new prospects runs between \$70 and \$90 USD.
- The cost to generate a lead using a webcast platform like Interwise is significantly lower. The average costs for a typical Interwise event is about \$20 - \$25 per registered attendee. This is significantly lower than the \$70 - \$90 industry average¹.

¹ Data from the Direct Marketing Association

The Webcast for Lead Generation Process Flow

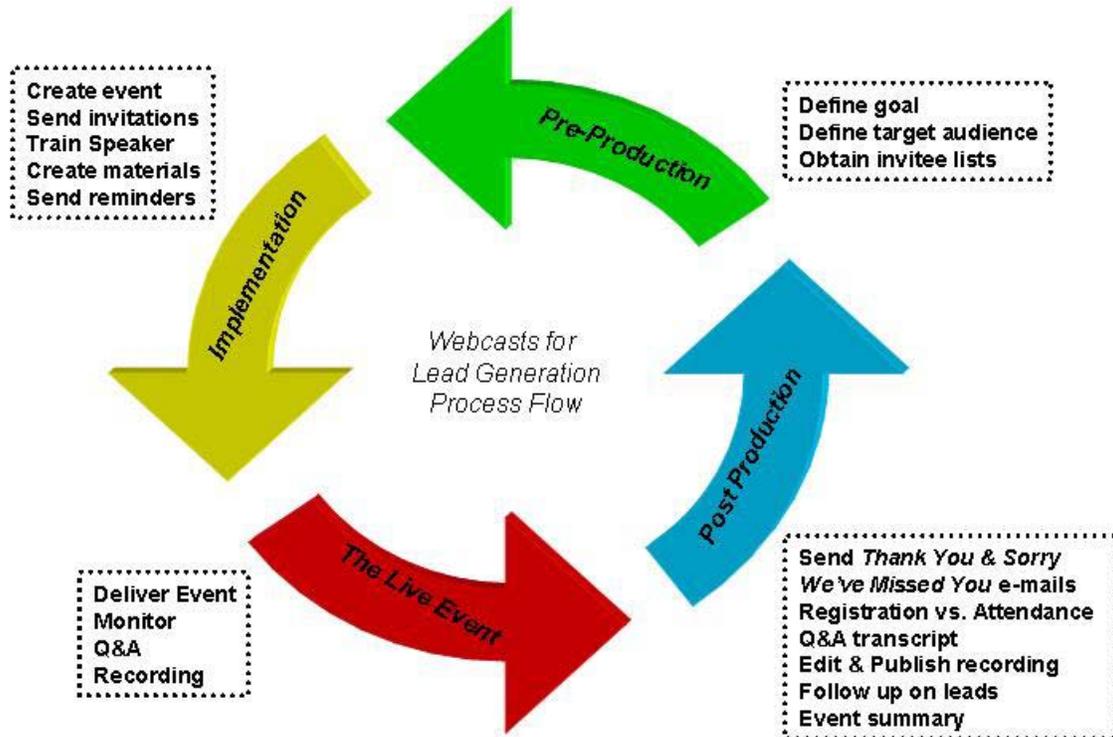


Figure 1 - The Webcast Preparation Process

Producing a Successful Webcast - Pre Production

The success of a webcast requires offering attractive content (from a content provider or industry expert) and targeting high-quality prospects as relevant to your company. When setting up the webcast, the following questions should be answered:

- Who will be the presenter or presenters? If the webcast will be in the format of a panel discussion, will there be a moderator?
- Where will the presenter be physically located and what type of Internet connection will she have access to?
- What PC and operating system will the presenter be using?
- Does the presenter know the application used for delivering the webcast?
- Who is the target audience? Most people today have PCs with sound cards and can participate in an online event.
- Where is your audience? If for example, the webcast being delivered is focused on prospects in the Far East, the Internet performance there will affect the technical aspects of the application selected to deliver the webcast.

Event Criteria: Why do this event?

Before beginning planning the webcast, determine if the event will support your goal of providing high-quality leads to the sales channel. To help determine if an event concept fits, address some basic questions:

- What is the available budget for the Webcast? What internal or external resources will you need?
- What is the ultimate goal for this event? What is the acceptable level of ROI for your company? How will ROI be determined?
- What is the targeted timeline for the Webcast? We recommend an eight-week planning cycle.
 - One week for planning strategy.
 - One week for program design and marketing materials creation.
 - One week for list selection and email blasts.
 - Events should be marketed anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks out.
- How can the prospective presenter help to promote the event? Do they have a list they regularly market to? If so, how often? What is the size of their audience and who is on the list (job title, company size, etc)?



Best Practices for Choosing a Topic

1. Be different!
2. Provide value to the participants
3. Make sure the content is unbiased
4. Think like your audience
5. Hit the hot trend

The target market and audience level will determine the topics and presenters to approach for the Webcast. If the event is tied to a publication or an association, the content should be closely associated to a relevant editorial topic. This will help broaden the opportunities for marketing and promotion. Have your PR firm research the editorial calendars of key publications to see what the industry will be talking about to make sure the topic of the Webcast is in tune with the market.

The budget level for the Webcast will determine the level of speaker or organization (such as a publication) and marketing efforts that can be done to bring in registrants to the event.

Planning the Webcast

Once the target market, audience goals and budget are defined, the first step is to determine if there is an opportunity to partner with a publication, association, customer or partner that will help market the event to a wider audience. The use of the brand name of a leading partner to entice the target audience to register has proven to be very successful.

Before proceeding any further with the presenters and partners it is imperative that a “Speakers Agreement” be signed and filed.

The following information is recommended for inclusion in any Speaker Agreement:

- Legal definitions of the agreeing parties, including business names and addresses.
- The term of the agreement, including agreement initiation date and date of the live presentation.

- Any negotiated fees. If the presenter agreed to deliver the live event without monetary compensation, this must be explicitly specified.
- Expectation of speaker's time required for preparation in advance of the event.
- A statement covering the liability of each party for compensation, employment taxes and insurances of its own employees, agents and contractors.
- A detailed list of materials the presenter will provide and associated due dates for the materials.
- A statement that allows for any additions you may make to the presenter's content, such as a sponsorship notice.
- Details of any needed preparation, such as training, software download, hardware specifications, etc.
- Details of your company's publicity efforts and the legal release for the usage of the speaker's name, title, and company logo for that purpose.
- Details of the speaker's company publicity efforts and the procedure for approval of your name, company logo etc. for that purpose.
- Details relevant to any sharing of registration and attendance lists.
- Expected usage of any recording of the event.
- Confidentiality terms related to any materials and knowledge exchanged in the process of setting up and delivering the event.
- Ownership of all software to be used for the event as well as the content created during the event.
- Non-Exclusivity to allow both parties to perform similar services for other businesses.
- Signatures from both parties.

The next item is to finalize a date, taking into consideration the audience and any major events, tradeshows or holidays that may prohibit them from attending the Webcast.

Finally test the presenter's environment (hardware, headset etc.) to make sure they are at optimal performance during the day of the event

	<p>Best Practices for designating responsibilities within your company:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Event Manger - works directly with the presenters and handles the production of the live event 2. Marketing Manager - handles all the marketing and timeline surrounding the event
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Marketing Plan

To improve the effectiveness of the marketing efforts, touch the audience multiple times in various ways. For example send an email newsletter, a solitary email as well as a voicemail reminder all to the same audience. Using partner-owned lists rather than rented ones will increase the chances of success of the marketing campaign. The better the list, the better the response.

When working with email lists, remember to sort the lists with criteria such as company size and title that will bring in higher quality leads.

When working with a publication or partner, work together to fine tune the marketing plan for all the campaign's elements such as:

- PR
- Email Marketing
- Direct mail
- Banner Advertisements
- List Purchase
- Web Marketing

Make sure all the above items are budgeted appropriately and include design, creation and delivery costs.



Best Practice for saving on presenters' fees:

Presenters charge anywhere from \$1,000 to \$15,000 for the delivery of a Webcast. Many presenters will lower their fees in exchange for access to the list of registrants.

Implementation of the Marketing Campaign

Once the plan is in place, the date is set and the partners and/or speakers are secured, the next step is to implement the marketing campaign. During this stage a work plan with all action items with corresponding delivery dates and appointed roles should be created to keep the event on target.

Setting up the infrastructure to receive registration for your online event includes:

- Customizing an event registration page (with the webcasts vendor).
- Collecting, editing and submitting speaker photographs, biographies and contact information.
- Testing the registration process.

Once the registration page is populated and live, marketing of the Webcast can begin to drive individuals to the event's registration page.

For large mailing lists (larger than 100 invitees), it is recommended to use the services of a vendor such as [Boomerang](#) to send out the email. These vendors can also provide response metrics. This is usually done by adding specific codes to the invitations that allow for identifying where the registrants came from and then assessing the quality of the email lists used for the event.



Best Practice for sending email invitations:

- When using email marketing, always add a source code to any link that will allow measuring of the results from each type of marketing.
- The email should include a direct link to the event's registration page.
- The desired action (registration to the event) should be highlighted.

In parallel with sending out the email invitations, the Event Manager works with the presenters to:

- Assist in creating the presentation materials.
- Train the presenter on using the Webcast delivery application.
- Assist in coordinating the flow of the event.
- Coordinate and handle the dry run a few days before the live event.
- Finalize and load the presentation for the event along with branding logos for the participant interface and finalizing the survey questions.
- Handle administration during the live event.



Best Practices for planning the length of the webcast:

- When planning the Webcast, try to keep it less than 90 minutes. People may be hesitant to register if they feel it will take too much of their time.
- When designing the materials for the Webcast, remember that about 15 to 20 minutes should be set aside for the introduction and overview of the application along with a wrap up survey and Q&A. Therefore the actual presentation will need to be shorter than the event— 60 - 75 minutes of presentation is optimal.
- Use a survey at the end of the Webcast to collect feedback and ask the audience if they would like more information on the subject of the presentation.

Internal Communications

Communicate throughout the event planning process with sales, marketing communications, and other internal departments. Here are some ideas for what types of emails to send:

- Send employees and channel partners a copy of the email blasts going to registrants. Encourage them to sign up and remind them to put it on their calendar.
- Encourage the sales people to send out the invitation with a personal note to their prospects and clients.
- Send an “in-progress” update to let them know who has registered. Make sure to include titles and companies.
- Send an event report after the fact to let them know the results and to check the sales automation tool for hot leads!



Best Practices for wording emails:

The wording of the emails that confirms registration must be very simple. This is not the place to market the Webcast. The confirmation email should be as short as possible (people tend not to read through long emails) and focus on critical issues:

- Confirm that registration to was successful.
- Confirm the time of the event.
- Give clear instructions for how to prepare for participation.

Preparing Content

- Set expectations about updating content. After the delivery date, materials should not be changed. Only after the materials are final, should the dry run take place.
- Any process to create, upload, present, and edit the content should have as few steps as possible.
- Participants in webcasts expect to be engaged. The presenter's showmanship is no less important than their knowledge.
- Participants expect more than static PowerPoint images. To keep people interested and focused, use PowerPoint and Flash animations, application sharing, questions, raffles, surveys, etc.
- Surveys are the core of the lead generation process. By wording a survey properly, you can gather a lot of useful information. Always test the surveys on a sample of prospects before the live event to help prevent misunderstandings or other mistakes.



Best Practice for collecting feedback:

- Use a survey at the end of the Webcast to collect feedback and ask the audience if they would like more information on the subject of the presentation. A good survey will redirect to a product or company information page.

Is There Prime Time for Webcasts?

There is general agreement that the best times for events are during lunch hour. People are usually more available at that time. However, when producing events for a global audience, planning the start time of the Webcast to fall reasonably within the business day for all participants becomes difficult. Well beyond the importance of the content, in order to host a successful event, select a start that will attract as many people from the target market. Preparing a time zone chart can help to identify the most viable start time. The chart below illustrates how an event producer who is located in the Pacific Coast has identified 8 am or 10 am as the best start time to reach global target markets in the Pacific, Eastern, UK and Continental European time zones. Other secondary time zones are included to identify time zones for other audiences. (The top row is the time zone offset in hours for the specific region.)

-2	0	2	3	5	8	9	17
Hawaii	PST	Central	EST	Rio	UK	Europe	Sydney
6am	8am	10am	11am	1pm	4pm	5pm	1am Next Day
7am	9am	11am	12pm	2pm	5pm	6pm	2am
8am	10am	12pm	1pm	3pm	6pm	7pm	3am
9am	11am	1pm	2pm	4pm	7pm	8pm	4am
11am	1pm	3pm	5pm	7pm	10pm	11pm	7am Next day

The best days for events are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Try to avoid the first and last days of the week where people are usually less available for attendance. Friday is also a day off in Israel and in Muslim countries.

Response and Drop Off Rates

- Depending on who you are, who your audience is and what you are offering, a 2 – 4% response rate to an email solicitation for an event is reasonable. To increase the number of people that participate, offer an incentive. Anything goes but your audience must see perceived value in the incentive. An all time favorite is a Palm Pilot. Another good incentive is a donation to a popular charity such as Habitat for Humanity. These can also be used to keep attendees to the end of the presentation.
- After a prospect registers to the Webcast, there is only a 40 -60% chance that she will actually show up to the event. Therefore, it is important that to offer users the ability to easily add the event to their calendar on the registration page as well as having an automated email reminder system.
- Investigate for content or technical problems if the drop-off rate during the event is more than 5%. Content problems are often the result of poor presentation skills or because the content doesn't match what was promoted.



Best Practices for using Voicemail reminders:

- Use a voicemail service such as [Boxpilot](#) to leave a voicemail with a reminder for the event. It costs about \$1.00 a call (prices drop with volume) and seems to be a very effective reminder. The best results are when the message is a recording of the presenter's own voice. In a [Boxpilot](#) case study, voicemail reminders increased the attendance rate 40%.
- The most effective way to increase the live event audience size is to use a combination of one reminder email 2 days prior to the live event, and a final email reminder 20 minutes before the live event start time.

Event Production

The Event Manager handles all event production with input from the team that was assembled for the task.

A dry run should be mandatory to assure a successful Webcast even if the presenters are familiar with the delivery tool. The dry run should occur 3 - 4 days before the event.

In the dry run, the following items should be finalized:

- Event flow and transfer of the microphone between presenters.
- Overview of the delivery application.
- Handling of Q&A notes and questions.
- Running through presentation materials for a final check.
- Testing audio levels.



Best Practices for coordinating with presenters:

- Send the presenters an Agenda overview of the Webcast with the approximate times that events will occur.
- Set up the Webcast so you will have 90 minutes with the presenters before the event officially starts to re-familiarize the presenters with the flow of the event. This time is valuable in assuring all presenters are connected and comfortable.



Best Practices for creating content:

- Keep the audience engaged with polling questions and interaction. Make sure to prepare these before the Webcast.
- Use branding buttons as an additional marketing opportunity for you and your partner.

Create the presentation materials to be viewed by any audience. For example don't assume everyone has a non standard application to view content. Rather, limit the presentation to content that can be accessed by the lowest common denominator of the audience. Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe PDF file formats are acceptable to any business audience.

The Live Event

Live Delivery

- Not seeing the people in front of you nor being able to guarantee their full attention are the two basic drawbacks of using webcasts.

- Participants in the Webcast will be attending from their PCs. There is no way to force them to pay attention to the presenter.
- During the presentation, some of the people will be reading email, talking on the phone and doing other distracting activities. Today we are in an age where people know what they want to learn. Therefore, there is nothing to worry about when someone is doing something else in addition to listening to a Webcast. When the presentation gets to what they want to hear more about, they will tune in.
- Interaction is key. Participants should be able to ask questions verbally or via text questions. The latter should be available for people who are not comfortable speaking in front of an audience.



Best Practices for the live event:

- Have more than one presenter online to handle questions from the participants.
- Have a hard copy with notes for the presentation on hand.
- When using Voice Over IP (VoIP), a headset will give the best results.
- Read text questions from the audience aloud before answering them.
- Poll the audience every 10 minutes with a question, survey etc.
- At the end of the Webcast, send out a satisfaction survey.

Wrap Up

Always send out a survey at the end of the Webcast. The survey should be a combination of questions from your company as well as from your partner or presenter. Always thank the audience for attending as well as give them a way to contact you directly.

After the event, the Event Manager will collect all the reports such as registration, attendance and survey results together into one document to be shared among the partners.

Leads will be handed over to the Event Marketing person to input into the sales automation tool. Sales should receive a notification with specific information on the event to assist them when they call on the leads.

Post Production

The event is over, but the work to optimize the lead generation capabilities of the Webcast is still in progress.

- Feed the registration and attendance reports that the Webcast system generates into your sales automation system.
- The recording needs to be edited and posted. The best way is to post them to the same URL participants used to enter the event. The event management system should support this.
- Add the recording to the company's event catalog and make sure that users have to register to access it.
- Send out an email to all registrations thanking them for participation and tell them about the posted recording.
- Collect and distribute the Q&A transcript.



Best Practice for Improving lead generation after the live event:

Providing an additional email after the event will increase the lead generating capabilities of your event recording. Those who failed to attend will frequently play back the session. Recordings many times account for your largest group of leads per event.

Summary

Webcasts offer many advantages over live promotional events. In this article we discussed how they can be used as a tool for lead generation and shared tips from our experience on how to make them successful. In the appendixes below, you will be able to find a case study on a live event Interwise held in June as well as our recommendations as to how to select a webcast system to support your lead generation efforts.

For more information on how to use webcasts for lead generation and additional case studies, [click here](#) to download a recording of a webcast delivered by Sharyn Fitzpatrick of [Marcom Gurus](#) (using the Interwise platform of course☺).

Appendix A – A Case Study

Pre-Production

In April we contacted Deloitte Consulting and talked with one of their senior consultants, an expert in eLearning. We set up a date for 9 weeks later for the live presentation. We suggested several topics and then agreed to “Our Journey to eLearning” as the title of the presentation.

We then purchased two lists from TriMax Direct, focused on our target markets: eLearning professionals in the UK as well as a global list of eLearning professionals. The lists were selected based on company size and title of the individuals.

The graphics designer was able to create the invitation within two days. We also offered a raffle of a Palm Pilot to registrants to encourage registration

The event was advertised in both Interwise’s and Deloitte’s newsletters several weeks before the event was scheduled to take place. The email invitation was sent two weeks before the event to the mailing lists as well as to our sales and marketing teams. We used [Boomerang](#) to send out the emails and to track the response rate per list. An additional email reminder was sent out the day before the event.

The Live Event

Approx. 40% of registrants showed up for the event.

Post Production

After the event, we sent out an email to all registrants thanking them for registering and inviting them to download the recording and to forward the email to anyone that is interested in the subject of the event.

Event Evaluation

As in all of our webcasts, we sent out a survey at the end of the event. These are the questions we sent out (with answers where relevant):

1. What was the most important thing you learned during this Webcast?
2. Was this Webcast valuable and would you recommend it to your colleagues? (Number of 'Yes' responses: 74; Number of 'No' responses: 3.)
3. The length and pace of the event was appropriate for the material covered. (Number of 'Yes': 61 responses; Number of 'No' responses: 15.)
4. The Presenter's voice was clear and easy to understand. (Number of 'Yes' responses: 68 Number of 'No' responses: 8.)

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- The learning investment saved by implementing eLearning
- How to build a sustainable eLearning culture
- The elements of an enterprise wide eLearning system

We look forward to "seeing" you in this Interwise iSeminar.

interwise **Click here to Register!** **Deloitte Consulting**

Figure 2 - The email invitation used for the webcast

5. "Overall, I am satisfied with the experience. (Average Answer: 1.84.)
 - Strongly agree (1)
 - Agree (2)
 - Neutral (3)
 - Disagree (4)
 - Strongly disagree (5)
6. Any additional comments about the presenter, presentation content, or suggestions for improvement of future Interwise events?
7. May we quote your feedback/comments on our website and company datasheets?
 - Yes, you may publish my comments using my name and my company name.
 - Yes, you may publish my comments anonymously.
 - No, please do not publish my comments.

Event Statistics Summary

Email and Registrant Statistics	
Addresses purchased	24,000
Emails sent out	~ 25,000
Registrants	538
Response rate	2.2%
Live Participants	201
Downloads of recordings	161
Unique leads ²	650

² Some participants in the live event downloaded the recording. These were not counted twice.

Costs	
Purchase of email lists	\$9,000
Graphic design of the invitation	\$600
Newsletter email blast	\$1,000
Give away	\$500
Presenter fees	\$0
Live delivery tool	\$0 (We use our own application)
T & E for presenters	\$0
T & E for participants	\$0
Total costs	\$11,100
Cost per lead	\$16.9
Industry average (Direct Mktg. Assoc.)	\$70 - \$90

Appendix B - Selecting a Webcast Delivery Platform

How will you be using it?

The most important thing is to get a good understanding of how you plan to deliver your webcasts. Find and attend webcasts delivered by multiple companies. Using competitors' webcasts as examples is always a great way to learn and improve on existing best practices in your industry. Ask the webcasts vendors on your short-list to invite you to webcasts delivered on their platform. The following questions should help you get your bearings:

- How many participants do you want in an event? How many can you entice into registering?
- Will you want to use application sharing, surveys, web tours, or other interactive content?
- Will you be using VoIP or a telephone conference call for the audio portion of the event?
- Do you plan to record and reuse the content?

Scalability

The system should scale on two fronts:

- It should support hundreds if not thousands of users in an event without any functional limitations.
- It should support the setting up and managing of dozens if not hundreds of events a month, depending on the size of your marketing efforts.



Figure 3 - Large Interwise Customer's Webcast Usage

Private vs. Public Events

Webcasts are best targeted to the open public. Most systems support having private events. I.e. participants cannot register to, nor enter the event from the system's default catalog or website. Password protection of the Webcast may be considered but can easily turn into a logistical nightmare if there will be a large number of participants.

Recording the Events

It has been our experience at Interwise that for every live participant, three to four people will download the event. The number of pre-qualified leads is thus 3 to 4 time larger than the number of live participants.

The platform you choose should have the ability to record the session, support editing it and post it for you in an industry standard format such as Windows Media or Real. After posting the recording, it should be accessible only after the person accessing it has logged into a tracking system.

- Is this a service the vendor offers? What is recorded? How much does it cost? Is it dependent on the size of the recording?
- What is the process for retrieving, editing and publishing the recording?
- If the vendor edits the recording, what is the turnaround time?
- If the vendor hosts the recording, how long is it posted for? Does the vendor track who downloaded it? How is this information reported to you?

VoIP or Telephony?

- The flexibility of having a mixed VoIP and telephony environment is an advantage. The advantage of using VoIP is that it will only require a single phone line. Using telephony might require 2 phone lines if the user accesses the event with a dial up connection.
- If you use telephony, you will have to decide who will be paying for it. If you cover the costs, you can offer users the convenience of a 1-800 number. Users from outside the US will need to pay for the call themselves.

Bandwidth

The system used for the webcast should support the lowest common denominator of users when it comes to connection speeds, i.e. 56 KB or less. Remember that even if everyone participating in the webcast is connected via a LAN or DSL, their effective bandwidth is always lower than their nominal speed. This can be issue with high bandwidth activities such as live video steaming and to a lesser extent, application sharing. Few people realize that they can have a 56 KB connection to the ISP but due to congestion, their effective speed is significantly slower. Ask the webcast vendor to explain their application's behavior under bandwidth constraints.

Emails

An event management system should include the ability to automatically send out emails at the following junctures:

- Upon registration.
- A reminder a couple of days before the event.
- A reminder a couple of hours before the event.
- Post-Event "Thanks for attending, here's a link to the recording."
or:
- Post-Event "Thanks for registering, sorry you couldn't make it. Here's a link to the recording."

The email system should be fully automatic and allow for editing of the email content on a per event basis. You should be able to edit the emails yourself without going through the webcast vendor.

It is best to use an email system that supports RTF or HTML formats, so that you can format the email with highlights of the important points.

Post Production

Choose a system that can generate reports in a format that your sales automation system is able to read with as little editing as possible.

Pointers for the Service Level Agreement with the Webcast Vendor

- Specify the turn around time for editing and posting a recording.
- Tech support availability to the presenters and participants.
- Uptime / availability of the system.
- What happens if you want to cancel or postpone a webcast?

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