

# 5 Tips to Better Engagement for Online Event Audiences

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Smart event planners have realized that you can't just take the old content model for physical events and toss it into a virtual event platform... unless you want to lose audience left and right. Here are a handful of things to consider as you plan your next virtual event to ensure you're engaging your audience:

## 1 Be Unexpected

Your attendees have expectations about what your program will include. In fact, you've probably set them up with those expectations as part of your marketing campaign while you were driving them to attend. While setting expectations is important, **providing something that is unexpected is a sure way to get someone to snap to attention**. For example: instead of the standard, expected "talking head" presentation, deliver the presentation as a character from a movie. Or spoof a game show in which contestants reveal the key messages in their responses.

## 2 Eliminate Schedule Gaps

Hundreds of distractions are present when we're online. As you develop the schedule for your event, allowing for gaps between presentations may seem like a good idea, but you're really creating an opportunity for a distraction to win the attention of your attendees. Instead, **fill those gaps with planned activities** and be sure that any segment leading into the gap drives specifically to a relevant activity. For example: a virtual event a session describing the features and benefits of a particular product should be followed by a forum discussion with the product manager for that same product.

## 3 Adhere to the "Seven Minute Rule"

You may have heard about the popular conclusion regarding adult attention span lasting around seven minutes. With average presentation length for most traditional events lasting sixty to ninety minutes, finding a way to keep someone's attention is challenging. Now that we're online, it is almost impossible. As a result, **every presentation should be broken into Touchpoints not longer than seven minutes in length**. At the end of the Touchpoint the attendee is naturally going to ask themselves, "is this engaging enough for me to continue participating or do I need to go feed the dog?" Presenters need to keep this rule in mind when they are crafting their presentation and online event organizers need to enforce it as much as possible, too.

## 4 Break Patterns

Humans are a predictable bunch, mostly because we don't like surprises that require us to take unplanned actions. When you're trying to engage an audience, we can use this desire to be predictable to our advantage by **doing something utterly unpredictable and break an expected pattern**. Breaking patterns can be thought of as using the need to be unexpected combined with the seven minute rule. Inside of every seven minute Touchpoint is an opportunity to break an expected pattern by switching up presenters, presentation format, soliciting feedback, etc.

## 5 Solicit Participation

Participation doesn't just happen organically; you need to solicit it from the audience explicitly. Inside of a webcast session, polling is a simple feature that can have a **powerful impact when used at the right time with the right content**. If you've ever sat through an in-person presentation where the presenter asked for a show of hands to answer a question, you know what we're talking about. The physical action of raising your hand is a pattern break and induces engagement. Online polling during webcasts works the same way by forcing attendees to become participants and contribute their opinion. This sort of active solicitation should be used liberally for any feature that allows the audience to contribute, not just polling.



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