

WEBINAR & CHILL



How to Use Online Events to
Build Lasting Relationships



Introduction

Webinars are a valuable tool for marketers. An incredibly rich source of content, they can be used in many ways throughout the entire customer life cycle.

During a webinar, your attendees give you 30 minutes to an hour of their undivided attention. This kind of active listening is practically unheard of in today's digital age, where audiences are continually bombarded with messages. No wonder webinars are popular.

Better yet, the most successful webinar format provides a unique form of engagement: a two-way conversation, with opportunities to ask questions and start meaningful dialogues between businesses and customers or prospects. And, according to the Content Marketing Institute, more than 60 percent of marketers use this format in their content marketing programs. In addition, two-thirds of B2B marketers cite webinars and online events as their most effective method for generating leads and marketing to their prospects and customers.

Even though we're seeing a majority of marketers leveraging webinars as part of their content strategy, there is still ample room for improvement in the way that we plan and promote webinars.



How to Tailor a Webinar to Your Target Audience

Once you've decided to put on a webinar, take the time to think about what you want to get out of it and what audience you're targeting before you put the go-live date on your calendar.

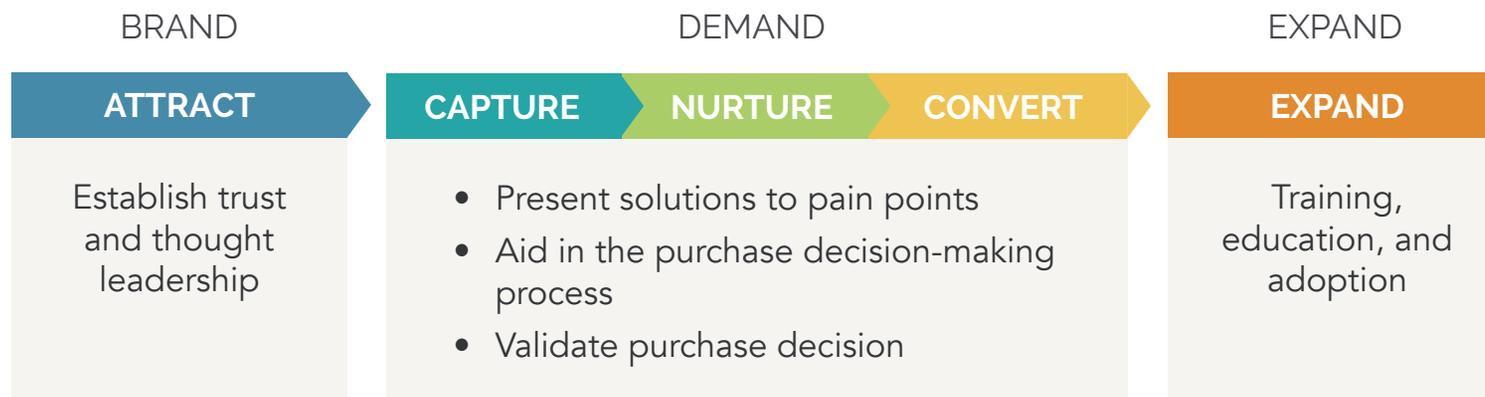
1. Define your goals

First consider the main objective of the presentation. Are you trying to build your **Brand** and attract new prospects? Do you want to drive **Demand** and accelerate conversions in your pipeline? Or are you looking to **Expand** customer relationships and provide education about your product or service?

These three steps – Brand, Demand, Expand – are the core functions of marketing. You need to know which stage your webinar is targeting.

2. Map your content to the customer lifecycle stages

Once you determine your main goal, use it to clearly define your webinar content. To help further shape content, you'll want to create target personas – which are also known as buyer personas. This will enable a more targeted approach and help improve the results you'll see from your webinars – as well as all of your other marketing programs.



HOW TO TAILOR A WEBINAR TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Brand

Branding begins in the attract phase when prospects first become aware of their need of your product or service or are introduced to your product category in general. Often the process starts when potential buyers become frustrated with their current situation or experience trigger events that initiate their search for solutions to their particular problems.

In webinars related to Brand goals, you'll want to establish trust and build thought leadership. Keep your content very "top of funnel" and informative. The trick is ensuring the material is not too specific to your product or service. This is not the time for a sales pitch – you can actually harm your brand by making a hard sell too early in the process. At this stage, use your webinar to establish yourself as relevant in the industry and to whet the appetite of your audience. The goal here is to get your product or service on their radar so they include you in their consideration set.

Choose a helpful, pertinent topic for your Brand webinar. **Some ideas include;**

- Focus content on **best practices** for a specific industry – like how to plan webinars for marketers, for example.
- Piggyback off **relevant trends** or current events. If regulatory changes are affecting your industry, you could conduct a webinar on the best ways to navigate and adapt to the new rules.
- Use a webinar to highlight a recent **analyst claim**. Did your company just win an award? Has it been featured in any new research? If so, see if those analysts are willing to co-present that research with you.

ATTRACT

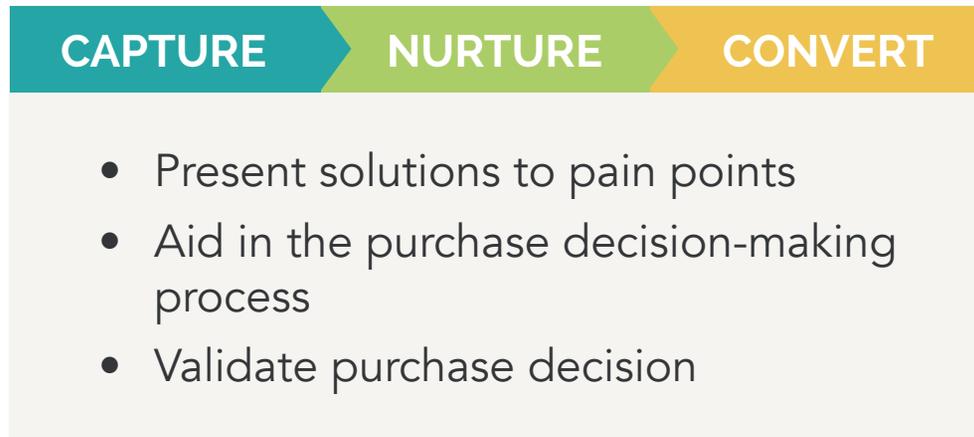
Establish trust and thought leadership

HOW TO TAILOR A WEBINAR TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Demand

Demand goals relate directly to the capture, nurture, and convert phases. In this stage of the buyer's journey, you want to concentrate on continuing the momentum you've gained from generating interest from your branding efforts and also convince your audience that your product or service is the best solution for solving their problems. This is where you can start to pitch your product or service in your webinars. Provide very specific information about how your product or service will eliminate their pain points, then aid them in the decision-making process and help validate their choice.

Demos are usually very successful in Demand webinars because they help provide this validation. They're great opportunities to show prospects how your product or service works and to prove its value using situational success stories. For example, a marketing automation software company could demonstrate how it automated its webinar promotion schedule using the platform. Better yet, it could show how a customer automated their webinars operations as part of their demand gen strategy, and share the growth in sales opportunities that the company experienced.



HOW TO TAILOR A WEBINAR TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Expand

If you're focusing on increasing, growing, and deepening customer relationships, use an Expand-stage webinar to provide education. The goal is to create customers that love and stick with your company, and ultimately become brand advocates. The best way to do that is to continue to engage with them after they've completed the sale. To do this, these webinars can provide training and instruction that help them use your product or service to its fullest extent.

Content for Expand webinars can be very specifically tailored to the needs of your customers, depending on their post-sale stage. For new customers, you use the event for onboarding and education. For existing customers, you could host a webinar focused on a specific product feature or new product features or even present opportunities for the upsell and cross-sell of additional products or services.

EXPAND

Training, education,
and adoption

Determining Your Webinar Format

After you know your primary goal and your ideal audience, you need to determine what kind of webinar will be best for your purposes. These are the four most popular webinar formats:

1

Educational



2

Q&A



3

Panelist
Discussion



4

Workshop





Educational Webinars

Most webinars follow the tried-and-true educational format in a lecture model ... because, well, it works. It works because it allows presenters to demonstrate their expertise on particular topics; this helps to develop trust in the speaker and/or the brand. This format also offers a lot of flexibility. Typically, one to two experts speak, and they present to a slide deck or leverage some sort of video or animations to illustrate their point(s). But these webinars are best when you allow for some form of audience participation, such as a Q&A at the end. Live polling during these kinds of presentations is also effective if your webinar platform –or vendor– can accommodate that technology.

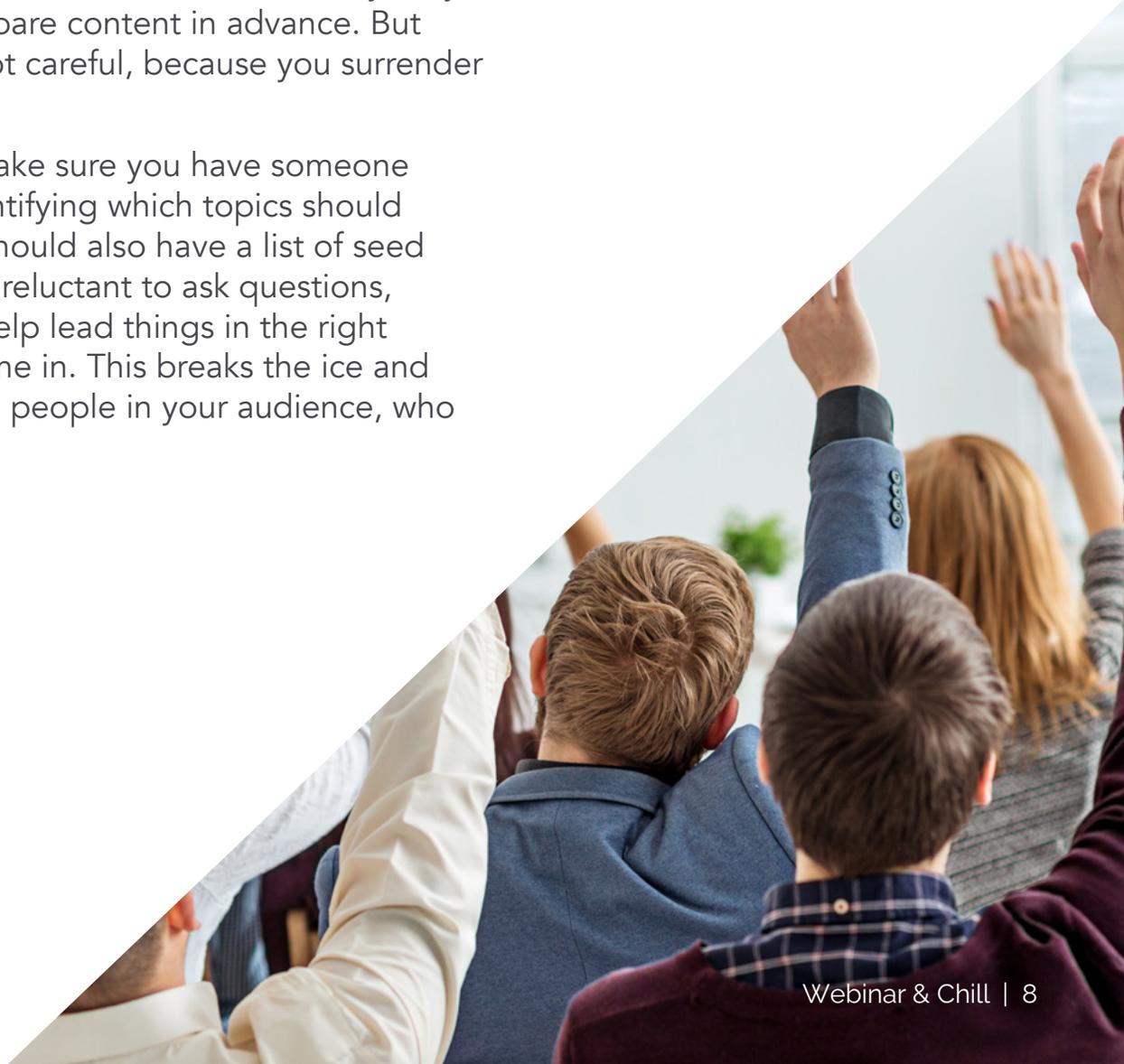




Q&A Webinars

Q&A webinars are the ultimate audience-driven format because they involve attendees asking questions of panel experts. These events are relatively easy to host because they don't require you to prepare content in advance. But that also be the format's downside if you're not careful, because you surrender control over what's being asked.

This is where a skilled moderator comes in. Make sure you have someone fielding questions who is adept at quickly identifying which topics should or should not be addressed. The moderator should also have a list of seed questions to fill in any gaps. Many people are reluctant to ask questions, especially at the start, so back-up questions help lead things in the right direction and make it easier for people to chime in. This breaks the ice and creates a more welcoming atmosphere for the people in your audience, who will then be more likely to participate.





Panelist Discussions

A panelist discussion is similar to Q&A, but it's not quite as audience driven. Instead, it's guided by the moderator, who typically asks prepared questions that have been shared with the panel in advance of the event. These webinars are usually very interesting because the audience has the benefit of learning from top influencers and experts sharing their experiences, knowledge, and sometimes even their clashing opinions. Additionally, they offer the possibility of that panelists will amplify the event promotion by sharing registration links with their own audiences and followers, thus driving more people to attend.





Workshops

The workshop format is the most applicable to expanding customer relationships because it involves walking viewers through a live step-by-step process. Often the host shares the screen so the audience can see everything that's occurring. These events are great for education and product demonstrations.

At Act-On, we've had some great success and feedback by holding customer webinars where we combined both an educational webinar format with the workshop format. For example, for the first half we had a subject matter expert in our organization cover best practices to optimize content for SEO and the second half was a workshop led by a Customer Success Manager that showed how to implement those tactics within the Act-On platform.

Figuring Out Your Webinar's Logistics

Once you've picked your format, it's time to establish the logistics of the event. The good news? Most of the hard work is already done, because creating the content and developing your format is the most time-intensive part of hosting a webinar. But you do need to craft an organized strategy for handling the event's logistics.

1

Speaker



2

Schedule



3

Platform/Tech



4

Rehearse!





Choosing Speakers

Start with booking your speaker or speakers, because their availability can have a big impact on your planning. Make sure the time for your webinar is blocked off on their calendars. This is especially true if you're using influencers or executives. They are busy. Don't give them a chance to forget about the event and make you scramble to find a replacement.

Additionally, always convey clear expectations to your speakers. They should know the topic and be comfortable with the event's abstract. Inform them if they'll need to create visuals for the webinar. If you're asking them to provide slides with their own content, you might consider providing them with a PowerPoint slide template or branding guidelines.





Setting the Schedule

Setting the schedule is not just about determining the date of the webinar; you also need to map out dates for things like rehearsals and content submission (if you're not creating it yourself) and plan the promotion schedule. Follow the webinar "Six-Week Rule"; that is, at six weeks from the event date, make sure you have a defined title and abstract so you can create promotion materials. You then have four weeks to develop the webinar content. Two weeks prior to the event, hold a rehearsal. This allows a week to discuss any edits. You can then get in another rehearsal one week prior to the actual live event date.





Choosing a Webinar Platform

You should also consider the webinar platform or the technology you'll use. Many good options are now available. ON24 and ReadyTalk, for example, are a bit more advanced than WebEx or GoToWebinar, and they allow for better reporting and engagement in the presentation, especially if you plan to conduct live polling. But this functionality comes at a cost. So, if you're using the workshop format for example, you don't need a lot of fancy features. In that situation, WebEx or GoToWebinar would probably be a good fit at a lower cost.





Rehearsing Your Webinar

It's very important to rehearse your webinar. For the best quality audio, present from a quiet room. At Act-On, we conduct webinars in a conference room we've converted into a studio by soundproofing the walls. This minimizes the chance for noisy distractions and interruptions during presentations.

In addition, make sure your Internet connection is stable. Wi-Fi works, but it can be spotty, especially if you're streaming video, so a hard-line Internet connection is preferable. Don't conduct the webinar over a cell phone; it's much better to have an actual landline. Lastly, if your webinar has an operator helping you with audio, make sure this person has the number to call you back in case you get disconnected.



Effectively Promoting Your Webinar for Increased Engagement

Well-thought-out promotional materials and communications with attendees will go a long way toward making your webinar a success.

FORMS & LANDING PAGES

Your registration form should have its own landing page. Keep it brief; use eight fields at most. The shorter the form, the more likely people will be to complete it. Remember, if you aren't going to use the information, it's not worth capturing.

Make sure your form is mobile friendly. Aligning your fields vertically rather than horizontally will render them easier to read on mobile devices. Make your submission button as big as possible. The average human thumb is about 45 pixels wide, so make it easy for people to submit their information by giving them a large enough area to press.

The landing page should offer compelling, in-depth information on what will be presented at the webinar and propose a solution for a pain point that one of your would-be customers might experience. This page should also introduce the speakers. People want to hear from experts, so provide ample background on their experience and accomplishments. This will help

establish trust and reassure attendees that they'll get valuable content out of the webinar. Use multiple URLs to track registrations by channel.

CONFIRMATION LANDING PAGES

People who submit forms should receive an auto responder email that confirms their submission and reiterates the attendance details such as the time and date. Include a calendar block in your email so people can download the event to their personal schedules; this is a great way to keep your webinar at the top of their minds. Marketing automation software that integrates with a webinar platform to support all of these moving parts will make the lead-up to the webinar much easier.

EMAIL INVITATIONS

Make your email invitation copy as concise and straight to the point as possible – but don't make it so brief that you fail to make clear what's in it for attendees. They should fully understand the benefits they'll receive from participating in the webinar.

Effectively Promoting Your Webinar for Increased Engagement (continued)

EMAIL INVITATIONS (CONTINUED)

Use images, including a head shot of your presenter or presenters. Images are powerful and photos of people are a great way to humanize email, a channel that can otherwise feel a bit cold. In general, whenever you get a chance to liven up and personalize your email, always take it.

Your email should be visually congruent with your landing page; use the same imagery in both places. –This helps to reassure people that they're on the right path in the right spot to register for your webinar. Also, make registering for the event your only call to action, and use a button or a graphic to make this obvious. Every email should have a key objective; don't distract people from that registration goal on a webinar invite.

CHOOSE YOUR LIST THOUGHTFULLY

It's very easy for marketers to focus on numbers instead of whether information is relevant to a person on their list, but that kind of thinking tends to lead to opt-outs. You know your message, so you should also know the audience that it will resonate with best.

Plan your invitations and set the cadence carefully. According to research by ON24, promoting a webinar more than seven days before the event can increase audience size by 36 percent – even though most registrants don't actually sign up until within a week of the scheduled date. What's more, sending a final invitation within 24 hours of the start time can increase registration by 37 percent.

INVITATION FREQUENCY

Don't send out more than three invitations to the same list. It's also a good idea to suppress people who previously opened the first invitation. That will help to reduce opt outs in the future.

Take advantage of automation for sending emails. A lot of our webinars have similar structures, regarding send dates and lists and suppressions. So, you can set the rules, set the cadence, plug in your messages and your lists, and then just let it all run in the background while you work on preparing your material.

Quick Tips: Email Best Practices

Follow these tips for using email most effectively in the lead-up to your webinar.

1. BE CONGRUENT

The email invitation is often recipients' first glimpse of your message – so don't waste the opportunity. Your subject line and your pre-header should align; utilize the same keywords and phrases. Many email marketers now call the pre-header "the new subject line" because people often skip the subject line and look at the pre-header to determine whether to open it. Never use your pre-header for the end subscribe or leave it blank.

2. USE PERSONALIZATION

Don't be afraid to break out of that first name box. Using other fields, like company or location, can often make an email more relevant. And this practice tends to increase either opens or click-throughs, depending on whether it's located in the subject line or in the body of the email.

For best results, send your emails on Tuesdays or Wednesdays – and, without a doubt, avoid Mondays. On Monday mornings, many people tend to delete every email that's not directly relevant to them or their current projects, so your message is likely to get discarded if it is received on the first day of the work week.

Let people know their options. For example, some might want the webinar content, but can't attend on the selected date. Inform them that if they register they'll get a copy of the presentation materials after the webinar has concluded.

3. PURGE YOUR LIST

Purging lists can be a very difficult exercise for email marketers. Nobody wants to lose potential customers, but your online reputation depends on maintaining a clean and healthy email list. Your email message might be crafted beautifully and the content might be absolutely riveting, but if it doesn't make it into the inbox, it doesn't really matter. So, take the time to filter out folks who haven't engaged with your emails in a while.

Let people know their options. For example, some might want the webinar content, but can't attend on the selected date. Inform them that if they register they'll get a copy of the presentation materials after the webinar has concluded.

Driving Registrations & Attendance

Use every tool at your disposal to promote your event wisely and effectively.

USE MULTIPLE SOCIAL CHANNELS

When publicizing your event, take advantage of as many different social channels as possible, and make sure to link them to your registration page so that people can get there in one click. Remember to use different URLs to track each channel and see which ones are delivering the most or the best quality of registrants.

Consider asking people in your organization to add an email signature line that promotes your webinar. At Act-On this works very well; we normally get thousands of impressions from our email signature line promotions. Keep this in mind for your own company.

PROMOTE ON YOUR WEBSITE

Webinars are a great way to engage prospects who might not yet know enough about your product to buy. Promoting your event on your website gives you an opportunity to not only to capture potential customers' information, but to get an idea of what kind of content they're interested in so you can start sending them relevant information to help warm them up.

If you have a section on your own company website listing upcoming events, be sure to list your webinar there.

Another great way to promote your webinar is write a blog post about the topic. The call to action? "Learn more at our upcoming webinar." This is an excellent way to help attract the right audience while also giving people a preview of what to expect at the webinar.

SEND REMINDER EMAILS

Send a reminder email a few hours before your webinar to help drive attendance. Provide people with a link to join and any other information that they might need to participate in the webinar. Not everyone is going to have added your webinar to their calendar. So, this is a helpful prompt for those who had intended to attend but perhaps forgot about the event – until your reminder came in. Keep in mind that a good target for a live webinar is about 30 to 40 percent of registrants attending the live showing.

Driving Registrations & Attendance (continued)

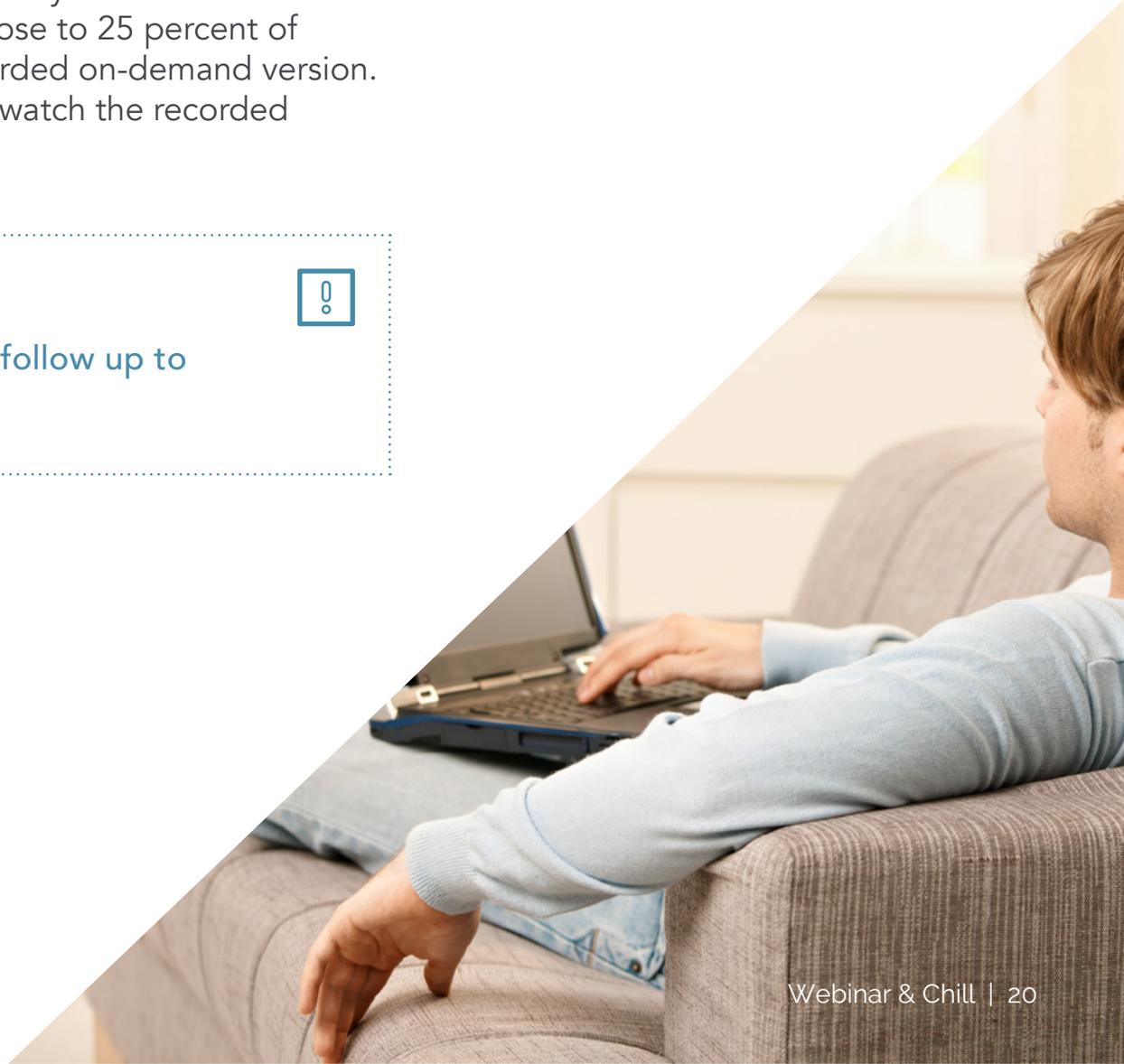
POST EVENT FOLLOW-UP

Be sure to send a thank you within 24 to 48 hours of the webinar, while it's still relevant and top of mind. Include any content that was promised, as well as your archived webinar; close to 25 percent of webinar attendees will actually watch the recorded on-demand version. And many people who skip the live event will watch the recorded version on their own time.

Remember:



At the conclusion of your webinar, send a follow up to all registrants with any promised assets.



Strategies to Leverage & Extend the Life of Your Webinar Content

One of the best ways to extend the life of your content is to repurpose it. Here at Act-On we follow the rule of four by repurposing any piece of content up to four times. For example, this eBook could become a blog post. We could summarize the information in the eBook and provide additional resources. Or we could do an interview with the speaker for the blog and use an on-demand recording as supporting material that the audience can access at the end of the post.

We could also create an infographic. These typically work best when material includes many statistics. For example, if you're discussing a workflow or a template, infographics are a great way to condense this long-form content into an informative, understandable format.

People prefer to consume content in very different ways. Some would rather read than listen, so ingesting webinar content through an eBook or another content format is a great option for them.



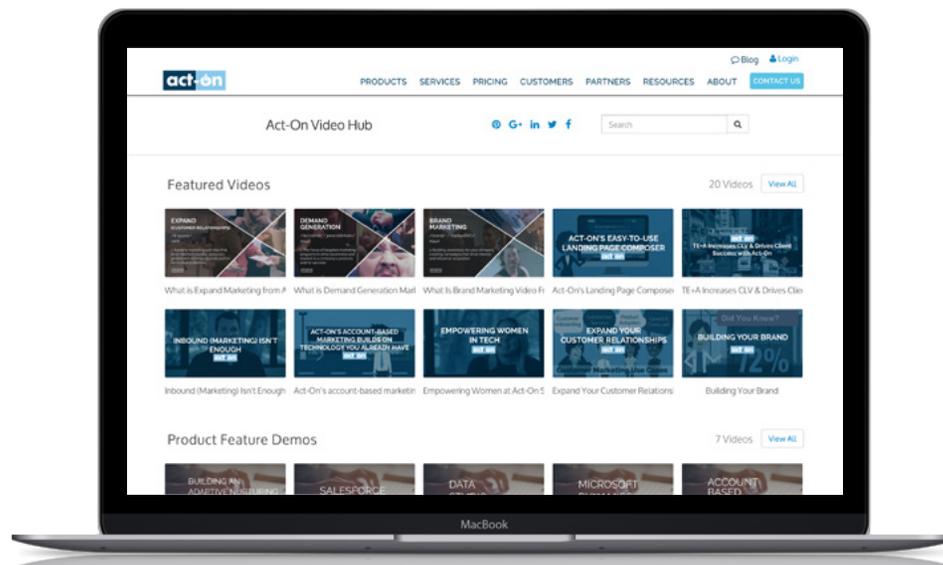
STRATEGIES TO LEVERAGE & EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR WEBINAR CONTENT

On-Demand Videos

One of the best ways to repurpose a webinar and let your webinar content live on is to turn it into an on-demand video. At Act-On we've created a video hub, which is listed under our resources and accessible on our website. We use it to host a number of video formats, like product demos, customer testimonials, short-form best practice videos, as well as our on-demand webinars (to date we have more than 40 of the latter available).

For marketers, leveraging webinar videos by gating them is the gift that keeps on giving, because the content continues to generate leads long after the original presentation is over. In 2016 Act-On generated more than 1,200 leads through this method alone.

Gating a webinar might sound complicated, but it's actually a simple process if you have the right tools in place. At Act-On we use Vidyard – which is easy to set up and integrates smoothly with our system – to host all our videos. Viewers just click “play” and an iframe form appears. After a viewer's information has been submitted, the form redirects to the full-length video content.



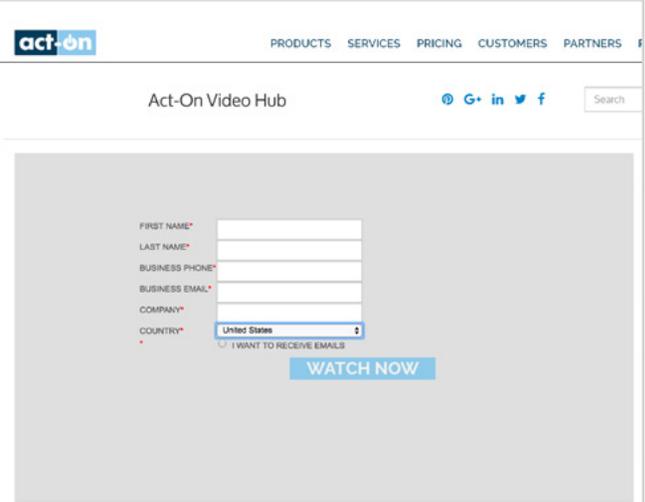
Testing Your Gating Methods

It's a good idea to try a few different methods of gating to see which receives the most engagement before you settle on one tactic. A/B testing is always a savvy strategy for marketers, because even small incremental lifts in your engagement and program optimization can have a huge impact on your revenue, lead numbers, and pipeline in the long run.

At Act-On we started with strategy one, where the form appears as soon as a viewer presses play and access to the video is denied until the information has been submitted. But we were wary of losing some potential viewers who would be discouraged by having to fill out the form. So, in strategy two, we allowed the video to play for three minutes before the form appeared. In strategy three, we didn't gate the video at all and instead offered a piece of related content and captured the lead information that way.

The results? Strategy one garnered almost double the amount of registrations compared to the others. We think that this is because people like to know what they must give to get something in return. When Act-On tried the winning strategy on shorter form video content, however, it didn't work at all. We concluded that it's best for us to gate videos only if they're 15 minutes or longer. Gating our shorter videos seemed to create a barrier to content consumption.

Be aware that strategies and results will vary by company and by content, so conduct your own tests to see what works best for your program.



The screenshot shows the Act-On Video Hub interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Act-On logo and links for PRODUCTS, SERVICES, PRICING, CUSTOMERS, and PARTNERS. Below the navigation bar, the page title is "Act-On Video Hub" with social media icons for YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and a search bar. The main content area features a registration form with fields for FIRST NAME*, LAST NAME*, BUSINESS PHONE*, BUSINESS EMAIL*, COMPANY*, and COUNTRY* (set to United States). There is a checkbox for "I WANT TO RECEIVE EMAILS" and a prominent blue "WATCH NOW" button. Below the video player, there is a video title "The ABC's of A/B Testing in 15 Minutes" and a short description: "With constant pressures to increase demand and revenue, you can't afford to throw darts in the dark. A/B testing has become an important tactic because it gives you the data you need for decision-making, so you can develop and evolve your campaigns with more confidence. Learn how to conduct an A/B test in just 15 minutes!". At the bottom of the video player, there are social sharing icons for Email, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and YouTube, along with an "Embed" button.

Quick Takeaway Tips for Success

First Identify Your Goal

Know from the start what goal you want to achieve and then develop your content from there. Because there are many types of webinars, it's important to choose the format that best fits and supports your objective and provides information appropriate to your audience's particular stage of the buyer's journey.

Plan Logistics Well in Advance

If your webinar is haphazardly put together at the last minute, your audience will know. Many details and moving parts go into producing a webinar. You want to make sure that you have a plan, stay organized, and set clear expectations.

Automate Your Promotions

Because really, why wouldn't you? Marketers are known for keeping incredibly busy schedules and juggling multiple tasks. So, save yourself some valuable time and automate your promotions if you can.

Utilize Multi-Channel Promotion

This is a good strategy for most marketing campaigns, but especially for webinars. You should employ all the tools in your arsenal: emails, website promotions, social media promotions, app banners, and so on. Using multiple channels to publicize your webinar will drive greater interest, registration, and, ultimately, revenue.

Let Your Webinars Live On

Once you've created something special, give it plenty of time to shine. After the event, continue to leverage content so all your hard work continues to pay off long after you hang up the phone on the webinar.

Conclusion

By following these steps for creating and leveraging first-rate webinars you'll forge lasting relationships with your audience, produce stellar content, and help bring long-term success to your marketing program ... and your business.

Additional Resources:



- Workbook: [Right Person, Right Message, Right Time](#)
- eBook: [The High Performance Marketing Plan](#)
- eBook: [Inbound Isn't Enough](#)
- Interactive Infographic: [Mapping Your Customer Journey](#)

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awards & accolades...

About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

Connect with us to learn more