Not all webinars are created equal:
The ultimate guide to picking the right webinar format

247 Webcasting

Introduction

With content as the core driver of leads in modern marketing, a comprehensive content strategy is a key part of successful lead generation. After you have identified your personas, you'll need to decide which vehicle(s) will deliver your content to the sub segments of your target audience.

There are a variety of content types to carry your message including whitepapers, videos, blogs, infographics, and slide decks – however this whitepaper will focus on webinars. Webinars are highly versatile and, depending on how they are utilized, can appeal to your target audience throughout the sales funnel.

In the first instance, this whitepaper will outline how well suited webinars are to driving lead generation. In this context it will look at aspects such as versatility, engagement, analytics and insight.

In this whitepaper you will learn:

Why webinars are so well suited to lead generation

What the different types of webinar are

How you can utilize different webinar types for specific purposes

How webinars can drive other content output

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Part 1

Why are
webinars so
well suited
to lead
generation?
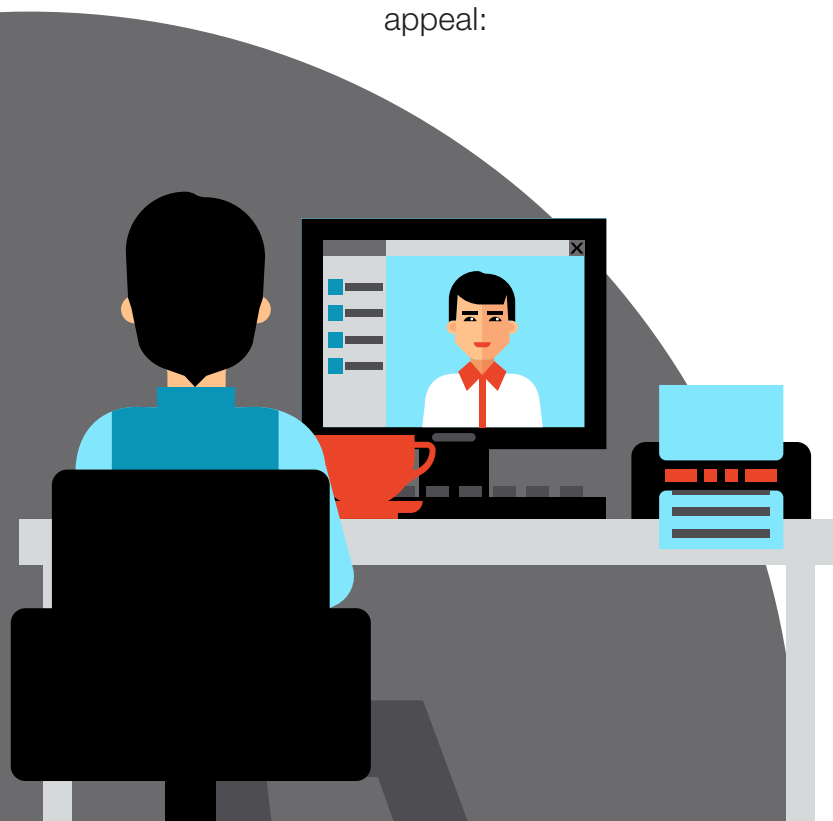
Why are webinars so well suited to lead generation?

There are many types of marketing asset, each of which appeals to a particular use case, because they are usually static and one-dimensional. That's not a bad thing, it's just a simple fact.

For example, an Infographic is usually a static image, not quite valuable enough to be gated, and while it usually contains interesting insight, it is not known for its engagement factor. Infographics, as any other asset type, appeal to particular target audiences at a particular stage of their buyer journey. That's why you should be using infographics – typically at the top of the sales funnel.

By comparison take whitepapers, for example. Long-form text makes them valuable enough to be gated, but their length can make them dry and unappealing. That said, for anyone researching or self-educating prior to a purchase, as 81% of us do according to AdWeek, it has appeal. Therefore, whitepapers should be used in the middle of the sales funnel.

These are just two examples of marketing assets that are commonly used in a content strategy. The challenge is sustainably managing all the different asset types, which all require different skills to produce them. Compared to the two examples above, webinars are more versatile and have appeal throughout the entire buying cycle, which means they can be applied throughout the sales funnel.

Webinars have a number of traits that justify this wide application and the wide appeal:

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Versatility

As outlined in section 2 of this whitepaper there are a number of different types of webinar, including audio, video, live, on-demand, simulive, single or multiple presenters. Deciding which to use should not be a matter of the organizer's preference, but be based on goal and desired outcome of the webinar. Each fulfills a different purpose and therefore fits differently into a content and lead generation strategy. Very few other marketing assets can demonstrate this level of versatility.

Engagement

Webinars are highly engaging. Webinars that are not engaging have failed their calling, which can be down to the organizer or the platform being used to deliver the webinar. A good webinar provides the opportunity to ask live questions, get live answers, participate in polls and surveys, group chat, download additional assets, link to related webinars or content, or be used for certifications and tests etc. The main appeal for many attendees will be, however, the presenter(s). Webinars allow for storytelling and storytelling provides much better recall than static or written content.

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Analytics

The engagement factors outlined in the previous point are all measurable in real-time within the webinar analytics dashboard. The result is rich insight into attendees' behaviour, preferences and background. These are based on self-provided information including demographics (from the registration form), general interest (attendance duration), engagement with topic (participation in polls, surveys and Q&A), sales funnel stage (based on selection of related assets from a library of resources arranged by sales funnel stage), preferences and other insight (based on poll and survey results). There is much more. This level of analysis, self-contained within the marketing asset but exportable via APIs (see point "Open for Integration") is unique amongst marketing assets and makes webinars so appealing to marketers and their lead generation programmes.

Source of more content

Their versatility can make webinars hard to place within a content strategy, especially if webinars are a new tool in the organisation. Webinars can be the source, and the result, of other content. For example, a webinar could be the vehicle to deliver existing whitepaper content, or it could be an expert presentation or panel discussion which is retrospectively made into a whitepaper or other type of asset. Whichever way webinars are created they can become a content output factory in their own right. Webinars can be the basis for blog posts, videos, infographics, social media updates and many other pieces of marketing content. Each feeding into the content strategy. The time saved in creating content in this way is significant.

Self-hosted and gated

Unlike other marketing assets, which need to be posted and gated by other marketing tools such as marketing automation software, webinars are already hosted and provide their own custom design options and registration forms. The point "Analytics" already highlighted how this feeds into the insight and reporting elements, so the next point ("Integration capabilities") looks at how the integration with other tools plugs webinars into an automated lead generation strategy.

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Integration capabilities

A key strength of webinars is their ability to seamlessly integrate with other tools such as CMs and Marketing Automation software. APIs and XML feeds allow for automated and real-time transfer of data and insight, which feeds lead scoring and nurturing programs.

All of the aspects discussed in this section make webinars one of the most valuable marketing assets available. The level of output that can be achieved with webinars also makes them one of the more complex marketing asset. The combined result is an incredibly powerful tool that should be present in every marketer's toolbox. However, in order to reap the benefits requires a good level of understanding of how webinars work, how they contribute to lead flow and marketing strategies, as well as how to utilize them in the best way for your organisation's particular requirements.

At a basic level, marketers should start building an understanding of the different webinar formats and what their purposes are within the lead generation strategy and sales funnel. For more information, skip to the next section of this whitepaper.

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What are the
different types
of webinar and
where do they
fit in?

What are the different types of webinar and where do they fit in?

There are a variety of webinar formats available to marketers, each of which has a different purpose within content marketing and lead generation strategies. This guide is based on best practices gathered over decades of webinar implementation.

Definition of 'webinar':

A streaming presentation (audio or video) requiring registration and usually delivered with synchronized slides and Q&A via a web browser.

Webinars come in a variety of different formats, including audio, video, live and on-demand, as well as the lesser known "simulive". This section highlights these and others and outlines how each can be used to achieve the results and outcomes you are aiming for:

Two main types of webinar: Audio and Video

Audio webinars

Audio webinars should be used for up to three speakers and can be used for content throughout the entire sales cycle. More than three speakers and the audience may struggle to tell them apart, especially if the speakers are unknown to them. Video webinars should be considered for more than three speakers (see below). Audio is ideal for single presenters as it allows them to manage the webinar and deliver the presentation without being visible on a video stream. Presenting an audio webinar is also more comfortable for less confident presenters, compared to video webinars.

Setup requirements:

Audio webinars are the easiest to setup as the audio capture process is by standard phone line and less complex to setup than a video webinar. As discussed above there will often be fewer speakers on audio webinars, resulting is less coordination of content, slides and speakers ahead of the webinar.

Audio production:

Audio webinars can be produced from any location with a phone and internet connection, and low background noise – i.e. meeting rooms, personal office etc. Multiple presenters

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can each connect to the presenter audio line via their respective phone lines without having to be in the same physical location. Typically, other than a computer, no further equipment is needed.

Cost:

Due to the low requirements for bandwidth and equipment, as well as the location flexibility, audio webinars are one of the most cost-effective webinar options. At a standard level, there are no costs for additional equipment, venue hire or travel.

Ways to improve standard audio webinars:

Webinar organisers can improve standard audio webinars most noticeably by improving the quality of audio. Two factors affecting audio quality are the location and the encoding equipment, i.e. the bit rate at which the audio is captured and encoded.

Sound-proofed rooms, e.g. audio recording studios or smaller rooms with little to no hard surfaces (tiles, wood, glass, windows, plastered walls etc) can improve the audio quality by producing less echo.

Switching the audio capture method from phone to dedicated sound equipment allows for higher bit rate encoding of the audio, resulting in radio type audio quality. This does, however, bear a higher cost for equipment, as well as loss of location flexibility – as speakers are required to be in the same location at the same time.

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Video webinars

Video webinars are ideal for between three and seven speakers, and when the speakers or venue should be shown on (and add value to) the webinar stream. This might be the case for well-known or famous speakers or if your webinar is taking place from an event or known venue. Video webinars are more suitable for a larger number of speakers in order for the audience to be able to differentiate visually between them. Video generally is more engaging than audio, but the additional cost and resource required should always be justifiable by the quality of output and return on investment.

Setup requirements:

Video webinars are more complex to setup and prepare than audio webinars. Video webinars have certain minimum connectivity requirements to be able to stream live, which the venue must be able to support. The venue should also be suitable (visually and audibly) for good quality webinar recordings. By default, the video format is more restrictive and requires more coordination of speaker availability and travel, as well as choice and availability of the venue. Webinar timing may be restricted by the availability of speakers. Unlike audio webinars, high-quality video webinars rarely allow speakers to contribute from remote locations. Speakers on video webinars may also require an element of media training and preparation in order to present well on camera. An experienced moderator is usually required to manage multiple speakers on camera and control the delivery and participation of each speaker, especially in panel scenarios. Lastly, an experienced camera crew and producer should produce the video webinar in order to capture each speaker and provide an engaging end-result for the audience.

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Video production:

Ideally, webinars are produced in dedicated studio environments to provide the appropriate visual setting and suitable audio quality. The number of cameras should be in line with the number of speakers on the webinar. A minimum of two cameras are recommended for video webinars with 3 speakers. Three cameras for four or more speakers, especially in a participative scenario such as panel discussions. The number of participants and cameras have a direct impact on the size of venue, the video production team and the respective cost. The size also affects the time needed to setup and test, which can reflect the time the webinar is able to take place. For example, a production setup of three hours may not allow for a 9am webinar, or it may incur additional cost for previous day setup – both for venue hire and crew. The venue must provide a minimum connectivity for the stream transfer, which should be hardwired and separate from the connectivity accessible by a potential audience watching live at the venue to avoid bandwidth contention. The venue should also provide phone connectivity.

Cost:

Video webinars have a variety of additional requirements as discussed above that incur additional costs. The video option on the webinar platform typically is more expensive as it carries higher infrastructure overheads. The venue, equipment and crew all carry additional cost, which can increase depending on the number of speakers, venue type and location.

Ways to improve standard video webinars:

The standard setup for video webinars is by default well specified, however additional cameras and better quality venues can improve the viewing experience. Studios with a view of famous landmarks can add to the appeal to the audience and set the scene for the webinar topic. HD cameras and stream encoding may improve picture quality, but face restrictions on the receiving end where internet connectivity of the end-user determines the quality of the video stream. The choice of moderator and speakers with experience presenting in front of a camera can significantly enhance the viewing experience.

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Choose between Live,
On-demand and Simulive

Live

Regardless of whether you are running an audio or a video webinar, the majority of webinars are run as live webinars (see also "Simulive" section). Live webinars have a number of benefits making them a more popular choice over on-demand webinars.

Live webinars are "events". A live webinar has a live start time and the audience expect to hear first-hand and fresh content that has not been re-used from a previous "event". The fact there is a live start time makes audiences more likely to set aside time in their calendars to attend online. The desire to be amongst the first to hear the content is a key driver.

It may also be the case that the webinar becomes the virtual equivalent of a physical event. For example, a conference organizer may opt to stream their event, which may be restricted by venue capacity or location, as a live webinar to extend its reach.

From a promotional perspective it is beneficial to set a firm date for the live webinar, as this allows for marketing activity to be planned and become a firm part of the overall campaign. It also allows the webinar organisers to monitor interest and registration numbers with the option to extend the promotional effort and budget or postpone the webinar altogether should there be lower than expected levels of interest.

Live webinars, however, also have more scope for errors that cannot be rectified. The majority of errors are minor, such as a presenter losing their train of thought, while others can be more significant, such as loss of connectivity during the live stream. While major incidents are rare, they should always be taken into account and, where possible, be mitigated against.

Typically, live webinars are available as on-demand versions after the live stream has concluded. However, there are instances where only a live stream is required without on-demand availability afterwards. For example, for regulatory reasons some Life Sciences webinars are required to be live only.

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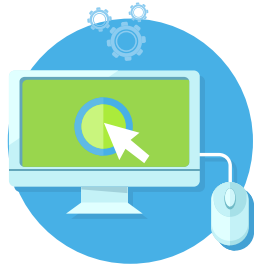
On Demand

On-demand webinars are pre-recorded webinars that are made available to the target audience to access at any point. This provides greater flexibility for the attendees, as they can consume the content when it suits them – as often as they wish. This might be particularly relevant for reference or evergreen content that has no connection to a particular campaign date or time of year. For marketers this can also hold greater value as the promotional results are instant, much like you'd expect from a whitepaper promotion. As a result, on-demand webinar leads can be fed into your CRM system and channeled to the Sales team immediately. By comparison, leads from live webinars will only become available after the live webinar has concluded – potentially only after several weeks of promotion. This leads to "waves" of leads being fed into the lead flow over the course of the webinar programme. This can be avoided by running and promoting on-demand webinars.

However, there are also some downsides to on-demand webinars. Unlike live webinars, they convey no sense of urgency, which may lead audiences to register for, or view, webinars at a later time in the future. Or they may become distracted and not view the on-demand webinar at all.

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Simulive

Simulive webinars offer some of the benefits of live webinars with the added control of a pre-recorded webinar. The content for simulive webinars is prerecorded, but subsequently made available at a specified date and time in the future. The stream is live and for all intents and purposes to the audience is appears to be a live webinar.

Simulive webinars can be utilized when speaker availability does not coincide with the marketing promotional cycle. For example, a marketing campaign is due to go live with a live launch webinar on date X, however, the speaker is not available on date X. Instead of postponing the entire launch or compromising on the speaker, a simulive webinar can hold the key. SImulive webinars also allow for editing of the prerecorded content in case of any major mistakes. However, organisers should avoid "over producing" the webinar by heavily editing the recorded content. Modern audiences are media savvy and will detect high levels of editing, which identify the webinar as non-live.

Simulive webinars have some restrictions, such as the inability to discuss live polling results. If your intention is to run live polls during the webinar and make it part of the webinar, then live webinars are a better option. Equally, live Q&A will not be possible with prerecorded content. Instead, webinar organisers may opt for a discussion of general or typical questions during or at the end of the webinar.

A key benefit of simulive webinars is the ability to significantly improve production quality of the audio or video recording. Audio can be recorded with dedicated audio equipment and encoded at higher bit rates, while video production is also easier to arrange and control. Both types of recording benefit from editing and especially video can benefit from post-production mixing.

In general, simulive webinars offer significantly more control especially around speaker availability and content quality, while maintaining the benefits and sense of urgency of live webinars. Simulive presents a great hybrid approach to running webinars.

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Pick your presenter format

Single Presenter

Having only one presenter and no moderator offers the greatest flexibility, as there is no need to coordinate availability of multiple speakers and is the easiest when resources are scarce. It is also the easiest to follow for the audience, as there is no need to distinguish between multiple speakers. This offers the potential to run a large volume and high webinar frequency, especially of the speaker is always the same person.

There are also downsides to having only a single presenter. The sole presenter will need to coordinate the webinar from start to finish, including the housekeeping, Q&A and potential technical questions from the audience, as well as the presentation itself. This can be distracting and to the detriment of the webinar quality. However, an experienced presenter should be able to handle this process from start to finish. The delivery of content by a single speaker can be less engaging than having multiple speakers. While using the same speaker for all webinars can help to build trust and rapport with audiences, it can also become too repetitive. There is also more perceived value in listening to multiple speakers and a diverse audience will react better to different angles of the same subject.

Single Presenter plus Moderator

Adding a moderator into the mix helps single-presenter-webinars to become more engaging and interactive. A moderator will be responsible for the introduction of the speaker, the webinar topic and will cover housekeeping items – for example how to submit questions and how to use other webinar features and functionality. A good moderator will be able to enhance the presentation and topic in general by acting as an interviewer and drawing out further details from the presenter. The moderator will also be responsible for running the Q&A at the end of the webinar by selecting the most relevant questions and putting them to the speaker in order to enhance the overall experience for the audience. A good moderator should also engage with the audience throughout the webinar to create a rapport and foster an environment of interactivity and engagement.

Provided they have the appropriate skillset, the person running the webinar programme can also be the moderator. This will help to provide consistency to the webinar programme. Webinar organisers also have the option of engaging

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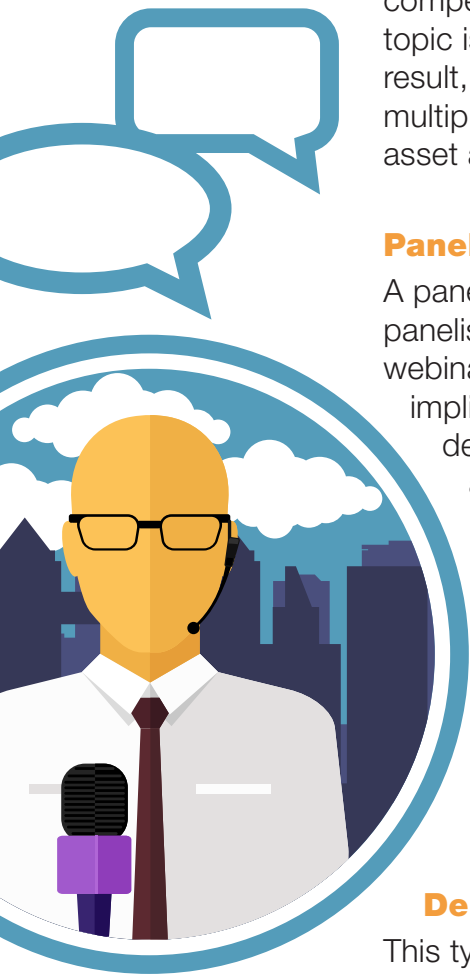
moderators that are relevant to the respective webinar topic. However, this may lead to inconsistencies in how webinars are run, which can lead to lower overall engagement over time by your target audience. Consistency is key to building webinar attendance.

Multiple Presenters plus Moderator

Compared to the single presenter version, a moderator for a webinar with multiple speakers will need to have the ability to not only manage the webinar, but also to coordinate contributions by multiple speakers who are potentially competing for exposure. A strong presence of mind and understanding of the topic is required to be an effective moderator for this type of webinar. As a result, the webinar can become highly engaging and the content drawn from multiple presenters can add value to a webinar that other types or marketing asset are unable to achieve.

Panel Discussion

A panel discussion webinar is typically defined as consisting of at least three panelists plus a moderator and by that definition should be run as a video webinar. Review the section "Video webinar" for more information on the implications and requirements. A panel discussion cannot run without a dedicated moderator as they are responsible for facilitating the discussion and conducting interviews. The same principles apply to the moderator as covered in the section "Moderator and multiple presenters" with regards to their ability to manage the webinar and speakers. The video element adds further complexity, as everything will be done with cameras present.

Typically, panel discussions don't feature supporting slides as the focus is on the contributions from the panelists. This has an impact on how the webinar console should be laid out and greater emphasis is put on the video player size inside the webinar console.

Demo webinar

This type of webinar is more practical and hands-on than other webinars, and will therefore be used for more technical topics. By its very nature it will also better serve audiences and topics at the middle of the sales funnel, as opposed to top of the funnel thought leadership content.

Due to the practical nature of demo webinars, preparation is very important. Demos will either be delivered via screenshare or through pre-recorded videos. The latter is preferable as it provides more control over the quality of the demo while mitigating the risk of hard- or software failure during the demo. The use of separate video content does typically require the webinar type to be

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'audio'. This is due to bandwidth requirements, as a video webinar showing a separate video as part of the PowerPoint presentation will consume double the streaming bandwidth (i.e. 1 x for main video stream AND 1 x for video clip in PowerPoint), which may lead to loss of stream quality or connection on the receiving end. A solution to this issue is the inclusion of video clips into the main video stream by means of a video mixer from the main production desk. The implications of running a video webinar for the purpose of a demo webinar may, however, outweigh the benefits.

Demo webinars are typically used during the pre-sales stages and as such should facilitate a maximum in interactivity through Q&A, polls, surveys and group chat to identify buying signals from attendants (see "How to webinars" section for post-sales customer-oriented webinars). Demo webinars should also contain calls to action, including offers of free trials and pre-sales calls. Prospects attending demo webinars are typically ready to engage in a sales conversation.

Webinar organisers should expect an overall lower amount of attendance, as a typical demo webinar attendee is further down the sales cycle, which naturally whittles out prospects who are not yet ready to buy. You may, however, see an increase in conversion rates (registrant to attendee), as well as overall engagement with the webinar and content.
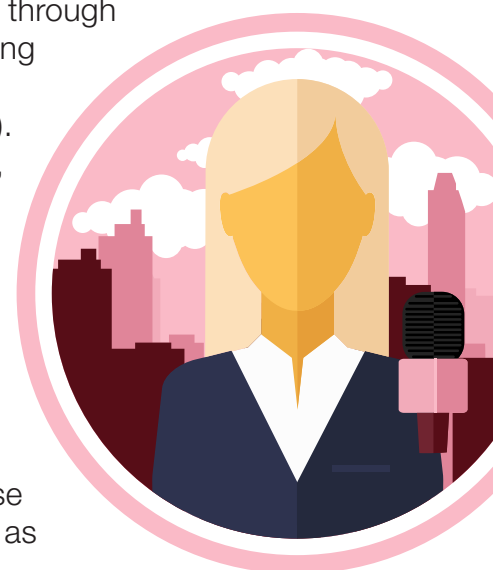
"How to" webinar (for customers)

This is the post-sale equivalent of the pre-sales "demo webinar". How-to content empowers users of a solution to become more proficient, which results in better utilization of a solution. Customers will require continuous engagement with the solution provider in an effort to become a power user. This is in the solution provider's interest, as it will result in higher spend, stickier customers and higher likelihood of referrals.

Just like demo webinars, and for the same reasons outlined above, how-to webinars should also make use of pre-recorded video content.

Conclusion

This overview and explanation provides a guide to the different types of webinars available to webinar organisers. It is important to consider best practices for each type of webinar (audio or video), delivery option (live, on-demand, simulive) and presenter format. Key to webinar programme success is not to start with the most complex webinar setup (e.g. a video webinar with a panel discussion). Your internal processes, as well as your audience, will need to adapt to this new communications medium. This will also mean that the lead quality and volume will steadily increase over time.

Webniar organisers should experiment during the early stages of the webinar programme in order to find the style most suitable to the audience, which can be replicated over time. Internal test webinars can help gather feedback on the delivery and setup, as well as familiarizing yourself with the typical promotional cycle and its requirements.

	No. of Speakers	Sales Cycle Stages	Complexity and setup time required	Cost	Engagement	Promotional time required
Audio	Up to 3	All	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Video	3 to 7	All	High	High	High	Medium
Live	n/a	All	Medium to High	Medium	High	Medium
On-Demand	n/a	All	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Simulive	n/a	All	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Single presenter	n/a	All	Low	Low	Low to Medium	Medium
Multiple Presenters	n/a	All	Medium	Medium	Medium to High	Medium
Thought eadership	Up to 3	Early sales cycle	Low to Medium	Low to Medium	High	Medium to High
Panel	4 to 7	Middle	Very High	High	High	Medium to High
Demo	n/a	Late sales cycle	Medium	Medium	Medium to High	Low to Medium
How To	n/a	After Sales completion	Medium	Medium	Medium to High	Low to Medium

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