

Boost engagement and collaboration



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The current Coronavirus pandemic has caused many countries – such as UK, USA, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Germany, among others – to follow a lockdown approach. Globally, organisations are turning to virtual meeting tools in a bid to remain connected to their employees and to engage with their customers. However, virtual meetings have their own etiquette and risks. They need to be aligned to specific criteria that ensures that all attendees are engaged, and that the meetings, ultimately, get results.

One of the most common challenges that organisations encounter in virtual meetings is that people often multi-task. The results of this can be embarrassing, like the co-worker that forgot to mute the conference call and started a conversation with their spouse. It's easy for this to happen. According to the Harvard Business Review, this can be caused by some individuals dominating a discussion, resulting in others not listening or doing something else because they don't feel that their input is necessary. People can lose a sense of engagement if they're not included, if the call isn't managed properly, and if they lack the confidence to share their views in a new format.

Get the most out of your virtual meetings



Leverage virtual meeting tools and capabilities to cement customer and employee relationships

Encourage the use of video

One of the quickest ways to get engagement going is to use video for your conversations. But instead of using it to police attention, video can become a vital enabler to have more people interacting during the meeting. Those who would've ordinarily kept quiet can more easily become active participants – especially when coupled with the chat functionality that many solutions provide.

Have a team lead or facilitator

Every meeting should have at least one team lead or facilitator. This person's role goes beyond scheduling the meeting and ensuring that the technology works beforehand. They also need to be on-point when it comes to ensuring that people are involved and sharing their views. The facilitator should pause a meeting every now and again to get everyone around the virtual table to check in,



add a comment, and confirm that they're on track with the discussion.

Choose the right technology

Of course, the most crucial part of any online meeting is going to be the technology that is used. The right technology will have a low barrier to entry – which means that people can learn their way around it without too much difficulty. It should also have collaboration tools embedded so that sharing a document is easy, and that recording a meeting is seamless.

There are numerous platforms on the market today. Some of the leading ones include Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Webex, and Skype. These tend to vary in price, depending on company size, meeting size, and general requirements; but they all offer robust and tested services that are easy to learn and reliable under pressure.

If you're introducing a new virtual conferencing tool to your employees or customers during the coronavirus lockdown, you need to make sure that you provide training.

People will appreciate having time to get used to the controls and learning how to avoid awkward incidents. There have been plenty of videos circulating where employees have forgotten to turn off video or mute audio, and this training gives employees and clients a sense of security and control. This can also be supported by offering people an audio-only option if they feel uncomfortable with live video.



Encourage informal chats

Another step that will make a difference is to give people a chance to chat before the meeting starts. This will ease people into the meeting, just as it does in real-life situations. Research has shown that people tend to respond better and work together more cohesively if they share stories and relax. By giving people a few minutes to chat, you're breaking the ice and alleviating the sense of isolation that can come with working from home.

Have a clear agenda

Finally, ensure that your meeting has a clearly defined agenda. This will keep the meeting on track and achieve results. People can meander in virtual meetings, so objectives will keep the conversation tight and relevant. The agenda should also be accompanied by a time limit. Just as in the real world, reduce the length of presentations and corporate soliloquy's because people will get bored or frustrated. They still have work to do, so make the meeting quick, efficient and to the point. This will make people more inclined to have another meeting, and less inclined to tune out in the next one. **SR**

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