

# Keys to Conducting a Successful Webinar

**An Osterman Research White Paper  
Prepared for Citrix Systems**

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## Why You Should Read This White Paper

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Webinars – online sessions that can include audio, presentation slides, product demonstrations and a wide variety of other types of content – are important tools that are growing in popularity. They can be used for a variety of purposes, including sales presentations, product demonstrations, employee training, investor or analyst briefings and a variety of other applications.

Webinars provide a number of benefits, including: reduced length of the sales cycle, more effective training, reduced travel expenses, lower costs than participation or attendance at trade shows and greater employee productivity. Webinars are inexpensive to produce and can be re-used indefinitely.

This white paper focuses on the key aspects of Webinar creation, promotion and management and discusses detailed considerations for any organization that wants to take advantage of this sales, marketing and training tool.

Instead of relying on our own opinions or conjecture, Osterman Research conducted two large surveys with both Webinar attendees and Webinar sponsors. The goal of these surveys was to understand why people attend Webinars and how sponsors address the needs of attendees through these events.

This white paper also includes information on Citrix® GoToWebinar™, a tool that provides the tools needed to successfully conduct Webinars and manage the attendee experience.

## The Increasing Importance of Webinars

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### **Webinar Use Is Increasing Rapidly**

The use of Webinars is increasing rapidly: in a survey conducted by Osterman Research in early 2006, we found that the average infoworker attended a median of four Webinars during the previous 12 months, or one per quarter. However, during the next 12 months, 41 percent of these individuals plan to attend more Webinars and another 45 percent plan to attend about the same number as last year. In a separate survey of Webinar sponsors, we found that during 2005 these companies conducted a median of five

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### **Webinars Can Be Used for a Wide Variety of Applications**

A key element in the growing popularity of Webinars, both for attendees and sponsors, is the breadth of applications for which Webinars can be used.

For example, Webinars can be used for sales and marketing purposes to generate leads; to build awareness of a product, technology or company; to demonstrate a product's look-and-feel; as well as a variety of other applications designed to promote or sell a product, technology, company or concept.

In one of the the surveys that Osterman Research conducted for this white paper, we asked Webinar attendees to rank various reasons for attending Webinars. The most important reasons cited by attendees were to obtain more information about specific products, to understand issues with which they were not familiar and to evaluate products for an upcoming purchase.

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Webinars can also be used for training purposes in a variety of ways – training partners on a new program or product, training new customers, teaching existing customers how to upgrade a product, instructing system administrators on new product features, training employees, etc.

Webinars can also be used for other applications, including analyst or prospect briefings in place of a Microsoft® PowerPoint® sent through email or for showing someone step-by-step instructions for a variety of applications.

In the survey of Webinar sponsors conducted by Osterman Research, we found that companies that conduct Webinars do so primarily to generate leads, the ability to make Webinar attendees fully aware of their offerings and to make Webinar attendees fully aware of their company and/or presence in the market.

### **How to Conduct a Successful Online Event**

In order to conduct a Webinar that will accomplish the goals you're seeking, it is critical to manage the event carefully and to address each of the key activities that must take place to ensure success. This section addresses these key steps and offers advice on how best to accomplish them.

## **Webinar Setup and Planning**

The setup and planning of a successful Webinar event requires a number of discrete activities, including:

- **Scheduling**

Clearly, picking the right topic is critical to the success of any Webinar, but there are other factors involved as well. Timing a Webinar to coincide with a trade show, partner announcement or some other event is important and can enhance the reach and impact of any Webinar. The vast majority of Webinar attendees prefer to be contacted one to two weeks before an event, with nearly half of attendees preferring a two-week advanced notice of the Webinar.

Our research found that the types of Webinars that people are most likely to attend include those that provide information on best practices in attendees' industries or professions, the leading issues in their industry or profession, 'how-to' instruction and the 10 most common mistakes in their industry or profession.

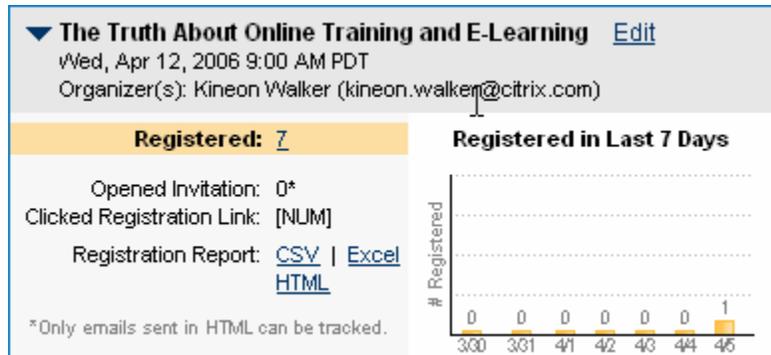
- **Promotion**

This includes identifying the target individuals and organizations to invite to the Webinar, the timing of the initial and subsequent invitations and the incentives that are offered to the Webinar attendees. Our research found that Webinar attendees find the greatest incentive to participate in a Webinar if they are offered a guaranteed gift, such as a Starbucks® gift card.

- **Registrant Tracking**

This is a critical step in order to properly manage the attendance of the Webinar. It is important to remind initial registrants about the Webinar, to send out a second invitation to those who did not respond initially and to tailor the messaging in the invitations to maximize the number of registrants to sign up for the Webinar. Our research found that most Webinar attendees, after they have signed up for an event, prefer to be reminded between one day and a few days before the event. Further, our research found that 20 percent of the people invited to a Webinar actually attend, although this can vary dramatically based the circumstances.

*GoToWebinar tracks registrant data so that users can quickly profile the audience and increase attendance before the Webinar has started.*



*It is very important to engage the audience through polls that solicit attendees' input and then report on the findings of the poll in real time – our research found that there is a mean of 1.6 polls conducted during a typical Webinar.*

- **Customization**

It is important to customize the content of any Webinar in order to closely match the needs of the audience and to make it as relevant as possible based on current events, partner announcements, etc. Customization involves activities like branding the Webinar appropriately, the questions asked on the registration page, asking the right polling questions and surveying Webinar attendees before and after the Webinar.

- **Practice sessions**

Practice sessions are an important part of the Webinar process, since it is critical that all participants are aware of the timing of the various parts of the Webinar, the cues for when to start particular parts of the event, who will take control and pass off control and other aspects. Most Webinar sponsors **conduct** rehearsals with their guest speakers and subject matter experts, while only one-in-seven never or almost never do so.

**Webinar Presentation: Open Early, Start on Time**

A Webinar should typically start about one or two minutes after the time it is scheduled to start in order to allow stragglers to enter the Webinar. It should end on time or slightly before in order to allow participants to attend a meeting immediately after the event and to have time to make it to that meeting. Our research found that the typical Webinar lasts 58 minutes.

It is very important to engage the audience through polls that solicit attendees' input and then report on the findings of the poll in real time – our research found that there is a mean of 1.6 polls conducted during a typical Webinar. One option is to compare the results of the poll with survey results and to draw comparisons about the survey sample and the Webinar poll. In order to do this effectively, it is critical for the Webinar speaker(s) to be able to discuss the results of

the online poll(s) in order to make the Webinar more relevant.

It is important to monitor the audience throughout the Webinar in order to make sure they are engaged and remain interested in the Webinar content. This can be done through the polls mentioned above and allowing attendees to ask questions continually throughout the event. To do this effectively, it is important to have an individual dedicated to responding to questions, if only to respond with a canned "Thank you for your question" type of response. Our research found that about half of Webinar sponsors frequently uses the question-and-answer function in Webinars, while another 40 percent occasionally do so. Above all, it is critical to make sure that the audience stays online through the entire Webinar. This can be accomplished through a combination of engaging guest speakers, appropriate annotation of the Webinar screens and product demos, as well as through the polls and questions discussed above.

The GoToWebinar Dashboard allows presenters to track audience reaction at-a-glance.



Guest speakers are an important component in recruiting audience members for Webinars: our research found that about three out of five Webinar sponsors sees improved attendance rates when including guest speakers in their events.

An audience 'call-to-action' is also important because it provides the next step for sales people, customer service staff and others to interact with prospects, customers, etc. depending on the purpose of the Webinar.

### Webinar Follow-Up

Follow up to a Webinar is also a critically important step for a number of reasons. It is important to analyze who attended the Webinar so that follow-up sales or support calls can be initiated. Follow-up might consist of emails, one-on-one

online sessions, additional Webinars, individual phone calls and other venues for sharing information or answering questions. For example, half of Webinar attendees have requested a newsletter, a sales call or some other follow-up after a Webinar; most Webinar sponsors run post-event surveys among attendees at least occasionally.

▼ <b>The Truth about Online Training and eLearning: What Vendors</b>	
Thu, Sep 8, 2005 4:33 PM PDT, Duration: 27 min	
<b>Attended Live: 400</b>	<b>Attendee Interest Rating Overview</b>
Registered: 500	<b>100</b> highly interested
Attendance Rate: 75%	<b>100</b> moderately interested
Polls Given: 4	<b>200</b> mildly interested
Surveys Submitted: 367	
Performance Report: <a href="#">CSV</a>   <a href="#">Excel</a>	
<b>Viewed Recording: 0</b>	Attendee Report: <a href="#">CSV</a>   <a href="#">Excel</a>

*GoToWebinar automatically generates audience reports and qualifies attendees by their level of interest.*

Recording and posting the Webinar to a Web site is a valuable means of gaining more out of the original Webinar session, allowing registrants who did not attend the session and newcomers to view the content and thereby extend the value of the live session. A Webinar recording can also be a valuable means of soliciting additional feedback, such as running a survey at the conclusion of the viewing session. Half of the Webinars that people attended during 2005 were recorded for later viewing.

## Summary and Conclusions

Webinars are an increasingly important avenue for sharing information, training employees and imparting a wide variety of useful information that can provide significant benefits to an organization of any size:

- **Reduced Length of Sales Cycle**  
Because a Webinar can provide richer and more in-depth information than is possible with a product brochure or other, more traditional means of sharing information, it can reduce the length of the sales cycle by getting prospects up to speed more quickly.
- **Reduced Length of Time for Training Employees**  
Many organizations rely on manuals or other printed materials to train employees. A Webinar, however, can be a much more effective tool because live, visual examples can be demonstrated, questions can be answered in real time, rich media can impart information more effectively than other forms of communication and

an instructor can adapt his or her content "on-the-fly" based on the needs of the audience.

- **Faster Decision-Making**

Just like a Webinar can reduce the length of the sales cycle because it imparts more information more effectively, a Webinar can lead to faster decision-making for very similar reasons.

- **Improved Productivity**

Webinars are an effective means of imparting information in their own right, but their re-use can make instructors, sales people and others who conduct Webinars much more productive. A Webinar that requires several hours to create and host can be re-used literally hundreds or thousands of times.

- **Improved Return on Investment (ROI)**

Webinars offer much better ROI in many cases because they are typically much less costly per lead than trade shows or other in-person events, they cost relatively little to produce and manage, and they can be re-used indefinitely. Plus, Webinars can dramatically reduce labor and out-of-pocket costs because they can replace employee, customer and prospect travel.

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