



VIDEOCONFERENCING

Video conferences are the new conference calls — from one-on-ones, to team meetings, to entire conferences. As people are trying to stay home as much as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, that trend has accelerated dramatically, with companies, organizations and groups across the globe acquainting themselves with a bevy of virtual platforms — Zoom, Google Hangout, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Skype, GoToMeeting. While each platform presents its own plusses and minuses, we have a few universal tips that will help you master whichever one you choose.

Here are some tips as we embrace technology to #KeepTalking.

FIND THE RIGHT MEETING ROOM

You have some great options from which to choose. It's a matter of finding the one that fits your needs. And it's about the one your most comfortable with.

Many of the platforms out there have free options, and many offer tutorials or guided tours. Take advantage of those to test and explore. Investing time in finding the best solution will pay off when your meetings are high-quality.

GO HOLLYWOOD

Some platforms, such as Zoom, give you the ability to replace your background with an image or video. Even if you don't have a green screen!

You can replace your home office — or whatever man cave, basement or closet you are currently using — with any image you want with just of a click of a button.

If a beach background is too casual for your profession, try replacing it with an image of your professional workspace or a stock image of an office. The background may be a conversation piece to launch a meeting, and it might set a more professional tone.

MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SETTING

But if you opt against using a faux background, try to neaten the area around you. Consider what your colleagues and audiences see behind you.

Be sure nothing is interfering in the foreground. Position the camera to find the best angle. Straight-on is usually better than up-the-nose. Do you have a window nearby? Open the curtains and use that natural light. Or flip on the lamp or overhead to add some lighting to your space. Adjust lighting so that it's somewhere between darkness and stark brightness as you might for an in-person meeting. It sets a tone just as well for online versions.

Use your inner Scorsese and take a minute to adjust the frame. Find an interesting perspective. Maybe you're situated to the left or to the right. Maybe adding height to your laptop helps. It might seem like an afterthought, but how you are situated on screen helps others engage with you and listen to you.

Also – continue to pay attention to how you dress. When we're all at home, it's understandable if we're dressed a bit more casually. But for a business meeting, take some time to prepare. Continue to dress professionally so that clients know you're still operating professionally. And, yes, that means showering every now and then.

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GRAB THE MIC

Laptops, tablets and smart phones most often come with quality audio functions, allowing people to hear you clearly with during a chat or meeting as long as you have a solid connection.

But if you happen to have a mic — or if you're willing to invest in one — use it. Your audio quality will increase, and especially if you're leading the discussion, the quality of conversation will likely go up.

A device such as Blue Snowball — often employed for podcasts — is cost-effective and available on Amazon. Spend a few extra bucks on an accessory pack to get the most out of your investment. And again, spend some time testing the equipment so you're good to roll when the meeting begins.

ENGAGE

The more people are involved in an online meeting, the smaller the windows get, making it easier for some participants to stay quiet or tune out entirely.

Toss questions around to all your participants. Encourage discussions. Request input from someone who hasn't spoken in a while.

When you aren't physically in a room with others during a meeting, it's easier to disengage and drift away. Reel them in by simply making sure they speak.

SHARE YOUR SCREEN

Effectively sharing PowerPoint presentations, video content and colorful data sheets are ways to keep a meeting interesting and give participants something to look at other than, well, a bunch of faces.

Most platforms allow you to share your screen and thereby share content that supports your topic and clarifies information.

But again, test it and make sure it's working smoothly prior to a meeting. Be certain any audio streams well within the platform and be proficient with switching in and out.

MAINTAIN ORDER

You may not need to employ Robert's Rules of Order. After all, online meetings tend to lean more casual than in-person meetings might.

Still, agendas help, and they're easy to share electronically and even within the meetings themselves. It's up to meeting leaders to help meetings stay on track.

Unless you're hosting an online happy hour – which, don't get us wrong, is a great idea — avoid a free-for-all by providing some direction.

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