

# *Webcasting*

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## **Author's Bio:**

Caro Segal is the Director of Technology and Business Development at you-niversity. You-niversity develops webcast software and provides webcasting services for organizations and associations. Mr. Segal has 20 years of instructional design experience as project manager at various companies, managing large CBT, e-learning, and software projects.

## **Abstract:**

For the past five years, the webcast industry has been evolving to meet the needs of the organizations it serves. Current webcasting is based on a robust technology delivering a vivid and engaging experience. Through market proliferation and technology improvements, a significant decrease in webcasting costs occurred. Prominent organizations are already implementing this exciting technology for prime time events. With you-niversity, you can manage the production of almost any type of webcast.

## **You-niversity webcasting**

Based on 16 years of experience, you-niversity has been offering webcasting solutions since 1999. You-niversity webcast software supports the entire webcasting production cycle, from marketing and sales to post-production and maintenance. You-niversity offers hundreds of options and production templates, so you can deliver one of the best viewing experiences on the Web today. Start now, familiarize your members, and then scale-up to attract new audiences!

## **Demystifying webcasting systems**

Legacy Webcasting systems record and deliver live events over the Internet, much the same way that television broadcasts programs. Attendees use their Internet-connected personal computers (PCs) to view the recordings of these events. The basic presentation includes the audio and visual of a lecturer displayed in a window on your computer.

Current webcasting goes further by producing a virtual conference room and applying interactive tools in the presentation. It enhances the visuals by incorporating a robust, multi-dimensional presentation with numerous communication features, such as large and clear slides; information about the program presented as Web links, downloadable files, real-time quotes, and statistics; networking amongst attendees; questions to the presenter; audience feedback; an on-screen notebook to accompany slides; and online surveys.

## **What types of events can be webcast?**

Webcast systems are an excellent way to deliver events possessing one or more of the following characteristics:

- There is a presenter speaking in front of a live audience.
- There is a panel discussion featuring experts.
- There is an online event to deliver training or information.
- Presentation materials such as slides, graphics, etc. are used.
- The event is a training or information-assimilating event.

By considering these characteristics, you will find the following types of events to be good candidates for a webcast:

- Board meetings, annual meetings, and investors meetings
- Conferences, seminars, workshops, and symposia
- Product launches, VARs training, customer training, and product support
- Compliance courses and certification programs
- Messages from leadership
- Educational videos, which may be converted to an Internet-ready format

## **Webcasting accommodates your organization's needs**

Distribution of information delivery or training is often the most important service of your organization. The main reason for the interest in webcasting is that it creates an interactive environment for members and a business model for organizations. Current webcasting is versatile and dynamic, because it combines the always-accessible attribute of the Web with the bells and whistles of broadcast media. The vibrant quality of webcasting holds the user's attention in a familiar format. It also helps organizations deliver training and critical information to their members or target audiences on demand, thereby providing greater exposure and better service, which helps grow your attendees' satisfaction.

## **Maximize your market**

You may have already recognized webcasting as a possible solution for reaching larger audiences. Online exposure is rapidly gaining ground. More than 35% of the Fortune 5000 companies are using webcasting technology, and the same statistics apply to non-profit organizations. You can and probably want to tap into this market.

## **Webcasting also accommodates your audience's needs**

By properly implementing webcasting, you will have the potential to attract new members to your information resources:

- Professionals are very busy and want the convenience of always-available, easily-accessible information and training delivered in a familiar format. Recordings of webcasts are available 24x7, as narrated PowerPoint™ presentations.
- While the individuals may be located across the country and around the globe, webcasting condenses geography and promotes networking.

- By their very nature, large conferences and annual meetings preclude attendees from participating in all the concurrent sessions. Webcasting increases exposure for lecturers, while allowing attendees to view those sessions they have missed.
- Your recorded webcasts will be the basis of a Web-based learning center (or information center), allowing attendees the flexibility to learn at their leisure and thus, vastly increasing traffic to your Web site, where you promote your other products and services.
- Members with travel restrictions and limited financial resources welcome webcasting over the Internet as an affordable alternative.
- Current webcasting emphasizes interactivity, resulting in a more appealing and attractive Web site. Research by Nielsen/NetRatings (a prominent Internet audience measurement company) states that a majority of Internet users (>75%) now watch and listen to streaming media.

## **How is live content delivered over the Internet?**

The technology of webcasting usually uses *streaming*. It streams the audio, the video and other information from a network of servers directly to each attendee's computer via the Internet. Actually accessing a webcast is similar to accessing a link (or URL) in your browser – you simply click on a link, and a window pops up displaying the visual of the lecturer synchronized with the PowerPoint™ slides and the interactive controls.

## **Simultaneous connection types**

It is therefore important to note that different attendees have different computer systems, and current webcast systems use smart technologies that automatically detect the end-user's Internet capabilities whether a slow dialup modem or fast broadband connection (e.g. DSL, cable, T1). Through these capabilities, webcast systems work simultaneously over a range of Internet connections serving low-end modem users, as well as broadband institutional users. Employing this type of system will help you keep all of your members happy.

## **How are slides delivered over the Internet?**

The webcasting software usually converts Microsoft PowerPoint™ slides into a Web-ready format. It is therefore important to apply a conversion process that preserves clarity and is accurate. Slides should be converted into HTML (the standard Web protocol). This ensures that the conversion process preserves animations and slide transitions built into the PowerPoint™ presentation. It also means that small print fonts and charts will properly zoom out when attendees watch slides on the entire screen. Timing is also of the essence. Current webcast software does not require you to have the slides ready before the event starts. Slides can be 'captured' as they are being presented or converted just minutes before the event's start.

## **Establishing a webcast service to deliver your content**

While some large organizations with the proper IT infrastructure may choose to license software and manage a webcast service in-house, most associations outsource webcasting services.

Be sure to work with a webcasting provider backed by a track record of several years and a commitment to education, as well as research and development to ensure that your services remain state-of-the-art. In selecting your partner, find someone who will advise you, help train your faculty, and ensure the maximum exposure of your content.

## **Saving money with webcasting**

Webcasting reuses existing content; thus, it has the potential to save without incurring additional expenses on defining, approving, and creating new content. There are several ways an organization can save money by employing a webcasting service. When combined, the savings turn into a significant bottom-line figure:

1. **Save travel dollars:** With webcasting, you save the attendees' travel expenses, the presenter's travel expenses, or both.
2. **Save travel time:** Time is money, and time spent on travel is time off business. Webcasting saves that spent time, increasing productivity.
3. **Save by delivering your information in a timely manner:** Webcasting will allow you to train geographically-disperse attendees all at once. This will save you time-to-market, increasing your business opportunities.
4. **Save on printing materials:** With webcasting, you provide all of your materials in electronic format; thus, you save the printing costs. Printing costs are comprised of both the direct costs and the indirect costs of managing the printing process.
5. **Save spent business hours:** On-demand webcasts are available 24x7 and can be watched in segments. Busy professionals view them during their after-work hours, saving prime business time. This saves money by increasing productivity.
6. **Save on lost training days:** Sick leave, urgent business conditions, personal issues, and other unexpected circumstances cause the loss of valuable training days (that cannot otherwise be repeated). On-demand webcasting saves these costs, allowing everybody to participate on their own schedule.
7. **Save on Web site development:** A carefully-constructed webcast can cost less than posting the same information in a Web format. It also is easier to maintain that information, contributing to more savings.

8. Save on phone costs: An over-the-Web webcast saves you your toll-free teleconference costs.

## **Introducing a new revenue stream**

With webcasting, the Internet provides a solution to the increasing demand to grow revenue sources. There are several ways an organization can generate revenues from webcasting. We offer five approaches so that you may consider those that would work best for your organization:

1. Registration to virtual meeting: The first obvious choice is to charge online attendees a fee for viewing the recorded archives of your events.
2. Pay-per-view: Organizations can charge members and non-members a fee for access to individual webcasts on the organization's Web site. This process can be accommodated either through an existing e-commerce center on your Web site or through the webcast lobby page.
3. Educational grants. When your high-quality content is coupled with state-of-the-art "educasting" and made accessible for 6-12 months, you offer the perfect environment to attract sponsors.
4. Training: Certification and compliance courses can reach wider audiences via the Internet. Your organization may even charge a premium for the convenience of the online training, as participants are spared typical travel expenses.
5. Subscriptions: In an approach similar to that used for online journals, you may choose to make monthly programs available for an annual subscription rate.

## **An Example**

Let's look now at an example of revenues generated from registration to a virtual meeting. Say a non-profit organization has 20,000 members, of which about 50% are attending its annual meeting and paying the \$300 registration fee plus travel expenses. Now let's assume that out of the 10,000 members that do not show up, a mere 2.5% will pay the same fee (and will save the travel expenses) to have access to the archived sessions. This alone will bring in an additional income of \$75,000 (more than sufficient to cover the costs for the webcasting services). Of course, additional non-member online attendees may even double this amount.

You can imagine the possibilities if we looked at the other four means of revenue generation that I discussed earlier. Can you afford to take the risk of ignoring these opportunities?

## Cost considerations

While costs certainly will vary amongst vendors, there are several primary components that are factored into the basic cost:

- Number of viewers to the webcast
- Sophistication of the technology employed
- Level of customer service

A live video and audio production costs more than an archived one, due to additional on-site personnel and equipment. For instance, a Webcast using a studio setting for one hour can cost \$1,000 to \$2,500, while a one-day shoot at an off-site location with a camera crew and production team usually ranges from \$3,000 to \$12,000 (based on a live audience of 100-200 attendees and an archive period of 6 months with about 200 views per month). How can you reduce the costs? A do-it-yourself webcast is a great way to save money. Producing a small- to medium-sized event is not difficult. A simple yet vivid audio-slides production can be accomplished with casual office equipment (computer, Internet connection, headphones, and/or a phone line). Volume is another way to save money. Save the set-up costs by committing to more than one event.

## Choosing a webcasting provider

Choosing a webcasting provider may be crucial for the success of your project. Search for a provider that has both wide technical background and extensive presentation experience. Providers lacking experience in presentational design might find it difficult to educate you about the best choices you should make.

The following checklist will help you while searching for providers:

- Does the provider offer a full end-to-end turnkey solution? In other words, does it provide all aspects of the webcasting?
- Does the technology support both slow and fast Internet connections? In other words, does it support multiple bandwidths? Does it automatically detect end-user bandwidth? Does the support apply to the slides as well?
- Are there interactive features that allow for two-way communication in both live and recorded webcasts? In other words, will the attendees be able to ask questions, get feedback, participate in discussion groups, post messages to bulletin boards, use live chat, etc.?
- If your webcast includes slides: How compatible is the webcast software with PowerPoint™? Does it preserve animations built into your slides? Does it convert slides into HTML (JPEG conversations are not adequate, because your small print fonts will be hard to read, and slides will show fuzzy when enlarged by attendees)? Does it allow for last-minute conversions of slides? Can it 'capture' the slides from the presenter's computer and deliver them over the Internet in a transparent process?

- Can it incorporate a media-rich environment, such as large and clear slides, resources and links to information, simulated slide pointers, polling, evaluation forms, and live chat?
- Can you customize the webcast interface to include messages, links to your Web site, and artwork?
- Are there demonstrations, which clearly exemplify the provider's final product?
- Does the webcasting company provide registration and billing support?

## **Choosing a webcast system:**

### **For scalability**

Look for a system that will support different types of webcasts, whether they are live, real-time delivery of events or online archives. Also of importance is the delivery media. Look for a system that is able to augment the Internet delivery with CD-ROMs or DVDs, and other types of off-line media.

### **For multi-channel communication**

Look for interactive systems. Allow your attendees to interact, and many will come back again and again to view your archives. Questions, discussion groups, bulletin boards, polls, and live chat will make your audience proactive and happy with the materials you provide.

### **For conference room replication**

Attendees are familiar with presentations in conference rooms. Look for systems that replicate this experience via the Internet. The easier and more familiar it will be on the attendee side to participate, the more he would like to view your recordings. For example, taking notes is a common activity in conference rooms; therefore, allow your attendees to take notes on-screen and save them on their local computer.

### **Catering to audiences with different bandwidth**

Look for systems that will allow simultaneous delivery for low and high bandwidths. A system that is capable of detecting your computer's capability and thereby adjusting to deliver audio-only or audio with video will provide for a larger audience. Attendees who have high bandwidth will get the full impact of the recorded event, while those with modems will still be able to access the narrated slides.

## **You-niversity's involvement in the webcasting industry**

With over 16 years accumulated experience,, we have established ourselves as an industry leader, and we are now a recognized and recommended webcasting vendor. You-niversity specializes in producing webcasting for associations and organizations. We provide state-of-the-art webcast software featuring a robust yet user-friendly environment. Our healthcare division, IACME, sub-specializes in the production of webcasting and online CME programs for healthcare organizations. Our service team will record the lectures and presentations from your events or will train you on how to do it yourself. You-niversity's webcast is complete with audio, video, slides, and polls, as well as interactive features, which bring your content to life.

For further information, contact Caro Segal, Director of Technology and Business Development at (703) 351-5064, or e-mail [caros@you-niversity.com](mailto:caros@you-niversity.com). You are also invited to pay us a virtual visit at [www.you-niversity.com](http://www.you-niversity.com).