

Mastering the Webcast Video Shoot

A Technical Note from MediaPlatform

Shooting video for a webcast is similar to making a conventional video, but with a few key differences. Professional media producers tasked with creating high impact webcasts should be aware of these differences and factor them into the production process. This technical note is intended to give you a brief overview of some of the challenges you will face in shooting video for a webcast and how to overcome them.

Small Images, Big Expectations

Movie producers often poke fun at video for being the “small screen.” Well, webcasts can be considered the “smaller screen.” While a standard video plays on a screen of 640x480 pixels or larger, a webcast typically streams an image that is just 320x240. This size difference has several implications for the way you compose your frame and arrange your presenter:

- **Keep it simple** – Though watching a “talking head” may be a little dull, unfortunately you can’t display much more than that on such a small screen. You can however, work with your presenter to modulate his or her voice and to animate facial expressions to make the presentation as engaging as possible.
- **Get close** – With a small screen, a wide shot of your presenter will be pixilated when it’s streamed at such a small resolution. As the images below show, what looks good in the viewfinder might create a sub-optimal effect in a webcast. It’s better to keep the shot tight and focused on just the presenter.
- **Light for the small screen:** Lighting for a webcast video is similar to regular video shoots, but with an even greater emphasis on soft and even illumination. Video compression and a small screen size can amplify hot spots and shadows, often adding pixilated artifacts. More diffusion and soft light effects should be utilized than for a regular video shoot.



What you see in the viewfinder



What the audience might see

Compression is another factor that needs to be strongly considered in a webcast video shoot. Like it or not, some of your viewers will see the video image in a highly compressed form. For example, the image on the left represents the kind of high definition, balanced view you might see when you look at your presenter through the camera lens. However, once the signal has been compressed and streamed, especially to accommodate low bandwidth remote locations, the viewer might see an image that looks more like the frame on the right. The color may be flattened or changed, and the image might look a slightly pixilated and generally lower in quality.



What you see in the viewfinder



What the audience might see

Keep Camera Movements to a Minimum

A recommended best practice for webcast video shoots is to avoid panning, zooming, and handheld recording. When the camera moves, the pixels in the video stream change rapidly, usually more rapidly than the compression can handle. As a result, you can get odd-looking artifacts that will mar the professional effect you are trying to achieve. In general, it's best to lock your camera down on a tripod to maintain a consistent distance and shot frame.

Stick with Plain Backgrounds

Backgrounds that are too patterned or textured will look strange and pixilated when compressed. Obviously, you don't want your webcast to look like an archaic newscast, so you should exercise the best practice of keeping the background simple and neutral in visual terms. Muted colors and simple designs are ideal. If your background is full of details and distractions, it's best to deliberately throw it out of focus using a long lens. To do this, simply zoom in, making the lens long, and focus solely on the presenter in the foreground. The background will then become soft and unfocused, thereby making it less distracting once compressed.

Think Through the Complete Template Presentation

Webcasting puts the video image into a distinct graphic layout, usually within a special player. The look and feel of that player can have either a positive or negative impact on the appearance of the video image. It's important therefore, to consider how the player is going to affect the video image when you shoot for a webcast. As the images below illustrate, there can be a significant variation in color and design between templates for a webcast. In the template on the left, the slide design is overly complicated and creates a distraction from the video. On the right, we see a simplified color scheme and design reflected in the video and slides which creates a more balanced effect. As the media producer, it's important to have input in the design of the PowerPoint slides being used in the webcast, as they are effectively the "co-star" of the show.



Prepare Your Presenter

This may seem obvious, but with a webcast you are often working with a presenter who is not experienced in performing live and in front of a camera. Although this is usually the case, the presenter is still expected to perform the way a professional newscaster would. In order to ensure that your presenter is as comfortable in front of the camera as possible, take the time to discuss the entire process of executing the webcast video shoot from start to finish. This would include reviewing the script, rehearsing with the teleprompter, undersanding camera placement and so forth.



In addition to having your presenter be mentally prepared, makeup and wardrobe is also an important part of the process. For some presenters, the webcast is a significant event in their professional life as many of their peers will see them on camera. They want to look their best, yet they might still feel uncomfortable or self-conscious.

Investing in a makeup professional or stylist who understands how a webcast video can magnify appearance flaws like shiny skin or wrinkles is an important asset for the performer and the overall success of the webcast.

Use a Teleprompter

Some corporate presenters can improvise well or are completely capable of memorizing long speeches. For most people however, a teleprompter is a highly useful aid in contributing to a flawless webcast. Teleprompters are fairly inexpensive to rent at around \$500 per day, or one can be purchased for about \$1500. You can also purchase teleprompter software which is available for less than \$250 (see <http://www.script-q.com/>). The teleprompter allows the presenter to look right into the camera lens and speak confidently as though they are having a conversation with another person. This helps the presenter appear more natural and poised and can contribute to the overall success of the webcast.

Audio Counts!

Finally, one of the most decisive factors that can determine the success of your webcast video shoot will be the quality of your audio. Because the image is so small and compressed, most viewers won't be able to engage in intuitive lip reading like they do when watching TV. High quality audio then, is absolutely essential in delivering a clear message. The microphone needs to be checked for quality and the placement needs to maximize clarity and comprehensibility of the speaker's voice. Since the audio signal can also be compressed in the webcasting process, it's perfectly acceptable to exaggerate and amplify the audio quality at the video capture stage.

These elements are intended to help you, the webcast producer, master the process of the webcast video shoot. If you have any additional questions about webcast video production, we'd love to help you make your webcast look as good as possible. Contact us at info@mediaplatform.com

About MediaPlatform, Inc.

MediaPlatform, Inc. (formerly IVT) delivers best-in-class webcasting and media management technology to global enterprises and digital media producers. MediaPlatform's webcasting software enables high-impact presentations for lead generation, corporate communications and training. The company offers organizations the ability to take advantage of scalable cloud-based computing, as well as on-premises deployment, to present and manage rich media. With media management tools built on its platform, the company helps clients derive long term archive value from their investment in media content.

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