

Tips For Making Virtual Meetings Easier For Participants

Discussion created by **Sheila LeGeros** on 8/20/2009 10:53 AM

[Sheila LeGeros](#)

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I am starting this discussion so that we can share with each other our tips for making virtual meetings easier for participants.

One aspect of virtual meetings I have found very challenging is that busy participants don't save or even read the email that contains all of the login information for a conference call. They call in right at the meeting start time, find out they were supposed to log-in, and become frustrated searching amongst their hundreds of emails for the right message. They are flustered before the call even begins.

Here is one tip to help -- there are several tools, which convert a long URL, link to a nice short link. By converting the URL to a short, readable link, I don't have to send participants to hunt down an email, I can read the link right over the telephone.

I have been using SNURL, and find it to be an easy-to-use tool for snipping URL's. I can name and save my URL's, and I can wave my cursor over the file name to get a thumbnail image of the URL destination.

<http://snurl.com/>

What tips would you like to share to make virtual meetings easier and less stressful for participants?

[Wayne Nelson](#)

Posted by **Wayne Nelson** on 8/20/2009 11:23 AM

1. I like to format the instructions message myself; so they are comprehensive, simple and easy to read. The messages that are auto generated are often not easy to read. Information is often too sparse. I find them quite unhelpful, in general.

2. I think at least 2 messages are often needed.

A) The first message goes out a couple weeks before the event. It needs to include any pre-meeting information and assignments for preparation as well as clear instructions for connection and tech orientation. Each part of the message

needs a clear heading and all sections need to be similar in structure.

B) The second message goes out a day before the event. Not 2 days, because it can be forgotten, and not on the meeting day itself, because the receiver may be in a different place. This message needs to be concise and well formatted with very clear instructions. A shortened URL may be helpful. A message that is in the immediate memory and near the top of their inbox is pretty effective.

3. I also think it is helpful to ask participants to arrive at the virtual meeting space prior to the actual start of the meeting content. Participants need to know that this is critical to an effective virtual meeting. I find it quite disrespectful when people consistently come in late, puffing and panting and have no idea of where they are or what to do. They demand that the whole group pay attention to them. I play solitaire or check email in another window as a way of biting my tongue.

In most synchronous virtual meetings, the first part of the meeting is taken up with connection and orientation issues. This section needs to be part of the meeting design and time plan. If it is not, that time will be taken up with these things anyway and participants who are there on time and know their way around will be frustrated.

4. It is also helpful to either hold an orientation session ahead of the meeting or provide a way for participants to explore the interface on their own prior to the meeting. I do this myself prior to most online events and it really helps. I know what to look for, where I am and have an idea of what will happen.

W

Last edited by [Wayne Nelson](#) on 8/20/2009 11:38 AM

[Jo Nelson](#)

Posted by [Jo Nelson](#) on 8/24/2009 9:25 AM

Here are some icebreakers I copied from an Elluminate LearnCentral discussion. Some of these may also apply to other virtual meeting tools.

Icebreakers to use in Elluminate Live!

1. Name that Movie - use "legal" multimedia clips, web tour, or place an image on the

whiteboard!

2. Bingo - object oriented whiteboard is perfect for this! Use the filled in shape tools as markers!
3. Simon Says - turn on that webcam and have fun!! Or use the whiteboard and track who follows Simon's rules and who doesn't!
4. Pictionary - another great use of the whiteboard - the moderator can private message the item to draw to the students!
5. Peer interviews - break up into pairs in breakout rooms and do the traditional 'get to know you' interview - head back to the main room and introduce your new friend!
6. Photo scavenger hunt - Pick a theme and drag those pictures to the whiteboard - can be an individual or team activity!
7. What kind of animal/sport/element/etc.? - Place a variety of pictures on the whiteboard (ex. monkey, lion, puppy, fish) and have the students mark which one is most like them. They can explain their answer on chat or audio
8. "Shy Shannon sings songs softly" - describe yourself with alliteration - either typed/written on the whiteboard/chat or say it out loud!

[Jo Nelson](#)

Posted by [Jo Nelson](#) on 8/24/2009 9:33 AM

Last week I hosted my siblings on an Elluminate meeting. I discovered that each of them had different challenges getting on line and using the space. I spent about an hour with each. (My siblings range in age from 58 to 73, so these are not digital natives!)

One learning is that it is a good idea to have a "test meeting" with each participant the first time, so you can make sure they can get on and that they see how to use the space.

I have set up a drop-in meeting for doing a test run with new participants, either individually or with a group. And I have devised a sentence to add to the invitation, based on my experience.

"You will need to have the application Java 6 installed on your computer in order to access the meeting. Many computers have it already. If you get an error message

when you click the link, go to the Java.com website and go to the download section. If you need it, it will download and you will need to find the java.exe file and install it. Close your browser, open it again, and try the link again."

I found that having them on a Skype call while they are clicking the link to enter and encountering all the various messages is a good idea. As soon as they are in the meeting and find the mike button, you can hang up the Skype.

Jo

[Sheila LeGeros](#)

Posted by **Sheila LeGeros** on 8/24/2009 2:11 PM

Hi Jo,

Glad to hear you're experimenting with Elluminate. The issues you encountered are two of my chief concerns with Elluminate -- it takes quite a bit of handholding and educating to get a person ready to work in it, plus the downloading.

Love the virtual icebreakers you posted -- those are great.

Catherine and I are currently exploring Facilitatepro.com. I totally love it in that it has a very low learning curve for participants, and nothing to download -- just go to the internet. I'm trying to arrange another demo with them, and then if we like it, I'd like to arrange a demo for the whole group.

Sheila