

It's Time for Your Close-up!

Virtual Media Survival Guide

We are living in a high-tech, camera-ready age. FaceTime has replaced face-to-face, GoToMeeting is the new way to go to a meeting, and instead of zooming out to a media interview, the interview is being held on Zoom or another virtual meeting platform.

In virtual standard time, “making do” won’t make it. It’s critical to prepare key spokespeople to deliver a high-quality virtual experience to prepare you so you can handle it like a pro. Get the picture? This Virtual Media Survival Guide will ensure that you do.

Location, location

Whether at the office or home—especially at home—be prepared with the right equipment and a professional-looking personal “broadcast studio.” Here’s what you’ll need to keep the focus on you and your message.

- **A strong internet connection.** This will ensure your audio and video will not be choppy.
- **A quality webcam.** External cameras seem to provide better images and more flexible placement. They’re often equipped with a mic as well, which can improve your audio.
- **Microphone.** Your computer’s internal microphone and speakers may be fine, but you’ll likely find better quality with an external mic. Keep your headphones or airpods ready, too. The key is to isolate your voice and reduce echo during the back and forth. Test your options beforehand to assess the best quality, and “mute” your microphone when not talking.
- **Lighting.** Face your light source. Set up in a room with plenty of natural light, where you can face a window. If that is unavailable, position a desk lamp in front of you, out of view of the camera, so you have a warm light on your face. Never position yourself with a window or bright light directly behind you, as it will turn you into a silhouette.
- **Camera angle.** For the best results, position the camera face-to-face with you, like a mirror on the wall. If needed, elevate your device by using books or anything sturdy enough not to wobble. People often place their camera too low, resulting in an awkward and unflattering camera angle. Connect with your participants by looking directly at the camera lens when you are speaking—not the screen!
- **Screen view.** Most video platforms provide a view of event slides and a window that allows you to look at your notes, the next slide, the chat window or the attendees. Take the time—ahead of your meeting—to make your screen work for you, so you stay on track and have a commanding view.
- **Background.** Do a little staging to provide a glimpse of “the person behind the message.” Many people like to show off their home or office with a tasteful book collection, plant or photos in the background. Just make sure your background is clean, professional and free of anything in camera view that could be considered distracting, odd or inappropriate by others. You may also

want to consider a “green screen” backdrop where you can utilize a digital image or company branding.

- **Dress for success and the audience.** Your attire should be clean, professional and reflective of your job and organization, and your hair should be well-groomed. Business/casual business attire never gets old. Wear something that contrasts with your background so you don’t blend in—solid colors and deeply saturated “jewel tones” remain the best bet. Avoid busy patterns, which may strobe the camera and be distracting. The focus should be on you and your message, not your wardrobe.

Prepare and Practice: Your Pre-Meeting Checklist

Create a checklist and run through it before any virtual session. Don’t assume you’ve got it all covered.

- Reboot your computer to ensure top performance.
- Check your internet connection.
- Shut down apps, programs and anything that is disruptive.
- Close documents or on-screen materials you don’t want others to see.
- Silence phones and other audible equipment.
- Set up and adjust lighting.
- Connect your external camera and mic.
- Tidy up your background.
- Clear your area of pets, family, others who are not necessary for your event.

Content and Delivery

Virtual meetings and presentations can be productive, but can also quickly turn distracting. The tasks that make for a successful in-person meeting are even more critical when you meet virtually.

- Don’t invite the world; think about who needs to be invited in order to balance covering your topic thoroughly with encouraging participation.
- Set and send an agenda to attendees well in advance so they’re prepared.
- A little small talk is OK, but get down to business after brief “housekeeping” instructions.
- Make your remarks tight and clear, and focus on what you want the participants to know, feel and do.
- If you are making a presentation, add narrative and context to all slides and data presented, break it up with questions or snap polls to avoid “death by PowerPoint.”
- Create a personal connection. Picture the people you are talking to as you look at that camera lens.
- Maintain your energy—cameras are notorious for sapping energy, and they show it if you’re tired or distracted.
- Keep on track. Sustain a steady, deliberate pace to avoid “dead air.”
- Moderate the discussion so that everyone has the chance to speak, and take a breath before changing topics.
- Lastly, send a meeting recap via email to all attendees.

Got the Picture? Relax and Be You!

Now you're ready for your close-up! So project confidence, relax—and *smile*. Smiling triggers changes to the tone of your voice, so let them see—and hear—you smile. Your tone will pack a strong punch on how your audience perceives you and what you have to say. Even if your topic is serious or somber, you can find the right smile to project relaxed sincerity.

Communicating effectively under these new rules of engagement will ensure that you project a professional presence and make the best use of the new virtual meeting medium.

Questions? Comments? We've got you! Call us at Sullivan & LeShane Public Relations, Inc. (860-560-0001; bflaherty@ctpr.com, dtapper@ctpr.com or czaccaro@ctpr.com)