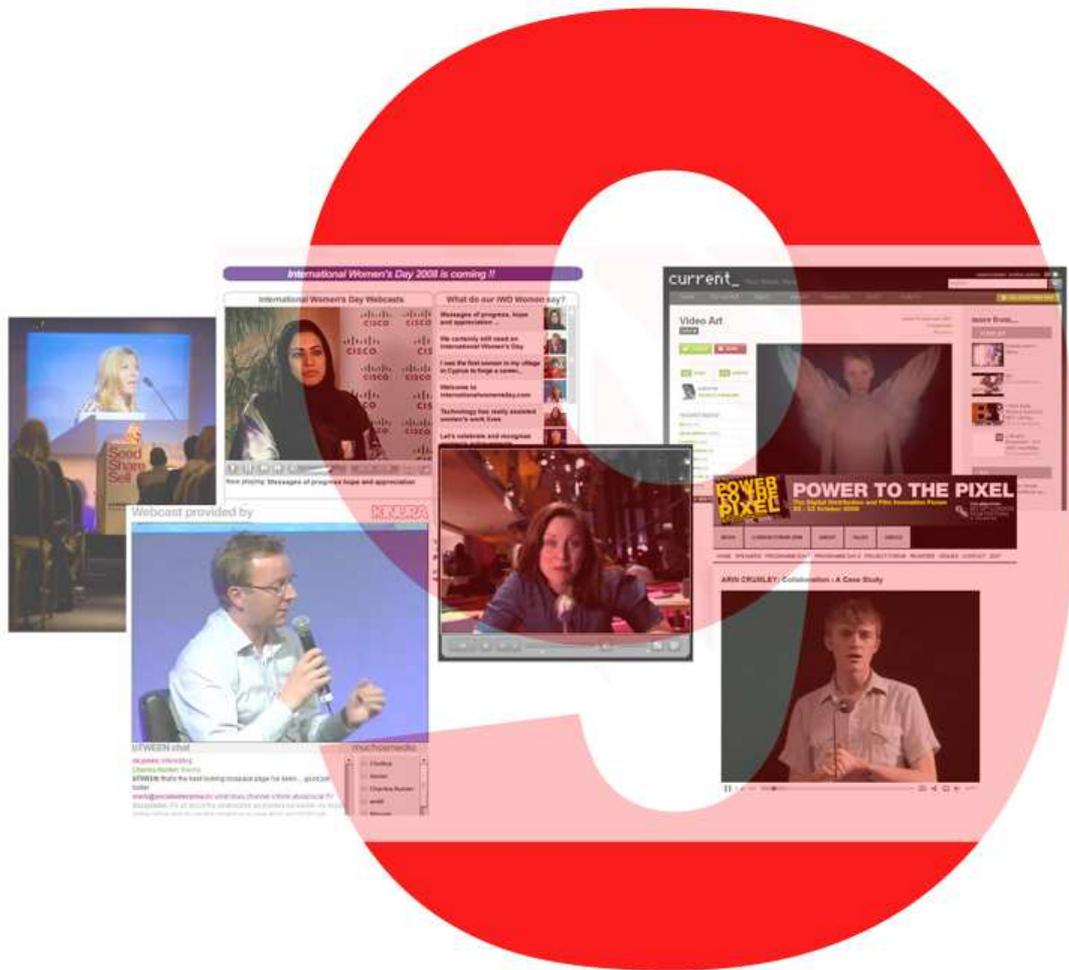


9 Things You Need to Know About Webcasting & Webinars

By Sarah Platt, web video communications expert/UK Director of Kinura Web Video



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1. Webcast or 'webinar' might mean different things to different people

If you're thinking about broadcasting an event on the web, be clear about *why* you are doing it, *who* you want to watch it, *how* you will promote it and *what* needs to be delivered around your web event to make it successful and worthwhile.

A webcast is usually understood to be a live online video broadcast, but it could be audio and slides only. It could be a video message from a remote speaker streamed into a conference you are holding, or even a pre-recorded video on a page with a live chat room, slides and downloadable assets. Beyond the audio or video stream you can now add any number of collaborative or interactive elements so it makes sense to be clear about your goals. If you're thinking about communicating via a web broadcast, take a step back and think about how you can get the most of it

2. Know your connectivity

For a quality video stream, the place you are streaming from ideally needs a dedicated broadband line with a minimum of 1MB upstream. If this means nothing to you then don't worry too much as your webcasting supplier should deal with IT issues and handle all the connectivity testing, etc. But at the same time, when scoping out the perfect venue for your event, it's worthwhile getting written confirmation that they can supply the level of connectivity you need.

A lot of business broadband lines are 'contended' which means they are shared by many of the ISP's customers. They may be advertised as 8MEG but on testing the upstream connectivity, you may find the reality is more like 300kbps, which isn't great for webcasting. You can (roughly) test the speed of a line using a site like www.speedtest.net.

Golden rule: The more bandwidth the better the stream!

One other consideration here is your audience's bandwidth. Most individual users will be fine receiving a stream at 300k upwards these days, but if many people from one organisation want to view at the same time it's better to set up a screen or a few computers dedicated to watching the webcast, otherwise the corporate network might creak at the seams!

3. Make an impact – consider your video and graphics sources well in advance.

Attention spans are short. The more lively you can make the message you're delivering the better. At live events it's very straightforward to mix in PowerPoint slides, video clips or anything your speakers are showing on screen as part of their presentations. Filming the screen is not the best option, as the quality will suffer, so taking a feed from the speaker's laptop into a vision mixer is the best bet. You should also think about your branding for within the video window. Pre-roll graphics can be displayed with your logo (or sponsors logos), and you should also think about messages to be displayed during any breaks in the live stream, and a message to be displayed after the event has finished.

4. Get it Watched: Advertise and Promote Your Event

Many people think of webcasting as an add-on to an existing event rather than as an opportunity in its own right for online PR or direct marketing to their end users. Advertising the event in advance via your own mailing lists, intranet and web pages is obvious, but have you thought about asking media partners and bloggers if they want to embed the webcast player on their site? You could also use social networking sites to create a presence for your online event. By doing this, people can create their own profiles, get reminders and continue the conversation. Ning (<http://www.ning.com>) is a good one. And of course there's Facebook, LinkedIn and a host of other web 2.0 and networking platforms to exploit.

The earlier you can promote your event the better. If your event has a very specific audience, you could consider an advert in a relevant magazine or on a trade website. It's also worthwhile thinking about any partners with real venues where they could set up a screen for people to watch the event. For example, if you are webcasting a conference about graduate careers, why not ask universities and key HR departments if they want to show it in their offices around the world? Some companies have linked up with big screens in cities or invited arts and community centres to set up screens and participate remotely. Think about the possibilities. It's pretty exciting!

5. Make it Interactive

As well as thinking about offering options to download further information, email the speaker or send messages via live chat, you should make sure your speakers address the online audience as well as those attending the real event. It's simple to set up a printer or screen to show questions that are being sent in so that people online have just as much opportunity to contribute as people sitting in the audience. You could even email people to ask if they want to send a question in advance, and then they're more likely to tune in and see if their question was selected.

Live chat rooms can be moderated if you have any worries about rogue elements posting offensive or irrelevant comments. So go for it –talk to your online audience and get them talking to each other.

6. Track it. Find out who's watching

Just as with any website, you should get statistics showing how many people tune in to your event. With video streamed from a 'proper' streaming server network, you should also get streaming stats for any videos made available to end-users.

If you want to get some marketing data it is straightforward to add an email sign in option before people can view the stream. There's an argument this could put some people off, but if you have something worthwhile to communicate and are talking to the right audience, it's likely they won't mind being kept informed. You can also use RSS to send event reminders or updates.

7. Get Your Web, Video Production And Webcasting Team Talking

If you have a web agency or in-house web team, an external video crew and a webcasting company all involved, it's essential they all know what the other party needs. Then there is also potentially IT, AV and front-of-house staff at a venue to consider. It's sensible to get your teams talking to each other as soon as you decide to produce a webcast. Some things can be set up in advance, like pages to hold the archives once the event is over. Think through the process and communicate how you see it all working to everyone involved.

8. Do Your Research. Look at what others are doing (and not doing) well.

You can now choose to search Google for video results only, so it's worth spending a bit of time exploring what others in your sector are doing. If no one else is webcasting you could have an angle for a press release, and if they are, then you can see what you could do better. There are a few 'streaming industry' news and information resources out there, like www.streamingmedia.com and Chinwag's webTV list (<http://www.chinwag.com/lists/uk-webtv>), but just a general Google search will probably turn up some interesting links. This seems to be the right point to mention the Kinura blog – written by the author of the document you're reading. We really do hope you find it useful. www.kinura.com/blog

If you are using an external webcasting company, ask them what their other clients have done and if they have any suggestions.

9. Think how you can use the video after the event.

If you have the infrastructure sorted to host your video files after the event then don't delay in getting your archives online. Even if you choose one session from a whole day of conference programming, it's wise to make something available for those who tune in late or missed the event but want to see it as soon as possible. If you have a keynote speaker, it makes sense to prioritise big names or what you thought was the most well received presentation.

It also might be worthwhile thinking whether you need any additional edits or formats for webTV platforms. For example, YouTube has a limit of 10 minutes and a file size of 100MB. If you want to upload some clips there you should ask the video crew to re-encode the video and add any extra graphics you want. If your webcasting live using Adobe Flash, then Blip.tv is great because you can upload Flash video (flv) files directly, YouTube does accept flv files as uploads but may re-encode them so some quality is lost.

Thanks for reading!

There's a checklist below if you need something to refer to. And a list of links that might be useful, which link to more useful links!

Don't take it for granted that webcasting is a day-to-day occurrence. You might find that some of your speakers haven't been live online before, or that no one else in your sector is communicating with live web events. Webcasting is still quite new and it can be pretty exciting. These days it's very reliable and shouldn't even cost you an arm and a leg. So enjoy it, make the most of it. Happy webcasting.

This document was written by Sarah Platt, UK Director of Kinura Web Video.

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Kinura Web Video are always happy to answer questions.

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CHECKLIST

- Have I defined my webcast goals and communicated them to my team?
- Have I checked my venue has suitable connectivity?
- Does my client have enough bandwidth to watch multiple streams?
- Have I planned my pre-roll graphics, notices for breaks and post event messaging?
- Have we thought about how we can promote the event and planned time for emailing reminders, etc?
- What other elements should be on the web pages around the webcast?
- Do we want to capture email addresses or make this event by password invite only?
- Does everyone working on the webcast, both at the venue and online, know the process for before, during and after the event?
- Have I checked what my peers or competitors are doing?

USEFUL LINKS

ARTICLE: Live webcasting: reasons to be cheerful (contains links to free webcasting gizmos).
<http://www.kinura.com/blog/?p=141>

ARTICLE: A-Z of webTV (contains links to lots of webcast examples and good streaming video sites, mainly UK and EU based)
<http://www.kinura.com/blog/?p=23>

Chinwag webTV forum – discussion point for web video industry folk
<http://www.chinwag.com/lists/uk-webtv>

Techy and business focused site with conferences and a directory of suppliers
<http://www.streamingmedia.com>

Flash video resource. This blogger knows his stuff. And he's been doing it for years.
<http://www.flashcomguru.com>

<http://www.webtvwire.com>

Great webTV blog

<http://www.ted.com/index.php>

TED – One of the best video sites on the planet. Great content, high quality production values and a very clear remit.

<http://www.FabChannel.com>

One of our favourite inspirational sites for viewing high quality live music gigs.