

Chief  Marketer

Tech Round-Up

Webinar Tech Trends

Leveraging social media tools to boost webinar registrations and attendance—and keep the connection going during and after the event

BY JASON HAHN



Webinars are by nature “social” online events, since they bring together groups of people to partake in meaningful discussions about topics of shared interest. While companies can make webinars even more social by properly utiliz-

ing—you guessed it—social media, there are best practices and hazards to consider. The good news is that webinar platforms offer features that make the “socialization” of webinars easier and more streamlined before, during and after the event.

Before the Event

According to the “Webinar Benchmarks Report: 2013 Edition” from ON24, a webcasting and virtual-events technology provider, social media was ranked among the least effective marketing tools for driving webinar



The bottom line is that attendees will tweet and post to Facebook during a webinar. The question is whether the company running the webinar can integrate those interactions into the webinar environment or risk losing attendees by letting them leave the webinar and engage on external social platforms.

—Mark Bornstein, director of content marketing, ON24.

registrations in 2012, taking a backseat to the likes of banner ads, text ads and search engine marketing. The company notes in the report that it expects social media to become increasingly valuable as more marketers build their social profiles and learn how to best leverage them.

Companies should, of course, use social media to drive registrations by sharing webinars on their various social presences, especially those where their target buyer personas are. This can usually be done from the webinar setup page immediately after creating a webinar, as many service providers offer the ability to share the details of a webinar and a link to the registration page. Using a trackable link will help to understand which social channels generate the most registrations, according to Aaron Everson, president and COO of social marketing platform Shoutlet.

To amplify these efforts, social sharing buttons should be included on registration and “Thank You” pages. By encouraging people to share these pages with their social networks, “you’re getting it out to the second, third and fourth degrees of the social graph,” says Justin Levy, head of social media at Citrix, which owns webinar platform GoToWebinar.

When people share a webinar they see or register for, it’s a form of personal recommendation, according to Mark Bornstein, director of content marketing at ON24.

“Including those social sharing buttons on not only the registration page but on the registration confirmation page makes a huge difference,” says Bo Bandy, marketing com-

munications and PR manager at ReadyTalk, an audio and Web conferencing platform. It’s one thing when a company promotes their own webinar, but “it’s another thing when someone else says, ‘Hey, I registered for this,’” she says.

Basic social promotion best practices apply here, including the effective use of relevant, concise and branded hashtags; and using scheduled posts that adhere to an informed editorial calendar.

“What we’ve found, frankly, is that though we start 6-8 weeks out, it’s in the last 2-3 days that we generate the most sign-ups,” says Chris Bechtel, director of marketing for Web conferencing and webinar platform AnyMeeting. “I think it’s because people don’t really know their schedule, and they look at a date and say, ‘OK, I’ll deal with that later.’”

“We start with social about three weeks prior to the webinar,” Bandy says. “Anything before that is just too far out.”

These recommendations are supported by ON24’s study, which found that 64% of registrations happen the week of a live webinar.

Showtime!

Social media also has a rather significant role during webinars. This is where things get more interesting—and even a bit controversial.

The basic (and maybe best) way to incorporate social media during a webinar is to find a platform that displays social feeds within the webinar interface. This would allow participants to see what others are saying about

the webinar and, if they so desire, hop into these streams and interact on those channels without having to leave the webinar environment. According to ON24, Twitter (35.5%) is the most popular social media widget companies use within its webinar console, followed by Facebook (9.8%) and LinkedIn (7.6%).

Companies that are feeling a little more adventurous can assign someone to focus solely on engaging users on social media platforms during a webinar. This goes beyond simply encouraging participants to use a specific hashtag during the event and allowing the social media discussion to take its own course – it requires the company to live-tweet during a webinar outside of the immediate environment where the event is taking place.

“If your speaker has a key quote or a key stat, those always tend to perform well,” Levy says of tweeting or posting to social media channels during a webinar. He adds that content that’s shared during the event should be simple, short and “snackable.” Knowing key tidbits that will be shared during the webinar beforehand will help the company have those social media posts ready to go when the time comes, easing the real-time burden for whoever is charged with this task.

“To boost engagement on the hashtag, consider doing a giveaway – and teasing this early in the webinar – to get people amped up and ready to tweet,” says Everson.

Retweeting interesting points from participants, holding a Q&A session for Twitter users, sharing webinar-related polls on social channels and leveraging the attention from the webinar to encourage attendees to connect with the company’s various social media presences are also effective tactics.

If you’re wondering whether the use of social media during a webinar will sidetrack attendees’ attention from the main event itself, you’re not alone. This concern is legitimate, according to Bechtel.

“Right now I feel like there are more cons to this because it sort of takes people outside of the webinar itself, and maybe they have conversations that distract from the webinar,” he says.

However, ignoring social media’s role during a webinar altogether is like burrowing your head in the sand, according to Bornstein. “The fact of the matter is that we live in



the age of social media communication.” He adds that when someone in the audience has a thought, they will want a channel where they can immediately share it.

The bottom line, according to Bornstein, is that attendees are going to tweet and post updates to Facebook and LinkedIn during a webinar. The only question is whether the company running the webinar will be able to integrate those social interactions into the webinar environment or risk losing attendees by letting them leave the webinar and engage on external social platforms on their own, a journey that may hold other tempting detours (e.g., emails).

Still, social media has its virtues when used during a webinar. Tweets and other social media posts about a webinar serve as a marketing tool for a company’s future webinars, since non-attendees might see the value delivered by a webinar their social media connections join and post about. Also, common or unanswered questions tweeted during an event might make for good webinar topics in the future.

Once a webinar is done, companies should share the link to the on-demand version with

A recorded webinar is a great piece of content that can be seeded and shared weeks and months after a live webinar to drive new likes or follows, sign-ups, and email subscriptions. –Chris Bechtel, director of marketing, AnyMeeting

their social media networks, a task that can be done with a few clicks on the page where the recording resides.

“Now you have a content asset—you have a recorded webinar,” says Bechtel. This piece of content can be seeded and shared weeks and months after the live webinar to drive new likes or follows, sign-ups, and email subscriptions.

“We almost use social media after the webinar in the same way we do before the webinar, because it’s really about lead-gen efforts,” says Bandy.

Some webinar platforms have reporting tools that will show which social channels

yielded the most listens and who listened from each link, valuable insights when planning the social promotion of future webinars. Bornstein notes that analyzing hashtagged tweets after the webinar can unearth valuable leads. For instance, if an attendee tweeted positive reactions to the content, that information can be used to bump up their lead score.

When used effectively wielded in tandem with a webinar, social media can drive registrations, boost engagement and awareness, and inform lead-nurturing efforts and future webinar content—quite a virtuous cycle. !

A Sampling of Vendors

The information below shows the variations in some representative webinar vendors. Ask about promotional price offers as these come and go all the time. The information contained here was drawn from public sources with attempts to validate directly with all vendors. We recommend you consider this directional and a start to your own research. Providers are listed alphabetically.

Adobe Connect

NASDAQ: ADBE

www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html

345 Park Ave.

San Jose, CA 95110-2704

(Offices in the U.S., Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Middle East, Africa, South America)

Contact: connectsales@adobe.com

Number of employees: 11,000 (all of Adobe)

Founded: 1982

Sample clients: Xerox, Federal Highway Administration, Philips Healthcare, Clemson University, Grundfos

Feature list: www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect/features.html

AnyMeeting

Privately held

www.anymeeting.com

7777 Center Ave., Suite 520

Huntington Beach, CA 92647

Contact: sales@anymeeting.com

Number of employees: Less than 50

Number of clients: 400,000+ registered meeting hosts

Founded: 2010

Feature list: www.anymeeting.com/adw/Webinar-Service.aspx

ClickWebinar (Implex)

Privately held

www.clickwebinar.com

702 West St.

Wilmington, DE

(Offices in Poland and Canada)

Contact: Margaret Skulska, business development manager:

mskulska@implix.com

Number of employees: 120

Number of clients: 80,000

Founded: 1999

Sample clients: Sony, Siemens, GlaxoSmithKline, Renault Trucks, Grant Thornton

Feature list: www.clickwebinar.com/features



FuzeBox

Privately held

www.fuzebox.com

150 Spear St., Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94105

Contact: 888-679-4759; sales@fuzebox.com

Number of employees: 160

Founded: 2009

Sample clients: Evernote, Amazon, GM, Ogilvy, CBS Interactive

Feature list: www.fuzebox.com/learn-more

GoToWebinar (Citrix)

NASDAQ: CTXS

www.gotomeeting.com/online/webinar

4988 Great America Parkway
Santa Clara, CA 95054

Contact: 866-962-6492; www.citrix.com/products/gotowebinar/overview.html

Number of employees: 1,900 (in the Citrix SaaS division)

Founded: 1989

Sample clients: Pearson Digital Learning, University of Illinois at Chicago, Papa John's International, BusinessWire, American Institute of Certified Tax Coaches

Feature list: www.gotomeeting.com/online/webinar/internet-conferencing

InterCall

Privately held

www.intercall.com

8420 West Bryn Mawr Suite 1100

Chicago, IL 60631

(Offices in Canada, the U.K., Australia, Asia)

Contact: Carol Hanley, sales operations manager:

917-286-2822, cahanley@intercall.com

Number of employees: 4,000

Number of clients: 9,500

Founded: 1991

Sample clients: IBM, PepsiCo, GE, Wells Fargo, ADP

Feature list: www.intercall.com/solutions/uses/event-conferencing.php

INXPO

Privately held

www.inxpo.com

770 N. Halsted St., Suite 6S
Chicago, IL 60642

Contact: Daniel Lotzof, EVP of sales: dlotzof@inxpo.com,
312-962-0563

Number of employees: 100

Number of clients: 500+

Founded: 2004

Sample clients: Bank of America, Bloomberg, Forbes.com, Gap, Kraft

Feature list: www.inxpo.com/webcasting/#features

ON24

Privately held

www.on24.com

201 3rd St., 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

(Offices in the U.S., Asia, Europe, Australia)

Contact: 415-369-8000; solutions@ON24.com

Number of employees: 300+

Number of clients: 800+

Founded: 1998

Sample clients: Marketo, Oracle, SAP, Deloitte, Autodesk

Feature list: www.on24.com/products/webcast/

ReadyTalk

Privately held

www.readytalk.com

1900 16th Street, Suite 600
Denver, CO 80202

Contact: 800-843-9166; sales@readytalk.com

Number of employees: 175

Number of clients: 5,200+ retail customers
(not including wholesale)

Founded: 2001

Sample clients: GT Nexus, Marketo, American Marketing Association, Miller Heiman, PR Newswire

Feature list: www.readytalk.com/products-services/webinars

WebEx (Cisco)

NASDAQ: CSCO

www.webex.com

170 West Tasman Dr.
San Jose, CA 95134

Contact: 877-509-3239; www.webex.com/contact-sales.html

Number of employees: 75,049 (Cisco as a whole)

Number of clients: More than 9.4 million registered hosts worldwide

Founded: 1996 (acquired by Cisco in 2007)

Sample clients: The Food Group, LUMEDX, Seagate Technology, Brüel & Kjær, Princess Cruises

Feature list: www.webex.com/products/webinars-and-online-events.html