

CHUKUNI
Communities Development Corporation

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Small Business Newsletter



11 Professional Videoconferencing Tips

Videoconferencing has become a daily activity for many businesspeople, but just because we do it a lot doesn't mean to say we are doing it well. Consider your last virtual meeting; how professional were the attendees? Was there that one guy with a background filter making him seem as if he was floating in space? If there were several attendees, did some of those not contributing look bored? Were they looking down at their phone, was the room in the background messy?

Here is a videoconferencing etiquette refresher that discusses many of the pitfalls inherent in this relatively new business communication.

1. Agendas

When there is no agenda (with time limits on each item), meetings go off on unexpected tangents, and little gets achieved. An agenda helps attendees focus and keep on track.

2. Pre-meeting Information

Provide information in advance and request that everyone attending review the material before the meeting. Do this, and you will not waste time bringing everyone up to speed at the start of the session.

3. Meeting Times

Here's a little trick that encourages people to be on time. Instead of setting a meeting for 10:00 a.m., set it for something like 10:12. An odd meeting time is more memorable and has proven to be effective in improving the timekeeping of chronic latecomers.

Be punctual; use a calendar reminder to alert you ten minutes before the start of a meeting.

4. Backgrounds

Those Zoom virtual backgrounds are cute but not professional. We've all sat watching someone floating in out of space, and then there's the story of the attorney in Texas who accidentally left his cat filter on during a Zoom call at a court hearing. Filters are also unstable. You may find that the green screen breaks down as you move, revealing glimpses of the room behind you.

The most professional approach is to position your computer so that there is a plain wall behind you or a bookcase. However, ensure there are no inappropriate books or items on the shelves. This has been the downfall of many an executive and news reporter!

5. Dress Professionally

This depends on the meeting, but working from home is no excuse for dressing like a hobo. Enough already with the sweatpants.

6. Transition into the Call

Take a few seconds before the call to focus on the meeting. Too often, people are working on something else when others join the discussion. Imagine this in an in-person meeting where you go into someone's office, and they ignore you while dealing with something else. It isn't polite, and the same goes for a videoconference.

7. The Dreaded Mute Button

Be aware of this important button. There are legions of stories online about what people heard during a call when one of the attendees thought they were muted. Some of which were not pretty.

8. Lighting

Ensure there is sufficient lighting. Nothing is worse than being barely able to see someone during a meeting. Consider purchasing a videoconference ring light. These inexpensive items can be attached to a laptop, and others have stands. You can order them online for less than \$25.00.

9. Beware the Camera

Remember you are on camera! If you decide not to wear pants because you're at home and people can only see your top half, that may be okay. But, if you forget and stand up to do something, or the meeting ends, and not everyone has signed off, your professional image will suffer.

10. Look at the Camera

One of the sad things about virtual meetings is that they lack personal connection. In real life, we react to social cues; we look people in the eye, we gesticulate, and we focus on them when they talk. Do your best to look into the camera as if it was the person or people's face. One thing that makes this difficult is when you have the window showing your own image open. It's too tempting to keep glancing down at yourself. Close it, and you will be able to focus more on the other attendees. Heck, you know what you look like!

11. Close all Unnecessary Programs

Whether or not you will be sharing your screen during the meeting, close all programs to avoid distraction. If you are going to share your screen, this is very important because you may not want people to see that you have been Googling something private that is not in keeping with your position. Close your email browser and switch your phone to silent. Have you ever noticed that with a larger group, somebody's phone dings, and everyone looks down to see if it's them?

Follow the simple steps above, and you will not only take your videoconferencing to the next level, the people you meet with will notice your professionalism.



Videoconferencing: The Bloopers Reel

In the first article this month, we talked about how to raise your game when videoconferencing. How to be more professional, better prepared, more efficient. So, it occurred to us that highlighting some noteworthy videoconference disasters and faux pas featured in social media would be fun and illustrative. Many appear as videos, some as Tweets, and others in articles.

- Be careful when planning a virtual meeting to warn other people in your household that you will be live on a call during a specific time. A young woman failed to do that, and her husband wandered into camera view during her business call wearing just his “tighty-whities.” Once he realized he was on camera, he tried to run out of sight but ran straight into a closed door and fell to the ground, stunned. This was not the impression the young businesswoman was hoping to make.
- In a similar situation, a woman ran naked from her bathroom to get a towel from her linen closet. Unfortunately, she had to pass her husband’s open door, where, unbeknown to her, he was on a conference call with four colleagues. The husband’s next company social event was a little embarrassing.
- Sometimes it takes more than letting people know you will be on a call. Like the woman working from home and on a sales call whose young daughter was on their dining-room table dancing in the background. Or the young child who wandered in front of the green screen asking for cookies. Don’t assume you will remain undisturbed; plan for it.
- Calls involving larger groups can be dangerous because there is a sense of anonymity, especially if someone is more of an observer than a participant. Another classic social media video shows a woman who has muted her sound but forgotten to turn off her video when attending to a call of nature, which a dozen other people on the call all watched. Along the same lines, a Canadian politician got into trouble for doing something similar during an official government business meeting. In his case, he made the national news.
- What you wear counts. A hilarious video shows a man getting up to grab a coffee, only to show he is wearing no pants. What made this example far worse was that he put his hands inside his underwear to scratch his butt. He had muted his audio, so a colleague had to call him by phone to tell him that they could see him. The panicked look on his face when he received the call and ran from the room was classic.
- There is a classic video of a law court hearing where one of the attorneys accidentally, and without realizing it, activated a filter, turning him into a cat. The judge points this out to him, and the attorney tries to remove the filter. He assured the judge that it was him behind the feline mask, but the judge was not amused.
- Many people don’t think they are “live” before the meeting begins, which explains why several early attendees sat and watched someone flossing their teeth while waiting for a Zoom session to start. The same is true for the end of the meeting. The meeting is not over until you sign out, as the man who got up after an important business meeting to reveal his colourful boxer shorts discovered when his boss called him out on his unprofessional wardrobe.
- Finally, focus on the meeting, or you could find yourself in deep water. For example, this was the challenge a businessman faced when he decided to join a video conference call while driving. In his defence, he was primarily an observer listening to the meeting. Unfortunately, when he screamed at a driver, “This is not a >expletive< freeway!” his phone audio was not muted.

We hope these examples made you smile and help you avoid being part of someone’s blooper reel. On a serious note, they show how easy it is to fall foul of videoconference decorum and lose credibility with customers, colleagues, and your boss.



Coach's Corner - Make a Habit of Single-Tasking not Multitasking

In *The Six Lies Between You and Success*, as outlined in Gary Keller's book *The One Thing*, multitasking is the second lie of the six. He concludes that:

- Distraction is natural
- Multitasking takes its toll on you
- Distraction undermines results

Keller's advice is to focus on the one important thing, and that multitasking is detrimental to this goal. David Levitin, an American-Canadian cognitive psychologist, neuroscientist, and author, said, "What it turns out is that we think we're multitasking, but we're not. The brain is sequential tasking: we flit from one thought to the next very, very rapidly, giving us the illusion that what we're doing is doing all these things at once."

He continues, "Multitasking creates a dopamine-addiction feedback loop, effectively rewarding the brain for losing focus and constantly searching for external stimulation." These two experts clearly state that multitasking is not how to become more productive.

Multitasking is a by-product of distraction and generally inhibits productivity. Productivity is about accomplishment, not about how busy or efficient we are. Busyness can make us feel we are being productive when in fact, we are feeling the dopamine effect.

The Productivity Project by Chris Bailey supports the view that multitasking is ineffective and inefficient for accomplishing goals. He uses the term single-tasking and challenges people to pursue the habit of focusing on one thing at a time. As distractions are natural and lead to multitasking, Bailey promotes the idea of getting out of the practice of multitasking and into the habit of single-tasking. He suggests we devote short periods to actively focusing on a specific task or activity and gradually increase the time spent.

By spending and focusing our time on one activity, we accomplish more in a shorter period because interruptions and diversions waste time. Combining single-tasking with a focus on essential activities and goals, we become more productive and experience greater satisfaction with our daily outcomes.

What is the one thing you going to focus on? By asking yourself this question daily and ensuring you spend sufficient time on it, you are on the road to making single-tasking a productive habit in your work life.

Paul Abra, Certified Executive Coach, Motivated Coaching and Development

7 Tips For Effective Video Conferencing



1 Place the camera at eye level.

Set your camera up at a suitable angle, giving you eye contact with others in the meeting and showing that you are engaged.



2 Make sure your lighting doesn't detract from the call.

Try facing a window or moving light fittings around the room and see what works.

3 Think about what everyone can see in your backdrop.

Choose a relatively neutral background, like a plain wall, that isn't too distracting for others to look at.





4 Try and keep noise to a minimum.

If members of your family are at home, let them know when you're making calls in order to avoid gatecrashers or distractions.

5 Use headphones, or mute yourself when not speaking.

This prevents your microphone picking up sounds coming from the speakers, thus preventing an off-putting feedback loop.




6 Pause video sharing if necessary, to cut down on bandwidth.

Although webcams are great for keeping in touch and making you feel like you're back with your colleagues, they can affect the connection of the call significantly.

7 Make sure your internet connection is stable.

This seems obvious, but it really is important for making sure your calls run smoothly. Sometimes a poor connection can be solved by leaving and rejoining the call.





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“The same rules that apply to in-person meetings apply to virtual sessions; don’t be fooled, you are NOT invisible.”

–Mike Wicks (Author)

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