

Webcasting 101: Going Virtual for Company Meetings of Any Size

So you want to do a big live event for your company—the town hall, the all-hands, the major summit.

Or maybe it's not quite so high profile as the annual company call. Maybe it's "just" the department kick-off, the sales summit, or the product launch. Still, you need to reach a lot of people all at once. It's the kind of thing you would have done in person. Or by conference call. But people expect video now, and you know it's more effective when they can see faces anyway. It's got to be a webcast.

You might be used to webcasts being a big production event, with dozens of people and tons of expensive equipment involved.

But now that remote work is the norm, your speakers live everywhere, they can't operate professional camera or audio equipment on their own, and deploying multiple tech teams doesn't make much sense.

What are you going to do?

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Don't lose hope. You can still get an effective, engaging event out to your company. Webcasting from your home office can still result in a high-quality product. Not only that, building an effective webcasting process remotely will give you tools you'll continue to use for years. Let's see how.

What's a Webcast for?



Webcasts started off as big one-off events. They were the way to reach a huge audience, maybe even hundreds of thousands of employees scattered around the world.

Last year, a webcast might have been a major production. All the speakers would have come in wearing their best. A production crew would have fussed over them. The lighting would have been just so. There would have been schedules and rehearsals and call sheets. An entire team might have been dedicated just to making sure that the live feed from the cameras streamed flawlessly.

But even before the Coronavirus pandemic made large gatherings unwise and facemasks as necessary a garment as pants, webcasts were already expanding to wider usage.

Employees and executives' increasing comfort with video has **made webcasting less a fancy extra and more of an expected occurrence.** Doing live broadcasts with just audio feels awkward and makes executives feel untrustworthy. At the same time, technology has caught up so that pro-level cameras and mixing boards are less necessary for putting together a respectable broadcast.

Teams are using webcasting now for smaller, more frequent events. Webcasts were already in the process of becoming another tool for managers to talk to their teams. The current situation is quickly accelerating that trend.

What can you use webcasting for?

Some of the ways companies are using webcasting include:

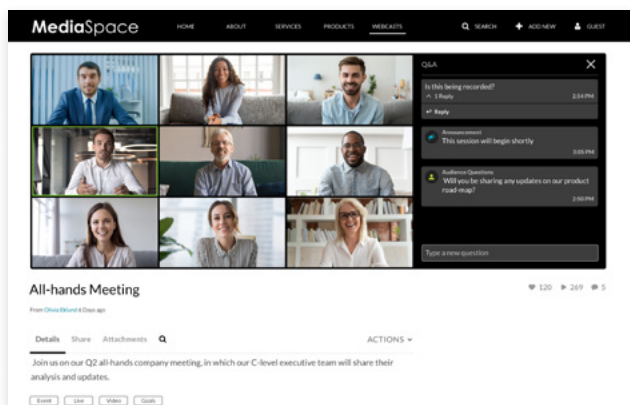
- ✓ CEO/President briefings
- ✓ Quarterly meetings
- ✓ Crisis communications
- ✓ Fireside chats
- ✓ Training sessions
- ✓ Strategy briefings
- ✓ Guest lectures
- ✓ Sales kick-offs
- ✓ Virtual events
- ✓ Department updates
- ✓ Product launches

Choose Your Weapon

Ready to shed the big production team? You've got a couple options.

Video Conferencing Integrations

If you've already got a video conference solution like Zoom, WebEx, or Skype for Business, you can use existing video conferencing infrastructure (including licenses, rooms, cameras, and equipment) for your webcast. Video conferencing solutions are not necessarily stable with very large audiences, they typically can't handle events with more than a few thousand people and may not give you many tools for managing an event at scale. They also leave something to be desired in terms of managing event content afterwards.

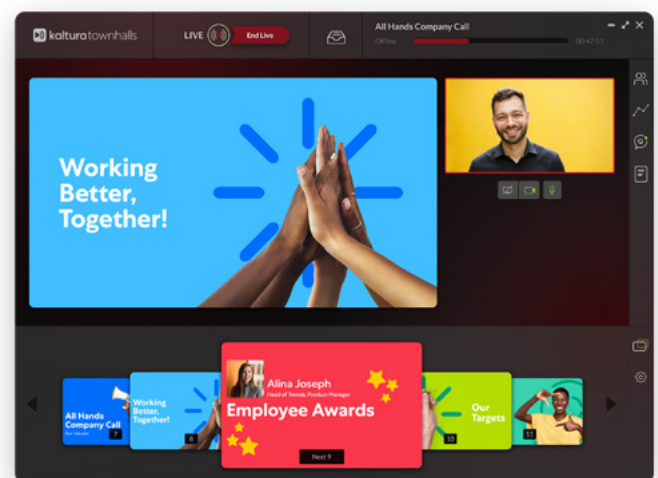


With Video Conferencing Integrations (VCI), you get all the benefits of a full webcasting solution on top of video-conferencing capabilities. This means, you can live stream engaging events, to an unlimited number of concurrent viewers, with multiple presenters and locations, directly from your video conferencing solution, which in some cases can also allow wary executives to leverage the tool they already feel comfortable with. Plus on top of the extended reach to an endless amount of participants, you can create a cool broadcast experience for your viewers,

with interactive features like moderated Q&A, announcements and polls, and an interactive player which lets the audience control their viewing experience. You also get access to advanced real time analytics beyond those that come with the conferencing solution, both during your event and after it.

Self-Serve Webcasting

Want something even more stripped down, with less infrastructure? You can manage a full-blown townhall meeting from a laptop with self-serve webcasting. No complicated technical set-ups, no production team. Nothing but your laptop and the right webcasting platform, from the comfort of your basement while you hide from your kids. The best thing about self-serve broadcasting is that it strips down your lead-up time; setting up a reliable webcast to many thousands of people is simple.



Set Your Stage: Tips for Presenters

One small silver lining from life in lock down is that our demand for polish has dropped significantly. Like, at this point, to a request that the CEO just wears pants. Not even fancy pants. Still, you want your presenter to come across as casual yet professional. What are some relatively easy steps to make sure that presenters make a good impression?



Lighting

Natural light is more flattering if you can get it, but no sitting in front of a window—the audience wants to see a face, not a black silhouette. Table lamps are usually gentler than overhead lighting. Do a test shot when you do your practice run, so the speaker can see what they look like and make adjustments.

Background

Background. Less cluttered is better. A plain wall might be boring, but it's not distracting. Bookshelves, a plant or a low-key piece of art can be quite soothing. Do a quick sweep for anything that might be embarrassing and make sure it's really, really, REALLY out of the frame. Lock the door. But if you do get interrupted... well, at this point most of us are pretty understanding of the fact that toddlers are going to toddle and cats are going to cat.

Clothes

Reasonably professional. No gaps at the buttons. No teeny tiny stripes or patterns, they really don't work well on camera. Nothing that looks transparent under the lighting you're using.

Audio

Getting good-quality audio is even more important than video. We're pretty good at processing bad visual data, but bad audio will make the webcast unintelligible. That doesn't mean you need boom mics. But get your speaker into a quiet room, ideally one that isn't full of hard surfaces. (Echoes aren't your friend—there's a reason the podcasters are hiding in their closets.) Any kind of mic can help—that includes the super-dorky but very effective headsets or even the earbuds and mic that came with your phone. Again, do a test run! Once you're live, it's going to be really hard to move to a location with better acoustics.

Behind the Curtain: Tips for Production

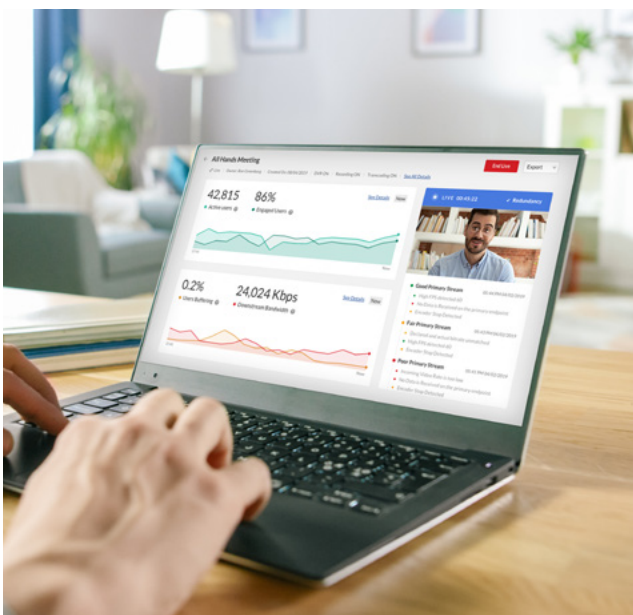
For the moderator and the production crew, though, the standards never dropped. But you're going to need to do this from your own separate rooms, now. (Or you can be brave and go it alone—self-serve webcasting can be run by a single nimble person if you want. You probably want to save that for smaller audiences, though. Presenting and handling a Q&A at the same time isn't for the faint of heart!)

For moderators

- Gathering some questions ahead of time can help if you're worried folks might be shy. It can also help get you started and organized if you expect a lot of questions. You can include a call for questions in your invite, or as an announcement during the broadcast.
- Make sure there's some live interaction, too—a completely canned presentation feels stiff and artificial. Use polls and accept live questions to preserve a sense of authenticity and openness.
- Since you're not in the same room as your speaker, have some kind of back channel with them so you can check on questions you're not sure of. Nobody likes an ambush.

For producers

- Real-time analytics are your friend. Keep an eye on your stream health. Ideally your dashboard won't just give you information but will also offer insights to help address any issues.
- A constant bit rate will produce a more consistent stream than a variable bit rate.
- You'll also want to pay attention to your connections, to make sure that you don't get disconnected or try to stream into insufficient bandwidth. For example, trying to upstream high quality on a slow connection may cause frame loss. In that case, you'll want to move to a more stable connection (if you're on Wi-Fi, for example) or reduce the quality of the stream to match the network conditions.
- Make use of preview functions—you want to make sure you're happy with everything and your speaker is all set up BEFORE you push live.
- Close all programs that might be using your bandwidth—Chrome, for example, is one of the biggest bandwidth hogs. Make sure you close all tabs except the ones you need for the broadcast.
- Make sure the rest of your household isn't using much bandwidth during your broadcast. This is not the time someone else to be watching Netflix.



What Now? After the Webcast Is Over



You finished the live event! Hurray, you're done! ...not exactly.

Even before the pandemic, VOD for your webcast was a good idea. Sometimes people miss events. want to review them again later.

But now that so much of the workforce is remote and the future of work is looking to be permanently hybrid, it's absolutely critical. With a distributed global workforce, you can't assume everyone will be able to make an all-hands call. The way people approach work has fundamentally shifted. You need to assume a proportion of your audience is just going to have to watch this one on demand.

You're going to want your webcast recording to end up somewhere easy for people to find. If you want to make things easy on yourself, having that recording stay at the same URL as the live event and convert to VOD automatically will make your life much simpler. But the standard video conference client strategy of one giant pile of recordings will turn into a headache fast. You need something easy to manage, and best to add metadata and even captions for easy search and discovery later.

Making It Pay Off: Moving into the Future

Here's the good news. While the current limitations may make webcasting a little more challenging, solving these problems now will pay off in the future.

Even as the world slowly gets back to something more normal, we're changed. It seems pretty likely that the amount we work from home or remotely is going to increase, and that we'll get used to working weirder hours. And we've all gotten far more comfortable with video as a medium. Will we get back to more formal and polished communications styles or just adjust to a far more intimate and casual look in general? It's early to tell.

But in general, the trend towards increased webcasting just accelerated dramatically. So if you can manage to master easy to use and reliable webcasting now, you'll have a powerful tool to use in the future.

Kaltura Webcasting and Town Halls

With Kaltura, easily broadcast any event of any size, whether for departmental meetings, town-halls, or international conferences. From live streaming to on-demand video, self-serve to full white glove production services, corporate communications to customer and partner events—Kaltura offers you a flexible and reliable end-to-end solution for all your live video communication needs.

Kaltura Webcasting and Town Halls offers:

- Streamlined workflow, including self-serve and Video Conferencing Integration options
- Unlimited concurrent viewers
- Advanced real-time analytics
- Interactive capabilities such as moderated Q&A, slide sync, announcements and polls
- Automated conversion to VOD, with a single events hub, interactive player, video editing, automatic transcription, translations and AI enrichment

Want to learn more?

