Producing a Webinar

The term "webinar" was created by combining the words "web" with "seminar. Strictly speaking, it's an online class. Some webinars are broadcast pre-recorded, others are live and interactive, allowing audience participation and Q&A opportunities. Some are small events with just a few people while others might have several hundred participants. Some are paid events to teach a specific technique or skill, while others are free, promoting a product or service they hope you will purchase after learning about it during the webinar. Each is different, but common to all is the importance of structure and organization. As with all things, producing a good webinar starts with good preparation and planning.

Make a Plan

Identify your audience. Who are you trying to reach? Slant the subject specifically for your intended audience.

Skills or projects? Will you focus on teaching particular technical skills or demonstrate the fabrication of specific projects?

Create a list of subjects and projects.

Organize your list in the most logical order.

Divide into segments.

Plan video file size and format. Video files can be incredibly large. You need to recognize that not all of your attendees are on a super speedy connection. Video file sizes should be kept as small as possible in order that the attendee with the slowest internet connection will still have a good experience viewing the material. Keeping videos short will help keep file sizes small.

Another way to minimize file sizes is through compression. Most video will be compressed. The most common video codecs are H.264 & MPEG-4. Then there are common video "containers", such as .MP4, .AVI, .MOV (Apple Quicktime) , .FLV (Flash) and .WMV (Windows Media). Flash, which consistently creates small files, is on its way out and will not be supported it in the near future. MP4 is a great "go to" format, accepted widely. You must keep abreast of popular file formats as well as aspect ratios. 720x480 was great for DVDs and still works well on many platforms, but it is not in any way near the quality of HD. Will you shoot in 4:3 aspect ratio (like TV) or 16:9 (widescreen)? If you want the next size up from DVD quality, you would choose 1280 x 720, which is 16:9. 1920 x 1280 is also popular, but creates really large files. If you keep your videos less than 7 minutes each, and upload them at 512 kbps and 25 fps you will also minimize your file size so that is helpful.

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Time Schedule – everybody has their own preference but what has worked well for me in a 2 hour webinar is:

> 10 – 15 minutes of administration introduction.
> 60 – 70 minutes of video
> 1 to 2 minutes of comments between each video
> 20 or more photos to comment on at the end of all the videos.

The variable in all webinars is how much time is spent answering questions. I have a list of Frequently Asked Questions I expect and check off on my list any that are asked. If I'm not getting questions, I might discuss some of the content of my list during the commentary time in between videos. The advantage to having a collection of photos to show after the videos are over is that it allows me to fill as much time as I need to before the end of the event. I can do a brief comment on each photo or I can elaborate on how the project was done.

Preparation

Collection. Collect all the material you expect to need for your projects.

Anecdotes. Prepare some anecdotes relative to the subject.

Questions. Be prepared for frequently asked questions. Try to anticipate popular questions and have clear concise answers ready.

Video Scripts. Write scripts for videos and any voice over.

Video Equipment. Do you have the needed video equipment?   If not, can you rent or borrow what you need?

Graphic drawings.   Do you expect some will be needed? Can you prepare them yourself or will you need help?

Photos. You should have lots of photos. Photos of the work in process and photos of the finished projects shown in any of your videos. You should also have lots of photos of other work you did and of work other artisans did related to your webinar subject.

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Special Issues

If you want to produce an effective webinar there are some special issues unique to webinars you should consider.

Video change intervals – For most webinars there will be up to 30 seconds after one video finishes playing before the next one is loaded and ready to begin. To avoid having dead time between the videos, prepare some comments to make while waiting for video loading. It could be a review of the previous video, it could be some related comments about it or it could be an introduction to the next video. Just say *something* so your audience isn't sitting in silence looking at a blank screen.

Dead time at end of material – webinars are usually scheduled to allow for questions and answers from participants.   Each webinar is different. Some will have questions coming at you like a machine gun. Others will be as dead and silent as a graveyard. You must be prepared for either. Schedule your timing to allow for some questions but also allow for there not being any questions. Some things you can do to have something ready if you have more time than expected left over after all the videos have played.

Lighting consistency. If you plan to shoot videos at different times of day, try to be sure the lighting is the same for all.

Video background. A fussy or busy background will distract viewers. Try to have as plain a background as you can. Get rid of papers and coffee cups and garbage cans or other things that don't belong in the shot.

Personal attire. Avoid wearing stripes and checks. They can be distracting to viewers and will sometimes cause the video image to distort. Don't wear white.

Practice speaking clearly. ESPECIALLY practice speaking without stammering and throat clearing. Pausing a second or so between phrases or sentences will help minimize deadly "ummms".

Videos

You don't need be a professional actor or videographer to produce a relatively professional looking video. Some things to keep in mind when you're being filmed.

Smile. Appear happy. Not crazy drunk happy – just pleased to be here happy. Think of something that pleases or amuses you so your smile is natural and not artificially forced.

Relax. Imagine you're talking to a close personal friend that specifically asked you explain this to them. Make sure your hands are not needlessly moving and distracting your viewers.

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Stay informal. This isn't a TV interview or a college lecture. It's just you talking to a friend. Talk to the camera the way you would talk to a close friend or family member.

Be animated. Show some enthusiasm! Make the viewer believe you're excited to have this chance to share with them. Be professional, but personal, too. Have Fun!

Keep active. Intermix your video with graphics and photos. Change to different views. Try adding slow motion and close ups views.

Make extra. Make LOTS extra. Lots of material. Film everything so you'll have lots of material to pick through to select from.

Video Script. Your videos will be most effective if instead of trying to remember what to say during the video, you work from a written script. Professional actors will memorize a script so they recite the words while acting but even the best of them often make mistakes that require retakes. Sometimes it takes dozens of retakes. When you watch news commenters or politicians speaking on TV, often they don't speak from memory but instead read from a script on a teleprompter. You can talk during the video if you feel comfortable doing that. I prefer to write the script to record the voiceover after editing the video.

Multiple Cameras

Videos are always more interesting if the view changes to different angles. You can do that by doing separate videos from different angles and editing the footage together but it's more efficient if you set up multiple cameras shooting at the same time and edit bits of footage from each later. Doing a demonstration with one camera pointing straight at you with another pointing down at what you're doing will provide materials you can edit and splice to show multiple views. Another option is over the shoulder.

Video Editing

When you plan and prepare to do videos, think carefully about how you will edit them. It will look amateurish if you just turn the camera on and let it roll on endlessly without cutting out extraneous and repetitive material. You don't have to show an entire process – just the important parts. Try to do it like they do in a cooking show where they show the beginning, show some important steps in the process, then show the completion. There's a variety of video editing software that can help you produce professional looking videos. Some different ways to video you can consider:

Video cut. Video everything and cut out any material you think isn't needed.

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Video splice. Produce a collection of video material and select bits of it mixed with photos spliced together.

Voice in. Speak during the video to record with the film.

Voice over. Video without any sound and add voice over after from a script. Adding voice after will produce higher quality sound.

KISS. Keep it simple. A few special effects can make your video interesting but too much is just a distraction. That can especially apply with music over the video. It's usually distracting.

Patience. Editing will likely take twice as long as you expect.

Graphic Drawings

Good drawings can sometimes be even better than videos or photos. Find a good computer program and learn how to use it. There are many available in a variety of differing costs and quality. Even some free ones. Many good ones have a free trial period. Alternatively, instead of buying a program there are many very good and easy to use ones you can rent. Just pay for the time you're using them to produce drawings. That's another good reason for careful planning. Get everything prepared in advance so you're only paying for equipment rent while you're converting your ideas to graphic drawings.

Production

You've collected all the material you need and you've worked out a plan. It's time now to produce your webinar.

Video. Video the important aspects of each of projects you want to demonstrate in your webinar. Let's review the always appropriate axiom:

Better to have and not need it then to need it and not have it.

Edit. Edit each video to remove any unnecessary material and adapt it to the maximum allowed time.

Voice Over. Write the voice over script to add to your videos.

Record. Record voice over to be added to your videos.

Sort. Sort your videos into the best order.

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Add graphics. Prepare any graphics or drawings you plan to use along with comments for each.

Photos. Prepare all the photos you plan to use along with comments for each photo

Practice.   Do a practice/pretend broadcast to check for timing and tempo.

Practice again. The more you practice, the better you perform. If you're at all nervous, practice until you've done it so many times you're too bored to be nervous.

Performance

You should be prepared, fresh and well rested, ready to perform and impress. It's showtime! You're going on the air live.   Do a last minute check to be sure you have everything ready.

Frequently Asked Questions.
Have your list of answers for some questions you expect to be asked.

Anecdotes.
A list stories, jokes or special comments you might want to add during the performance.

Reminder notes.
Your reminder list of the things it's important that you not forget to comment on.

Interlude notes.
The comments you plan to make after one video has finished and you're waiting for the next one to start.

Photo comments.
Any comments or references you want to make when you show a photo.   Take special care if you're showing photos of work that isn't yours to credit the artist.

Good to Go.
Everything checked off.   You're ready. Last minute reminder to yourself before the microphone turns and video starts to play.

- **Show enthusiasm.** Be animated – convince viewers you're enthusiastic about being here.

- **Speak clearly**.   Pause between comments to avoid stammeratives.

Review

Now it's time to review what you did. Self-criticize. Review the presentation and assess your performance. Be honest. Even brutal. Are you pleased with your performance? Where there some things you could have done better? Start a new list.

What was good? Which parts do you think went great?

What was poor? Which parts do you think could have done better?

What was bad? Which parts do you think need to be changed, re-shot or eliminated?

Anecdotes. Were they appropriate? Were they too long? Too short?

Photos. Were there enough? Should more have been included?

Your presentation. Did you speak clearly with enthusiasm? Were you nervous? Did you stumble in places?

Reviewing your past performance will help you learn how to make your next performance better.

That's just the beginning! Webinars need to be hosted within a webinar platform, content must be uploaded, the event must be promoted, marketed, registered for and recorded. How many email blasts will you send out in advance? How will you keep track of the registered attendees? Who will contact those who forgot to come but registered? How will you contact them after the fact with bonus handouts and materials? Who will help you or your attendees during the event when technical glitches occur?

It's better to have an existing staff of professionals to help you through than to go it alone.
Have an idea for a webinar? Contact Glass Patterns Quarterly or Glass Art Magazine and pitch your ideas! They're always looking for great new webinars to produce. You'll be well supported and get paid for your efforts to boot.

See you online!