

Networking and Virtual Events FAQs

in partnership with David Clare of
The Business Travel Network,
Matt Lewis of Active Group and
Jules White, Author of 'Live it, Love it, Sell it'



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Dear Members & Partners,

As we continue to adjust to life in lockdown, consider a new normal and try to make the best of the current situation, I am aware that many of us are pulled from one virtual meeting to another.

This week, I have been particularly aware of 'Zoom fatigue.'

In an effort to combat this and to move into a stage where virtual meetings become events and an increasingly comfortable part of life, this week's FAQs look at common mistakes and quick wins when holding a virtual event or meeting. They are designed for the novice through to the expert, so please take the relevant pages for you.

Thank you to our experts this week: Dave Clare from the Business Travel Network (and of course the BTA), Jules White (author of Live It, Love It, Sell It) and Matt Lewis from the Active Group. They have come together to share their expertise and are very much the sort of collaboration we are seeing across the industry.

Once again, I extend huge thanks to all of you for participating in our training, meetings and webinars. It's vital that we all continue to share our learnings, pool our resources and work together where possible.

As the BTA, we are here to help, so, please get in touch with your needs and concerns. Stay safe and look after your friends, family and colleagues.

Thank you and keep an eye out for the next **#BTAFAQs**

Best wishes,



Clive Wratten
CEO, The BTA



10 Tips for Networking

 Look for Insights

 Create Networking Spaces

 Think Security

 Research Events

 Update your Social Channels

 Go out of your Comfort Zone

 Think Branding

 Get Feedback on Presence

 Look for a Mentor or Mentee

 Video Calls

10 Tips for Networking During Lockdown

Video Conference 101

Managing networking when working from home

Before setting-up the meeting(s):

(a) Get to know the software you will be using. The basics across platforms are the same, but explore the software and learn some of the features and functions (virtual backgrounds, screen sharing etc).

(b) Find a friend or colleague you can practise having a few video calls with to understand how the technology works. It will help your meetings be much slicker and you will feel more confident.

(c) If you arrange the video call - remember to give it a title in the invitation. Many applications will default to your name (or your company) in the subject. Also look to call it something positive and make a statement, rather than just 'intro to xyzzy company' or 'xyz company is inviting you to a conference call.'

Before a meeting:

(a) Find a quiet place.

If you have family, partners, or flat mates - always let them know when you are on a call and ask them to minimise background noise and interruption.

Whilst many houses have good bandwidth, it's worth testing it to see how good it is when more than one or two people are trying to use it all at the same time.

Given how connected the world is these days, it can be an issue when other members of your household are streaming Netflix, home educating, and also having video calls with friends and family at the same time.

(b) Set-up your device or camera so it has a clear, unobstructed view of you.

Don't sit too far from or too close to your screen.

Always try and have the camera at eye level so that when you are looking at the screen it appears as though you are looking at the person you are talking to.

Sit back in the chair if you are sitting for the meeting - it will make you look more professional and help with your posture.



(c) Adjust lighting and your surroundings. Make sure your face is well lit. Lighting from the front and side is best - too much backlighting can make your face hard to see. Remember you can test and view what's visible in the background before a call.

Tidy up the area around you. Whilst everyone is accepting of remote working, try not to expose a messy desk, room or office. Also make sure whatever is in view is appropriate!

You can add virtual backgrounds and green screens with some apps – although these can be distracting.

If you have branded items such as banners, awards, brochures etc, these can be a useful addition to your backdrop.

(d) Dress as you would for a face to face meeting. This will make you feel more professional and will help with confidence and approach to meetings.

A tip from TV pros: try and avoid a bright white shirt or a very dark shirt - it can cause cameras to adjust lighting and over or under expose the brightness on the screen.

(e) Make sure the video call is full screen on your device. This will help with seeing everybody clearer, being more engaging, and avoiding other desktop distractions.

Have a glass of water (or preferred drink) to hand!

During the meeting:

There is nothing wrong with wearing headphones or in-ear buds.



A bit of **facilitation** is always appreciated by everyone. A good start to this is to get everyone to introduce themselves.

Ask people to **mute their microphones** when they are not talking. This is one of the most important parts of any conference involving several people.



Try not to get too distracted on the call - others will be watching you and there is a risk that they watch you more than they listen to the person presenting.

Don't be scared to turn off your camera if you need to for a short period.



Look for visual cues during the calls - such as someone putting their hand up, obviously trying to make eye contact or sending a message via a chat function.

Try and **look into the camera** when you talk. Everyone on the call will be in a different location on the other attendees' screens.



Let people know if there is a pause needed (for example - for you to find a document) so that people don't think that the technology has stopped working.

Make sure everyone's mobile is off!

Networking for Employees

How do I establish myself as an Expert and Drive Connections?

Currently it's difficult to position yourself as an expert. You only have to look at the experts appearing on our screens at regular intervals to hear how they are constantly questioned and doubted.

Rather than be an expert, now is the time to offer an opinion and be prepared to listen to counter positions without judging. Engage with as many groups as you can, LinkedIn is a great place to join groups and seek out opportunities for conversation.

How can I find or build peer groups?

There are numerous groups on LinkedIn which it is worth joining, likewise this platform enables you to create a group and invite members.

What networking tool is best?

LinkedIn is probably the best tool for professional networking and connections. Often people do not accept a connection unless you have spoken or had some interaction. It's advisable not to connect with people and then five minutes later send them a sales message. Facebook is mostly for purely personal/social interaction.

How can I take personal connections onto the professional level?

I am pleased to say that many of my personal friends are also professional connections. You just need to be mindful that there is a professional and personal relationship and they should be kept separate. When I meet with professional connections socially we endeavour not to discuss work matters.



Networking for Employees (Cont.)

How can I diversify my network? And approach new people virtually?

Once again using LinkedIn has an amazing array of groups that you can ask to join. Similarly you can connect with people on LinkedIn, but only do so for a reason not just because you want to increase your connection numbers. Don't bombard people, you need to find a balance.

When is it ok to Connect with people on social networks?

It's ok to connect with people whenever you choose, but mindful not to bombard with requests. Obviously it's up to them if they accept your connection request. Again personally I use LinkedIn for business and Facebook for personal.

How do you know when to speak at a virtual event?

Many of us are on virtual calls and/or webinars all day, but, it is difficult for everyone to know when to get involved and when to stay quiet. Therefore, when talking in a virtual room try to make sure your point is relevant and succinct.

Likewise, if you have a question but are afraid to comment on camera, you can always chat to the host privately and ask them the question, they can then share with the group either with or without naming you. Often, hosts give this as an option in advance as well as during a meeting.

How do I start a conversation and/or keep a conversation on a professional platform e.g. LinkedIn?

Before connecting with somebody, do your research, find out about them and their company and make sure there is mutual relevance. Make sure you have a reason or insight to start a conversation – not an immediate sales pitch!



Networking for Employers

Is virtual networking different depending on your nature (introverts vs extroverts)? How can we make it fair for all?

Virtual networking actually gives people, be they extrovert or introvert, a potentially level playing field. There are many people who feel intimidated walking into a busy meeting room, conference or party that can now join meetings and webinars.

It's important that the host makes everyone feel welcome and makes sure that the 'meeting' does not become dominated by one person. It is good to welcome someone who has not joined a meeting before, check on how a few people are to create a sense of openness and encourage people to use the public chat function if they would rather contribute that way.

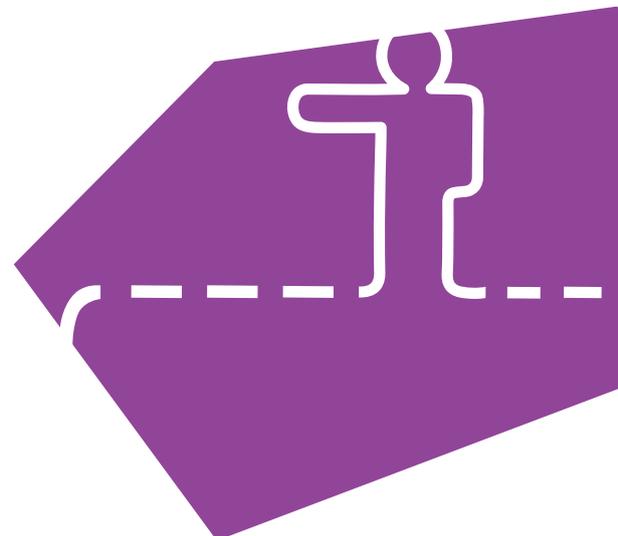
Can we give our employees networking goals, targets and guidelines?

This is a challenge and given how many people are feeling anxious at this time, with not only worries about work, but, also their personal life it's probably best to avoid setting goals and targets.

Guidelines for how employees appear at virtual events could be useful but without undue stress and pressure.

Are there opportunities to network with potential clients at the moment?

There are always opportunities to network with potential clients. Doing posts on social media create interaction, don't feel shy when using Zoom to send a private chat message to say hello to somebody and consider holding your own webinars or social events to invite potential clients to e.g. an industry casual discussion or small events around a specific topic.



Networking for Employers (Cont.)

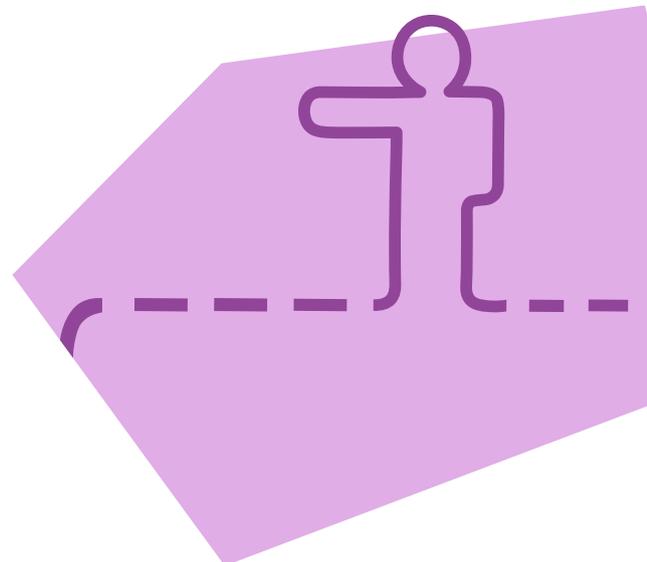
How can I make sure my company is remembered after an event as we can't give out business cards?

One important thing to remember when you are on a platform such as Zoom is that only your name appears in the video (unless you use your company name instead). When you are talking use your company name and make sure people know where you are from.

Ahead of an event, hosts should consider asking attendees whether they are happy for their email to be shared.

As an attendee, if you have made a contribution or have a relevant point, you can often use the chat function to send a message to everyone in the meeting with your point and add an email address.

This will disappear when the meeting ends but should be noted down by people it is relevant to. Don't forget to note down relevant emails that are shared with you!



Running a Virtual Event

What do we need to consider at the planning stage?

- (a) Timezones
- (b) Who is the event for – your audience
What's the message you want to people to leave with?
- (c) How many people should attend?
Therefore, what technology do you/they need
- (d) Wi-Fi plan B - you may get drop-outs so be aware of how to re-connect if needed
- (e) Who is leading the event?
- (f) Necessary support roles e.g. back-up host, dedicated note taker, social media promoter, slide/presentation co-ordinator, break-out room facilitators.
- (g) Audio set up – do you want to use headphones, a microphone etc.

Is there specific content to include for virtual events?

It depends what the purpose of the meeting is, but, be aware of fatigue, the quicker you can convey your message the better.

Often events are better positioned as multiple sessions - these are proving to be far more effective to achieve connection and engagement than a longer one-off session.

What platform should we use for the event of 50, 100 and 200+ people?

Zoom and GoToMeetings are amongst the best for events as they have very good screen sharing options. They can cope with audiences as large as 1000 people. Be aware that if the event is that big you should seriously consider using multiple screen technology.

How do you share information and documents pre/post event?

Tools such as Eventbrite are smart as you can get people to register for the event and also email them regularly with any information they may need. You could also set-up groups on Facebook and LinkedIn for the participants as an area to meet before the event and also connect post event.

Running a Virtual Event

How can we replicate the networking opportunities at a virtual event?

Being virtual doesn't stop our ability to connect and communicate. It's all about engagement and message, people will feel motivated when they understand what's in it for them.

So big considerations to get them there, as with live events, are: 'What's in it for the attendees?' 'Why should they come?'

Once at the online event - there is a breakout room facility on Zoom and probably other platforms, which means you can split people into separate rooms to make conversation interactive and allow easier networking. You as the facilitator can also go into the rooms to check and encourage conversation!

It's also worth considering how you can bring elements of 'real life' to your events, do you want to send out gifts or reports in advance of your event to all or specific attendees? It's worth getting creative to stand-out.

Are there top tips for the host on the day?

Set the boundaries from the start

Make sure the audience knows the agenda and how they take part in the event - how they can contribute and connect.

Keep to time - and give a valuable conclusion to the event - be it a call to action, or the next session details.

Can we specify what people should wear?

With virtual events, it is more important that people are comfortable. You are sharing an online space; therefore, it is more likely to be up to the individual how they would like to present themselves.

What is the main difference when organising a virtual event to an in real life event?

Technology, communication, fatigue, engagement, co-ordination with facilitators (they will probably not be in the room with you). Time zones if international audience and competing distractions e.g. emails, phone calls and other meetings.

Summary

From David Clare

At times like these people more than ever need to network and communicate, be it through social networks, virtual meetings or webinars.

It is understandable for furloughed colleagues to feel 'forgotten' and indeed worried about their future roles. Whilst they cannot engage in work matters, why not arrange virtual drinks or WhatsApp groups to keep them engaged? Also remember that if you join a virtual party you don't have to be the life and soul, likewise the host has to remember that some people just like to see friendly faces.

Smaller group 'meetings' also enable people to feel they have a chance to be heard. Diversify the types of meetings you hold, maybe have a quiz, baby photo competition or dance along to some of your favourite tunes alongside the more formal business updates and webinars that form the spine of your daily routine.

When you join a virtual meeting, please have your camera on and make sure your name is displayed. This not only means people know who you are, but it also helps to allay security fears.

Working from home is the new norm, don't be embarrassed if your dog barks, the children enter the room or your background is not full of books, awards and certificates.

If the sun's shining sit outside, why wouldn't you?

Stay safe and get in touch if we can be of more assistance with your virtual meetings, events and conferences.

Best wishes,



David Clare
Managing Director,
The Business Travel Network

In Partnership with:



Matt Lewis
Active Group



Jules White
Author: Live it, Love it, Sell it

External Resources

General Coronavirus links

Public Health England www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

NHS UK: www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance

Places that need volunteers or online help

NHS Volunteer Responder: www.goodsamapp.org/NHS

Samaritans Online Chat portal: www.samaritans.org/chatdonate/

Links to the other Faqs in the series:

Mental Health: <https://bit.ly/35eEpex>

Cyber Security: <https://bit.ly/2Yg1njV>

Career development and Recruitment: <https://bit.ly/3aIi9dX>

Legal: <https://bit.ly/3cVJ3k8>



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