

Creating Winning Webinars: 5 Lessons Learned in 2014

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This month, besides being the start of the new year, also officially marks the start of my 8th year of practicing webinar demand generation. I've learned a ton, had some ups and downs, yet it's truly been everything and then some that I hoped it would be. I'm excited about what 2015 holds in store for all webinar professionals.

After producing hundreds of webinars across multiple B2B sectors, 2014 really validated and brought into sharp focus what works, and what doesn't for producing webinars that meet our clients' commercial goals as well as delight their audiences.

Webinars have proven to be a top content marketing staple, and are here to stay. Based on our own experience and polls I've conducted over dozens of webinars with demand generation and marketing professionals, the biggest challenge continues to be around attracting an audience.

The 5 key lessons learned that I'm confident will help you create a winning webinar strategy in 2015 for attracting and engaging audiences are:

1, Relevance

Is your topic a "must have" that will educate the audience on how to overcome a pain point or demonstrate how they will achieve better outcomes? They won't register if it's not. An example of a relevant topic was a recent case study that demonstrated how a car dealership using an innovative solution increased new vehicle gross profits and sales by discussing their challenges, options to solving these challenges, methodology used, business outcomes, lessons learned and how to get started.

2. Disruption

Industries in turmoil, or are dealing with confusion and change are ripe for attending your webinar to learn how to overcome these challenges. Webinars that addressed these issues did very well and will continue to do well in attracting their audiences. For e.g., we saw very strong audience acquisition in sectors dealing with disruption such as Aerospace, Automotive, Healthcare and Life Sciences that attracted between 250 – 950 registrants with attendance ratios above 50%.

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3. External Thought Leaders as Speakers vs. Internal Company Experts

The credibility of a webinar is significantly increased when at least one of the speakers is not affiliated with the company sponsoring the webinar. A thought leader or 3rd party expert is critical as they help first in attracting the audience. Then during the webinar, they educate them by sharing trends and opportunities to overcome key challenges. Done right, real thought leaders will inspire attendees who are interested in learning more to contact the webinar sponsor after the webinar. We did a webinar for a very well known brand that chose to have their sales VP be one of the presenters along with an internal engineer, and it fell flat. While they were knowledgeable, it still sounded like a corporate sales pitch.

4. The Subject Line

As email marketing continues to be the major engine for audience acquisition, the only chance you have to get someone to register is if they read your invitation, and that means they first have to be intrigued by the subject line to open up the email. But with only a finite amount of real estate available for your subject line, and before you execute your campaign, it's imperative to spend a lot of time on developing a subject line series. Then after each Drip, measure your results and keep on be willing to modify and tweak it throughout the marketing campaign.

I wish I had a simple subject line formula, but every campaign is different. However, if you do have a well known thought leader, use both the recipients and their name in the subject line, as that will help grab the readers attention to open up and read your email. For e.g., for the automotive webinar, one of the featured speakers is a well known industry visionary, and we featured his name in the subject line that performed very nicely. Another technique is to ask a thought provoking statement, such as "are you prepared for the FDA's implementation of the Drug Supply Chain Security Act?", etc.

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5. Remember, Your Attendees are on a Journey - Don't Sell

The most successful webinars are those that are part of an on-going educational series. These brands take the long view and realize that not all attendees are sales ready to buy now. Instead they want to deliver on what the webinar invitation promised. By educating the audience to be more informed will create more advocates who will eventually become their customers.

In closing, if you do nothing more than follow these 5 lessons learned, I'm confident you'll have a very successful 2015 webinar season.

I'd love to hear from you on other tips you have and lessons learned as we're all interested in optimizing our webinar demand generation outcomes. Here's to great 2015 too!

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