

Jun 1, 2020, 08:15am EDT | 5,139 views

16 Essential Steps To Making Remote Meetings More Engaging



Forbes Communications Council COUNCIL POST | Membership (fee-based)
Leadership

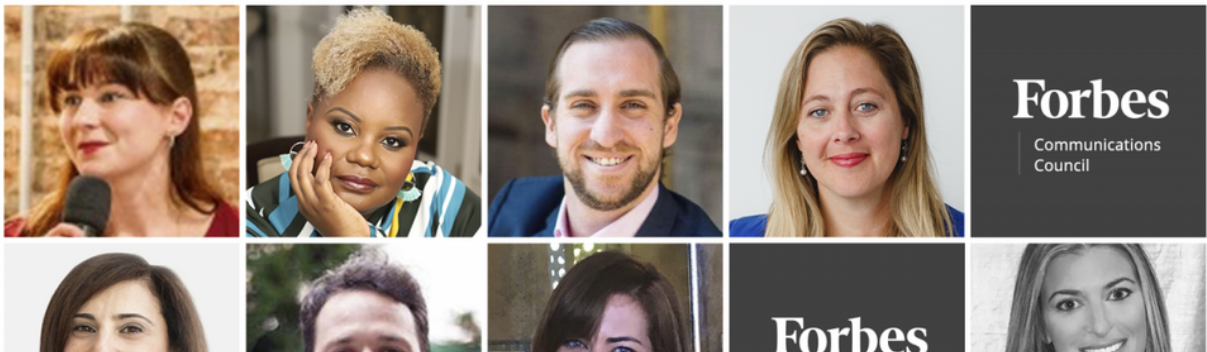
POST WRITTEN BY

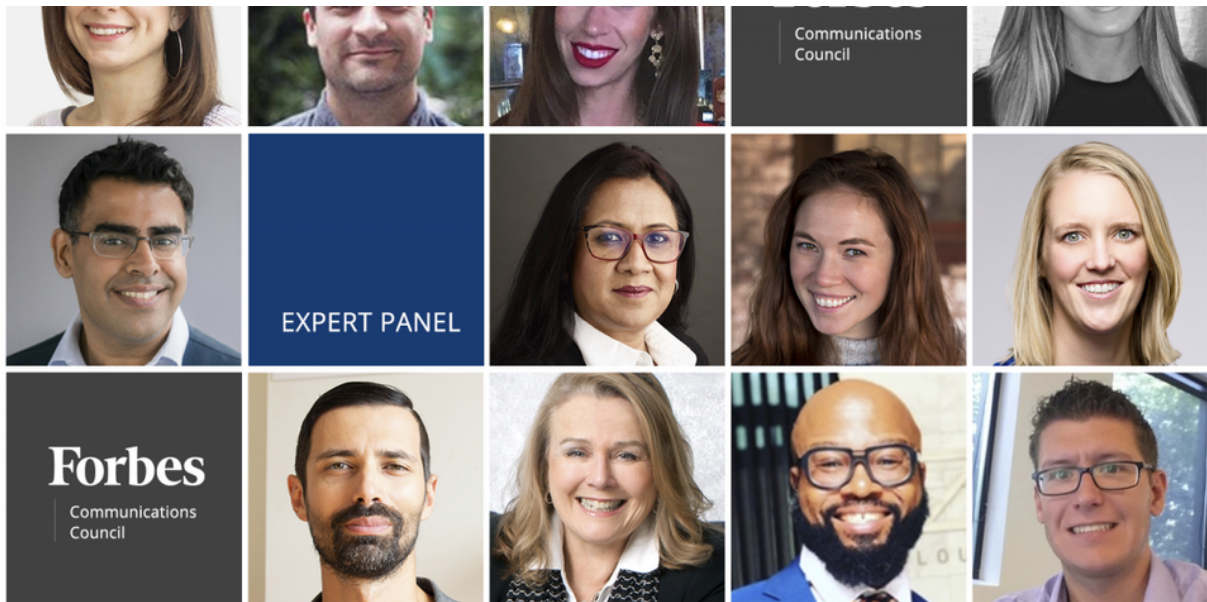
Expert Panel, Forbes Communications Council

Communications, PR, public affairs & media relations executives from **Forbes Communications Council** share firsthand insights.

When a business holds a meeting within a conference hall, it's easier to adapt to the environment and in-person communication to make it engaging. However, with the rise of remote work and virtual meetings, businesses lack a lot of that agency. The result is that many attendees may be distracted and fail to connect to the subject matter. In some cases, this could lead to miscommunication and eventual fallout from this consequence.

Remote meetings need to do more to bring their audience into the subject and become immersed. Sixteen members of **Forbes Communications Council** look at what methods a business can employ to make their remote meetings more engaging, and why those techniques are so successful.





Members provide insights on how to make virtual meetings more engaging for participants. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

1. Engage By Showing Your Human Side

Now that virtual everything is the norm, it can be difficult to engage your audience. But despite the challenge, this is your organization's opportunity to define your identity. As appropriate, ask speakers to share how they are coping. Add humor. Show your organization's human side. Social distancing means your audience will appreciate the connection more than ever and be more likely to engage. - [Megan Cagle, New American Leaders](#)

2. Be A Gracious Host

Be a gracious host. Let attendees know they do not need to apologize for the barking dog, talking toddler or the ringing doorbell in the background and that it's OK to come off mute even if you have background sounds. Set the expectation at the beginning of the call so attendees will feel more comfortable and supported. - [Temeka Easter Rice, Sallie Mae](#)

3. Make An Agenda And Stick To It

Virtual meetings can be a powerful way to connect with your team (or your clients), but they can easily get derailed. Maximize your productivity by

setting a concrete agenda for each meeting. Send your agenda in advance and delegate specific deliverables for each participant. This will boost engagement and teamwork during the meeting because everyone will have something valuable to contribute. - [Devin Henry, Nomadic Real Estate Investments, LLC](#)

[Forbes Communications Council](#) is an invitation-only community for executives in successful public relations, media strategy, creative and advertising agencies. ***Do I qualify?***

4. Set Your Expectations Up Front

I follow three principles when hosting virtual meetings. The first is to set an expectation that all participants join by video, not phone. Distractions are reduced this way. Secondly, pay attention to the length of your meeting (cut it in half for virtual ones) and double the frequency of breaks. Thirdly and most importantly, build an agenda to be interactive and involve participants in a personal way. - [Camille Weleschuk, ATB Financial](#)

5. Make It Interactive

Virtual meeting overload is real, and it makes it hard to stay engaged when meetings get booked back to back. Be aware of what needs an actual meeting and what can be a conversation over collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams. Incorporate workshop tools to be more interactive, use breakout rooms and whiteboard tools. Use visuals, ask questions, and be clear on your meeting agenda and outcome. - [Marisa Freeden, Broadvoice](#)

6. Apply The ‘One Pizza Rule’

For years, Jeff Bezos has used the “two pizza rule” to keep meetings productive. If the group gathered can’t be fed by two pizzas, there are too many people and nothing will get done. If you want everyone to participate

in your working virtual meeting and not have it turn into a lecture, you have to go even smaller and put the “one pizza rule” into action. - [Wayne Congar](#), MAZ Systems Inc

7. Utilize The Chat Feature

For any virtual meeting, encourage participation by way of chat. Even if it's just a "yes" or "no" answer, soliciting responses from participants throughout the meeting will keep them active for the duration of the discussion. Plus, just the very act of thinking about an answer then writing it down allows virtual attendees to engage with and analyze the material being presented. - [Melissa Kandel](#), [little word studio](#)

8. Be Deliberate

I've found that engagement in large groups can be difficult for most -- virtual or otherwise. My meeting philosophy is twofold: Provide a clear agenda with goals, key elements and your hope for next steps/action items; and don't bother hosting a meeting with a bunch of "yous." Instead, host meetings with a diverse group of people, which will generate a more robust and open dialog. - [Mia Tinari](#), [TAIT](#)

9. Bring The Plan And Make Specific Asks

Virtual meetings tend to exert more cognitive stress compared to live environments where body language and emotional cues are clearly present. As a leader, I've found it more helpful to bring a concrete plan to get my team's feedback and then make specific asks to take the work to closure. This gets the team out of vague abstractions to focus their attention on a concrete work output. - [Ajit Ghuman](#), [Narvar](#)

10. Personalize To Every Participant

Address everyone in the virtual meeting by their names. Reiterate and summarize key points as you go, and then stop to ask the virtual meeting

body for questions and concerns. It's more effective to stop every now and then, because it helps participants refocus their attention. - [Paramita Bhattacharya, Blurb](#)

11. Make The Agenda Question-Oriented

The best practice for meetings in general is to have an agenda. An even better practice is to have an agenda of questions. This will give a hint to all to not only be prepared to answer questions, but also get them to focus on "solving" something rather than being "presented to." For example, instead of "marketing strategy review" include "How will we deliver \$400 million in SQL by November via campaigns?" - [Katie Kirschner, NCR](#)

12. Keep It Short, Sweet And To The Point

The best thing you can do for engagement is to tighten up the attendee list and the time spent in the meeting. The more people on a call, the more likely that some will tune out. If they don't need to be there, let them log off. And second, knowing the attention span on virtual meetings is shorter, make the meeting shorter. That means, don't try to cram too many topics into a single call. - [Kate Barton, Clearview Advisory](#)

13. Get The Room Talking

Don't be afraid of a little small talk for the first couple of minutes of the session. This way, you can break the ice with your team and check in to see how they're doing. Some casual conversation can help encourage otherwise quiet team members to chime in, and it can build rapport between leadership and lower-level team members. - [Amine Rahal, Regal Assets](#)

14. Try To Include Breakouts

Having been on a multitude of virtual meetings recently, without a doubt the most engaging, helpful and informative have included a specific focus and clear agenda, a keynote speaker, and the opportunity to be involved in

breakouts to discuss the topic and/or agenda with like-minded people. Incredibly helpful and allows for networking! - [Lynne McQuaker, Studio Movie Grill](#)

15. Provide A Quirky Visual Aid

Add a requirement for all attendees to wear something funky and be prepared to discuss it on the meeting agenda. It could be as simple as a special hat or scarf. It helps liven up the screen and makes for a good screengrab of team bonding during these difficult times. It works because it serves the same function as an ice breaker, but breaks the monotony of endless calls. - [Ken Gibbs, Viacom](#)

16. Increase Engagement With A Theme

One of the biggest challenges we're all facing during the COVID-19 response is keeping a regular routine. This includes becoming very lax with our work attire while at home. Adding a theme to your next video call will set an expectation while increasing engagement. Something as simple as "wear the company logo" can go a long way. Or change it up with a fun "Hawaiian shirt" or "favorite team" day. - [Andy Nauman, Ameri-Force, Inc.](#)



Forbes Communications Council

Forbes Communications Council is an invitation-only, fee-based organization for senior-level communications and public relations executives. Find out if you qualify at [Fo...](#)

Read More

Reprints & Permissions

ADVERTISEMENT