Being a Speaker in a Virtual World

The Playbook

ar·tic·u·la·tion
LEADING WITH STORY

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Introduction

About Articulation

Articulation's roots can be traced to Ruth Milligan's founding of TEDxColumbus in 2009, one of the first TEDx events in the world. This experience led her to search for someone — anyone — who could help coach her next round of speakers in message method and storytelling. **Finding no one, she created** what would become today's storytelling authority — Articulation. // **More than just a public speaking training and executive coaching company,** we see ourselves as a service to communities and organizations — large and small, public and private — that helps their executives and rising stars become better storytellers and better public speakers. // **Our clients come from** Fortune 500 companies, internationally recognized education and research institutions, philanthropic organizations, and entrepreneurs eager to grow their businesses. Individuals from across the business spectrum also turn to us to obtain the presentation, public speaking, and storytelling skills to advance their careers and lead the people and companies they work for. // **The coaches from Articulation** have provided coaching to over 1000 speakers in the TEDx and TED-Style of speaking. // **This means our attention to the detail** of having your talk broadcast to thousands if not millions of viewers has been a part of our daily work. **We** believe in harnessing the power of stories well told — to deliver the impact that only compelling storytelling can. // Because great stories don't have endings, only beginning. // **As we find ourselves at the intersection of our experience and this new virtual world**, we are delighted to bring this playbook for your consumption and use. We hope it is a tool that brings you value during what is a likely challenging time.

Who needs this playbook ?

Answer: **Any speaker who will deliver content through a virtual platform.**

A speaker who might be **live in a team meeting**, a **board meeting**, **guest on a webinar**, **keynote at a conference** or at a **pitch for funds**. It might be a **TEDx talk**, delivering an **opening statement in a lawsuit**, or in an **oral session defending a billion dollar RFP,** all while staring at your computer or camera in your living room.

Paid speakers and everyday speakers are no longer differentiated in this virtual world. While the future of the live audience is in debate, this playbook will be a valuable tool for anyone standing up an idea, insight, report or oral delivery in for our virtual ones.

What role(s) are you playing?

Things to keep in mind while you read this playbook

Remember that sometimes you may be the organizer or host of the event or meeting, and sometimes you are the guest speaker. There are considerations you will want to always carry in either role - the host or speaker - and especially when you are playing both roles.

This playbook assumes that **you have already established the communication goal** for your talk, presentation, pitch or other - to inform, educate or motivate. We are not trying to re-create the message and storytelling pathway you will still need to take as you develop your content (We can help you with that but it wouldn't fit in this playbook!).

Likewise, there are times the virtual meeting is "closed" and will never be promoted, recorded or replayed, but other times it may be "open" or even "open on demand." **We invite you to stay open-minded if a suggestion doesn't apply to you right away - it may for another event, meeting, pitch or conference in the future.**

Online
Technology

Platform

As of the publication of this playbook, **there are more than over 75 different virtual platforms established.** We do not endorse or recommend any one of them - but in full transparency - we've been using Zoom exclusively for over 6 years and know it well.

Our recommendation is to **use what you know best** but be open to the emerging technologies, especially since you **won't always be in control of what platform you'll be speaking on**.

But we do assume that the platform you find yourself on will have **certain capabilities listed to the right.**

Whatever platform you are on, **you will want to know these fairly universal capabilities** and use them.

Capabilities

- **Take questions from participants**

- **Communicate through a chat function**

- **Play pre-recorded video**

- **Share screen for visuals/slides**

- **Mute or stop video**

- **Use a green screen**

- **Use a digital whiteboard**

- **Use polling**

- **Have breakout rooms (for meetings not webinars).**

The Producer's Role

Imagine you were giving a talk to a live audience of any size.

Your job is to stand up on that live platform (or in front of your team in a conference room) and deliver your content.

You are not responsible for the lights, audio, or video playback except maybe on your slides.

The same is true on a virtual platform. It is imperative that as a speaker, you always have a "producer" working with you.

Your producer should:

- Physically open and close the session (for meetings or webinars); hold people in the waiting room, if necessary, until it is open

- Mute and unmute participants (in meetings)

- Watch the chat and alert you to concerns, or address them in the chat (meeting / webinar)

- Watch the Q&A function and answer questions real time while you are delivering content (in webinars)

- Solve technical problems

- Record the session

Interactive Tools

Your producer should monitor these tools while you concentrate on your content and delivery.

Chat - This is used for people to **post comments**, not questions. Your producer should establish this guideline and also monitor them, especially for any technical issues.

Q&A - This is used for participants to **post questions** to you, specifically. Your producer can answer some of them inside the Q&A function, mark those that were answered already (depending on the platform) and then elevate others to you to answer verbally.
When recording your content, you may want to record the Q&A under a separate file.

Raising Hands - This function is available in smaller meeting rooms, not webinars. It allows a **participant to show next to their video image** that they have a comment or question. It is also a great tool to take a "live poll" to "show hands."

Polling - Polls are wonderful ways to change up the stream of talking / content and **get an audience engaged**. Once you launch a poll, make sure to give people time to answer and then also see the results. Polls typically need to be pre-programmed before a session starts, make sure to look for instructions on your specific platform.

Gaming - As an example, **Kahoot!,** is an online game app that gives participants a **chance to answer questions and be in competition with each othe**r. A leaderboard appears at the end of each question. While they need to go to the website or to the app - it is worth the extra clicks. It is free and easy to program and there are plenty more like it available.

There are additional interactive tools being developed, we will keep track of our favorites on our website - www.articulationinc.com

Video

ALL ABOUT VIDEO

Pre-Recorded Video

If you are hosting someone for a fee, or you are making a fee on a talk, you will want to **think carefully about pre-recording your content before the live event.** This way, if during the live event, any technology, wi-fi, internet or computer failure happens, **you will have a backup.** (See the appendix for a recording-at-home checklist). Your producer will need to have a copy of that MP4 or WMV file to cue up and play should a tech failure occur.

Playback Recording

Most platforms can record your live content. Often, they become part of an archive of a conference or a post-event social media push. **These recordings are not often edited** - which means you have some extra pressure on you to deliver the content well. While errors will be made (you are human) there are certain precautions you can take to assure the recording is strong. **See section on your video-set up below for a checklist.**

Playing Video during your presentation

First, pay close attention to the **technical steps to playback videos on your platform**. Your producer should have a redundant copy of it in case your computer does not playback on demand. This would be no different if you were in a live session and the stage manager / producer has a redundant computer set up if the initial one failed.
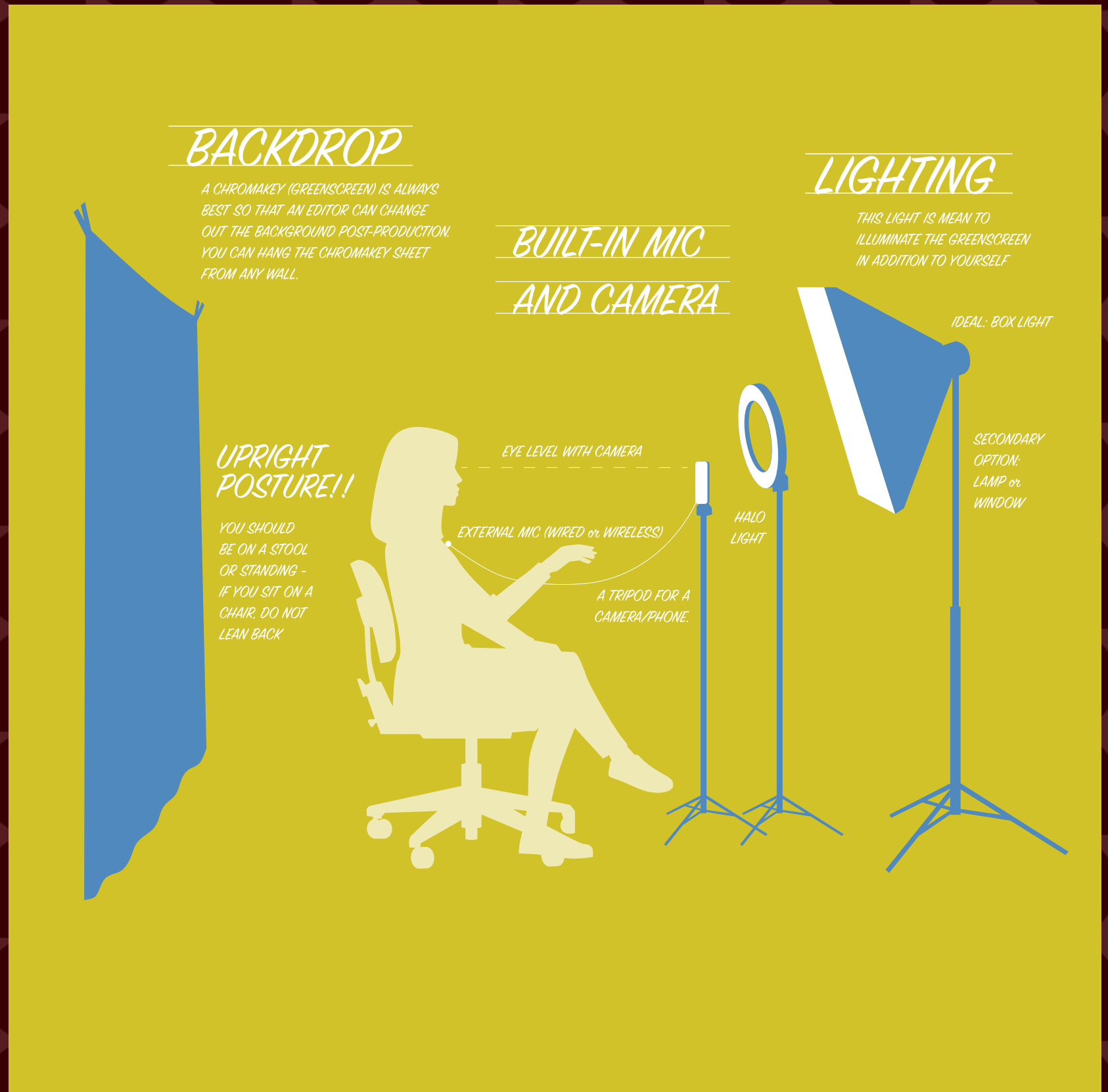
Recording at Home

If you are pre-recording a talk for events that were cancelled or for content you want to distribute outside of an event - and you have no idea where to start - these pages will be invaluable to you.

We do not recommend that you record video at home using a virtual platform like Zoom or Skype for these recordings. The quality of sound and audio is always sub-par to that which you can achieve through a smart phone or camera. We have tested several setups for recording a talk at home, **this diagram outlines the necessary elements,** with some options if you are working with a video editor. There is a page of **specific products** in the appendix of this playbook.

You will always want to orient your phone or camera **horizontal** and frame yourself just **above the chest** unless your event or production partner advises otherwise.

BACKDROP

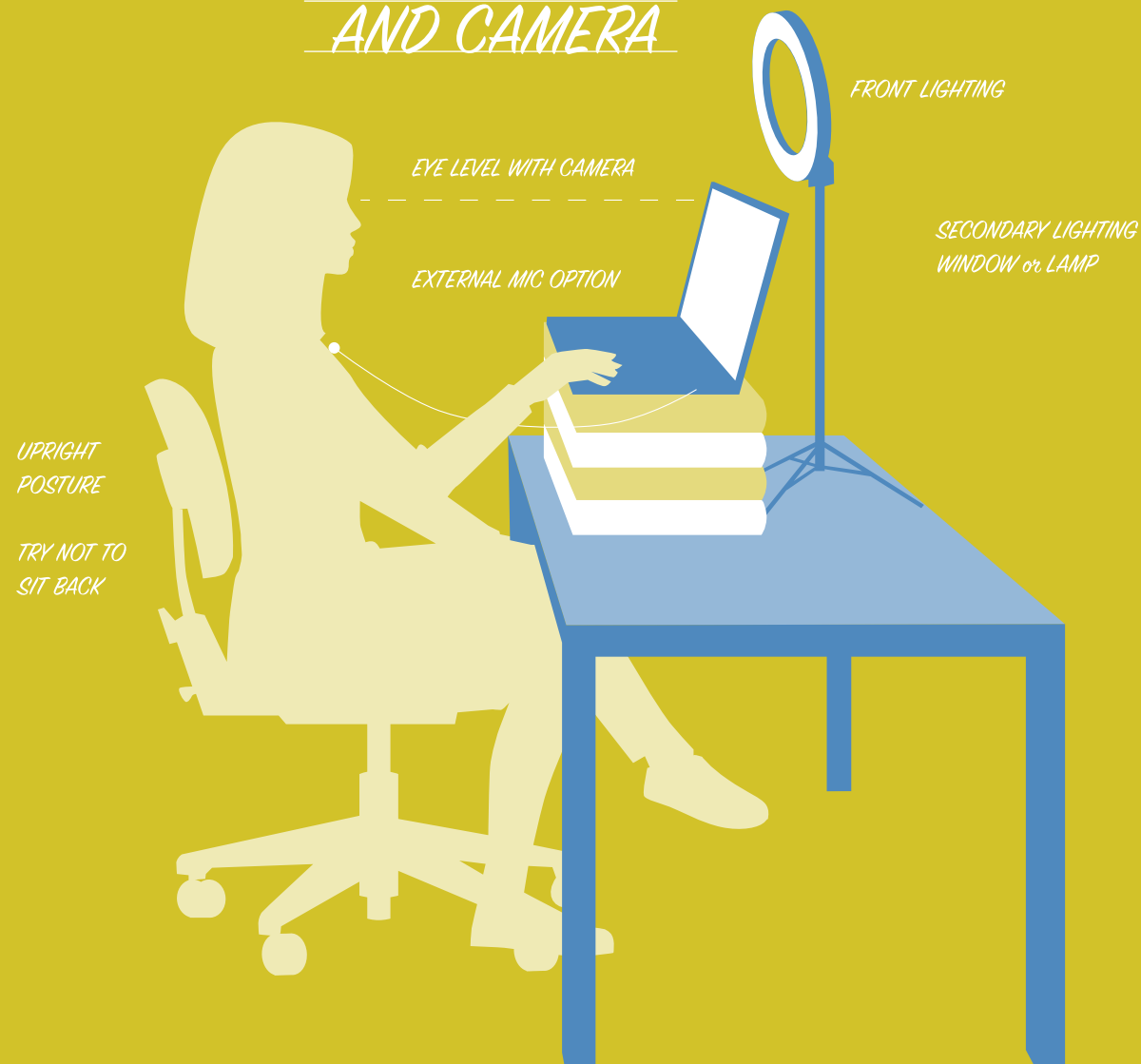A CHROMAKEY (GREENSCREEN) IS ALWAYS BEST SO THAT AN EDITOR CAN CHANGE OUT THE BACKGROUND POST-PRODUCTION. YOU CAN HANG THE CHROMAKEY SHEET FROM ANY WALL.

BUILT-IN MIC AND CAMERA

LIGHTING

THIS LIGHT IS MEAN TO ILLUMINATE THE GREENSCREEN IN ADDITION TO YOURSELF

IDEAL: BOX LIGHT

SECONDARY OPTION: LAMP or WINDOW

UPRIGHT POSTURE!!

YOU SHOULD BE ON A STOOL OR STANDING - IF YOU SIT ON A CHAIR, DO NOT LEAN BACK

EYE LEVEL WITH CAMERA

EXTERNAL MIC (WIRED or WIRELESS)

HALO LIGHT

A TRIPOD FOR A CAMERA/PHONE.

Your Virtual Self

BACKDROP

CLEAN BACKGROUND OR
CHROMAKEY (GREENSCREEN)

**BUILT-IN MIC
AND CAMERA**

LIGHTING

FRONT LIGHTING

EYE LEVEL WITH CAMERA

EXTERNAL MIC OPTION

SECONDARY LIGHTING
WINDOW or LAMP

UPRIGHT
POSTURE

TRY NOT TO
SIT BACK

Your Virtual Image

While it is true you can likely get away with sweatpants on a video call, you will want to use this map of visual elements to consider when creating your "virtual self" and stage above the waist.

- Solid Color shirt (not white)
- No sparkly jewelry
- Camera eye level or higher
- No distracting background
- Front-lit light
- Use a microphone or headset if available
- Posture-encouraging chair that does not swivel.

Your Virtual Voice

While your "live event" voice is important your voice is amplified in different ways on a video call. Consider these **foundational skills** to being heard on a virtual platform.

Sound often travels through a "stuttered" connection. **Strong, complete annunciation** is required.

UH, You Know, So, Right and UM:

Still not allowed.

Emphasis, tonality and enthusiasm are necessary fuel for a virtual message to be being heard.

Pausing and breath are as important as the words spoken to **allow for audiences to keep up with your message.**

Your Content

Content

If you have a keynote, talk or presentation of any length prepared for a live audience, we recommend that you **condense your live content to half the time for a virtual audience.**

This is a guideline not a rule. The reason is attention spans on video are **generally half of what they are in person**. Use the balance of your time for engagement activities, answering questions or general conversation.

If you are on a panel discussion, work with your peer panelists to be more concise and use the rest of your time for engagement activities.

And the million dollar question: how long will your audience last?

While the science is incomplete on how long a virtual session should last, we suggest starting with 20 minutes and not exceeding 30 minutes.

By the time you have solved technical issues, reviewed housekeeping and finished Q&A **PLUS** your content, you will likely be at the 45 minute or 1 hour mark, **which is the audience attention limit.** Your audience needs a change in delivery style every 3-4 minutes (slide / speaker / subject change, engagement activity)

We offer one exception - if the time is being spent in truly interactive exercises, engagement conversations in breakout rooms, or hands-on work - then your time limits can shift.

Refer to the "Interactive tools" page for audience engagement ideas

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Openings

Sparks

Your content is important, **but what will you do in the first 60-90 seconds?**

It works the same way with live audiences - how you draw them in emotionally to your content and intent will help to determine if they are going to stick with you.

While a great story is always a terrific opening, here are some other hooks to get you started. We love the list of Sparks that's been developed by our friends at the Radiant Collective, view it here on their blog: https://theradiantcollective.com/blog/treasure-trove-of-remote-ice-breakers-aka-stokes

- **Have everyone write a word in the chat as you begin: How are you feeling?**

- **For smaller groups: Ask them to bring an item to share, tell a story in 30 seconds where it's from.**

- **Launch a poll with some intentionally funny answers, evoking laughter.**

- **Show an image of how you are feeling (then make it the opposite of what you really are!) Ask attendees to do the same.**

- **Ask them to list in the Q&A the question they want to get answered in the session.**

Slides and Visuals

Visuals aid in attention and retention, if used properly.

Use less text and more visuals

Do you want people to listen to you or read your slides?

Use bigger borders on slides

Video boxes on the perimeter of video calls will overlap slide images

Practice slide transitions

Between slides - and - between your "shared screen" and your image

Aim for more slides with less content density

Online viewers need "digestible" bites of content, not a "firehose"

Pre/Post Event Considerations

Pre and Post Event/Meeting Considerations

We know in **virtual learning circles** to get someone's attention for an online class, you need to **send them something in advance.** A bit of reading, a short video clip, a survey or even some homework. That "**attention**" then advances "**engagement**" which then hopefully leads to "**adoption**" or "r**etention**."

Whether you are hosting a meeting or a speaker at someone else's meeting, this question always needs an answer:

What are you doing to communicate with your attendees before and after the meeting, webinar or conference?

For more complex events, there is always a plan to encourage people to attend especially since there is often a fee involved. But for virtual gatherings, from a simple weekly staff meeting to a more consequential quarterly town hall, **speakers will want to know that their attendees are informed that they are speaking.** Tease out their topic and give them something to do before the event begins.

Likewise, if you can encourage (or plan yourself) a **post-event survey** to gather feedback about your session, do so.

Recording Equipment List

Recording Equipment List (1/2)

A device to record on.

This can be your **smart phone**. Or your **computer.** Or a **SLR camera with video.**   Make sure whichever you use has storage capacity and you know how to use it in direct or selfie mode. You will use LANDSCAPE mode unless a video producer tells you to use portrait due to needs of a different editing need.

A device to stabilize your recording device.

If you are using your smart phone or camera, you will want some sort of **Tripod.**

If you are using your computer, it is already stabilized but you will want to make sure the camera is eye level (use books or other means to prop up a laptop).

A computer or tablet if you want to use a Teleprompter App

While we are not fans of TelePrompTers for live events, they have utility for recording video.

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Recording Equipment List (2/2)

Access to a shared file or file transfer protocol platform.

Getting your file off of your phone can be the hardest part. Think about recording it in smaller sizes (turning the video off and on in between natural breaks). ***There are several basic options for transferring files:***

Hard wire - download them through a wired connection or a SD card inserted into your computer (or via a transfer device).

For iOS devices - Airdrop often works very well for transferring between a phone and computer.

Once the files are transferred to a computer, consult with your event organizer or producer where you can upload them (i.e. Google Drive, Dropbox) for playback or editing.

Microphone

It is always best to have a **direct audio feed** the phone or computer. We do not recommend earphones (airpods) that have a microphone - it is distracting in the video.

Light

You don't need to purchase a light, but always make sure to have light shining on your face more than backlighting you. It will help eliminate shadows on your face and make you appear more professional. A **"halo"** light is most affordable and effective if you are going to buy one.

Green Screen

This is only necessary if you are going require a consistent background between videos (amongst multiple speakers). The editor will replace the green with a branded image.

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Questions to consider

As you prepare to speak at an event or meeting, use this list of questions to help make sure you are fully prepared.

- What is your role - host / producer, speaker/panelist or both?
- Who is your host / producer if you are just speaking? Do you have a call with them to run through the technology in advance?
- Do you understand the platform technology they are using?
- Are you limited to the technology tools (ie polling) within the platform or can you use other technology to supplement?
- Is your workspace quiet and set up for optimal participation?
- If you want to share your screen with a visual or slide, will you be in charge or that transition or will your host?
- Are you wearing something non-distracting?
- Are your slides / visuals as simple as they can be?
- What are your engagement points for your audience?
- Are they planned for every several minutes?
- How will you open to "spark" or "hook" your audience?
- Can you get your content to under 30 minutes and leave whatever time is left for audience Q&A?
- Is your backdrop clean and not disrupting?
- Should you pre-record your talk in case your wi-fi goes down?
- Do you have the right equipment to record on your own?
- Is the whole event being recorded?
- Do you have access to use the recording afterwards?
- What is being sent (or what will you send) to the participants before the call to help with engagement?
- If you need to record content, do you have access to the right basic equipment?
- Do you have access to a good video editor or do you have the skills to do so (if you are sending pre-recorded footage)
- If you have pre-recorded footage and it is being used as backup for a live event, who will be "switching" to it if it is needed?
- Who is responsible for sending out a post-event survey?

Your
notes

More Resources

www.articulationinc.com/ virtual-speaker-resources

Ruth Milligan, Managing Partner
ruth@articulationinc.com