

Chapter 1

Webinars with Maximum Impact

In This Chapter

- ▶ Describing the webinar
 - ▶ Understanding the tools of the webinar
 - ▶ Grasping the roles of producing a webinar
 - ▶ Understanding what a webinar can do for you
-

In the 1960s animated sitcom *The Jetsons*, George Jetson did a lot of business via a television screen from his office at Spacely's Space Sprockets. The futuristic show imagined the future of the workplace and beyond, and that particular scenario came true with the webinar.

Nowadays, thanks to webinars, people can channel their inner George Jetson and attend meetings from anyplace they choose.

Getting a Handle on Webinars

Webinars are a newer kind of meeting with a funny name that allow you to attend from home or office — anywhere with Internet access, actually.

Who doesn't like that kind of meeting? If you were ask anyone to describe their favorite kind of meeting, besides them saying none at all, they'll usually choose ones that are most comfortable. How often are those industrial-type office chairs comfortable, especially when you're sitting in them for more than an hour? *Almost never* is a likely guess, unless you compare it to sitting on its non-cushioned folding chair cousin. Then it's a clear never!

But when you allow your audience to trade in some utilitarian area for the comfort of their home, office, or on the road, you have them relaxed and attentive when listening to your message.



That's why webinars are so fantastic. They let you hold a meeting from a remote location that participants can join from their own computer. Not only are the participants comfortable and less stressed (commuting and travel do take their toll, after all), but you can also throw in some cool technology like video and PowerPoint presentations.

Yes, the webinar has changed the meeting game.

Much like the telephone, shown in Figure 1-1, made the location of a conversation between two people irrelevant, the webinar has done the same for the traditional meeting or seminar. Combine that idea with video and information graphics, and beam it out to thousands of people, and you see the value of the webinar.

Figure 1-1:
The rotary dial telephone enabled communication between people in different locations.



What a webinar is



Although webinars are a relatively new concept, many people have at least heard of them. Whether they can accurately describe one is another story. No worries. If you can't, let me take a stab at it. Basically, a *webinar* is a communication between two or more individuals over the Internet that uses audio, video, and interactive technology. Unlike a group chat in a glassed conference room, a book club discussion in your living room, or a large gathering in a public lecture hall, the meeting takes place wherever the participants are located.

So although the host resides in one location, the attendees can participate from anywhere there's an Internet connection. In some ways, a webinar is like a telephone conference call on steroids, but at the same time, it's very different.

Comparing a webinar to a conference call shares the same logic as thinking a 1928 Model A, as seen in Figure 1-2, does the same thing as a 2013 Cadillac Escalade. Sure, both will get you to your destination, but one clearly offers more comfort, efficiency, and style. Unless you're an antique car aficionado, the Escalade appears the more logical choice. And so is the webinar.

Figure 1-2:
This 1928
Ford Model
A doesn't
offer the
same
amenities
as a luxury
vehicle.



One reason a webinar is better than a telephone conference is its ability to go beyond audio communication by bringing an interactive visual component to the meeting. Sometimes that component is as simple as a few title slides or pie charts, but sometimes, it's a full-blown PowerPoint presentation with video. Add live chat and microphones on the user end, and you've created a situation where participants can communicate with each other as well as with the moderator.

More elaborate productions have a moderated panel like your own version of *The McLaughlin Group*, replete with multiple camera setups. (If you're not sure what *The McLaughlin Group* is, just think about those Sunday morning news shows with a bunch of talking heads sitting around arguing.)

Here's the basics of how webinars work:

- ✔ **Similar in some ways to a physical meeting:** Both physical meetings and webinars bring large groups together for a discussion of topics, but with the webinar, the attendees aren't all in the same room and can be located anywhere.
- ✔ **Each has its own structure:** Like any type of meeting, webinars vary greatly, yet they also share a common thread with a physical meeting space. Both use a moderator who explains the agenda, sets up the

PowerPoint presentation, and shares other appropriate content with the audience. Of course, with a webinar, it doesn't matter where the audience is located.

- ✓ **Uses audio and visual aids:** Audio and video are shared over the Internet through a webinar tool. Audio usually broadcasts through each participant's computer or over a telephone line. To participate, you need a computer with speakers and an Internet connection.

What a webinar isn't



Now that you know what a webinar is, I want to examine what it's not, compared to similar technology. For example, many people think that it's the same thing as a streamed event. A streamed event shares more in common with a television broadcast, like the one seen in Figure 1-3, than a webinar. In the physical world, you would never confuse attending a PTA meeting at your kid's school with going to a comedy club, nor would you think that going to movies is the same as attending a condominium board meeting. That's because some of these examples provide interaction, and some of them don't.



Figure 1-3: A circa 1950s television set.

Here's some food for thought on everything that a webinar is *not*:



- ✓ **A television broadcast:** A webinar is not an infomercial. Thank goodness, because who wants to hear a customer comment on how succulent the chicken is when cooked in some miracle apparatus advertised on late-night TV?
- ✓ **One-way presentation:** You know the type — where the audience can only watch and listen like a live streamed event.
- ✓ **An all-day affair:** You wouldn't want to sit through an eight-hour meeting in your workplace or some banquet hall, so why would you want to stare that long at a computer screen? The best webinars are carefully scheduled and have a managed running time that allows for bathroom breaks. People tend to lose interest when anything runs too long.

Why Do Webinars Work?

It's a win-win arrangement for both the presenter and participants. Everybody gets something out of it, with the participants being pretty darn comfortable in the process. That's because webinars offer a pleasing blend of technology and convenience.

Besides reaching a broad audience, the webinar can allow each participant to have a voice in the meeting or session. That kind of participation rarely works in a conference room, and almost never does in a large space. For example, some people are shy when it comes to speaking in conference room, just as others hog the floor with questions and comments. And when the meeting is in a larger space like a banquet hall, few people, with the exception of those seated in the front, get picked to ask a question, so most people get lost in the crowd.



Webinars also make life easier for the producer. Instead of having the added responsibility of securing an appropriately sized venue and all the things that go with it, you can concentrate on getting your message together and allow the service provider to worry about the rest.

Here are some others reasons that webinars work, including

- ✓ **They're affordable.** Travel costs, car rentals, and meals are greatly reduced or non-existent.
- ✓ **Location is irrelevant.** Participants can log on from just about anywhere. Of course, if you're with a Sherpa heading up Everest, perhaps this doesn't apply to you.

- ✓ **They're time zone-proof.** Anyone who wants to can join, although for some, it's morning, others afternoon, and for those on the eastern fringe, tomorrow, as seen in the quartet of clocks in Figure 1-4.
- ✓ **They provide flexibility.** An impromptu meeting takes time to come together because you have to consider location and people's schedules. But with a webinar, companies can schedule meetings or training sessions on short notice without worrying about the location of the participants.

Figure 1-4: Participants can join in a webinar no matter the time.



And participants reap the benefits too:

- ✓ **Webinars are interactive.** They provide real-time interaction between participants and presenter.
- ✓ **Participants can watch on-demand.** Participants can watch an archived version of the webinar if they missed it, or if they simply want to watch it again.
- ✓ **They're cost-effective.** You can save money on travel, food, and other stuff that the company doesn't cover.

Save on expenses

The best things in life are free, but webinars usually are not one of them. The costs to facilitate a webinar can range from free to expensive, but even “free” ones have some operating costs involved. Some providers charge a monthly flat fee, but it's a good idea to do some research and find the provider and plan that are best for your needs and budget.

Still, using a powerful communication tool to reach out to people saves more than gasoline or jet fuel.

These direct and indirect savings include



- ✓ **Increased productivity:** When your employees don't need to travel, they have more time to be productive. For example, they don't have to stop working on a project because they need to get to the airport or drive a couple of hours.
- ✓ **Lower venue costs:** This means you won't need to worry about finding a large room or venue and those overhead costs normally associated with having a meeting on location.
- ✓ **Decreased budget for support services:** These include chairs, refreshments, and so on.

Provide two-way communication



When you're watching the president on television delivering the State of the Union address, you're among an audience of approximately 35 million getting a progress report on the nation. Putting your political feelings aside — and the annoyance of having your favorite show pre-empted — it's an effective way of letting the country know what's going on.

That same model has limited appeal, however, when it comes to issues and topics that *directly* affect the individual. For example, employees don't want to hear their company president deliver a speech on changes to work procedures over the next calendar year. That type of meeting compels people to *interact* in some way. Why? Because people being able to ask questions at a meeting is a key part of the process.



Two-way communication lets the presenter and the participant exchange information by providing the chance to ask questions or participate. Although participants can't just blurt out questions, they at least have the chance to participate using a variety of methods. By letting everyone participate despite their location, webinars lead to a more effective meeting experience.

Here are a few means for communicating that go beyond what you as a participant see onscreen:

- ✓ **Telephone:** Many webinars rely on using a telephone for audio purposes, so you can hear the presenter and ask live questions. Be ready to ask a question or add input when you're called upon and be sure to identify yourself. After all, nobody knows who you are on the other side of the screen.
- ✓ **Headset:** Connecting a headset to your computer allows you to listen and speak at the webinar. Just remember to mute your microphone when you're not speaking.

- ✓ **Social media:** Some webinars allow participants to ask questions and make comments using Facebook or Twitter. The comments or questions either run on a ticker or are answered by the moderator.
- ✓ **E-mail:** Participants can send questions in advance, and the moderator will read them aloud, time permitting, and answer them.
- ✓ **Text message:** Just like e-mail questions, the moderator can read and answer these questions. Comments can also run on a ticker on the bottom of the screen during the presentation.

Ideal for global mobile audiences

As more companies realize the value of employees not having to schlep into the office, at least part of the time, the webinar becomes one more great thing about telecommuting. Webinars provide the perfect confluence of being able to work your normal job from home, while at the same time providing the ability to attend a meeting that, not that long ago, you'd have to commute to.

Webinars allow the participant to take an active role in the meeting, doing everything from listening to the meeting to being a contributor (responding to polls, asking questions, chatting), all from the comfort of home office.

Here some other benefits:

- ✓ **Relaxed environment:** There's no place like home. When you're comfortable and relaxed, you can more effectively absorb the material coming at you and interact accordingly.
- ✓ **Cost effective:** For so many reasons, webinars benefit the commuter, including not having to battle traffic jams, burn excessive gas, or put miles on your car. In addition, your blood pressure will thank you.
- ✓ **No worry of what to wear:** Heck, since you're at home, you can wear whatever you want and no one is the wiser. The value of this cannot be underestimated, no matter how many times it's repeated.
- ✓ **Increased productivity:** By alleviating the stress of commuting, you can use that energy to participate and absorb the full scope of the webinar.

Can be live or later



Face it. Life happens, and sometimes people miss important events. But with webinars, you don't need to rely on a colleague to find out what happened. Anybody who has ever played Telephone knows that information a step or two removed from its source gets lost in translation. Webinars are different.

Say you missed the webinar. Instead of asking a friend, coworker, or fellow participant what happened, you can simply watch it later. You see, webinars are often recorded, thus allowing viewers to watch them on demand from the host's website. Think of it as broadcasting over the Internet. Even if you've seen it before, watching the archived version again allows you to stop, pause, and rewind at your own pace.



Just be aware that it's a very large file if you plan on downloading. Some sites will store it online for a limited time. Check with your webinar provider to find out how long it will be available.

Here are a few other things to consider:

- ✓ **Recording is optional.** Some services include recording the webinar, whereas others offer it as an option. Free webinar sites generally do not include this service.
- ✓ **You can do it yourself.** Screen capture programs like Snapz Pro (www.ambrosiasw.com) or Debut Video Capture (www.nchsoftware.com), as seen in Figure 1-5, allow you to capture whatever is on your screen and play it back as a movie.
- ✓ **You can share the link with others.** When the archived version is available, send out an e-mail blast with meeting highlights and a link to the recorded version. This provides an opportunity for people who missed the meeting to watch it, as well as those who did watch it to view it again.

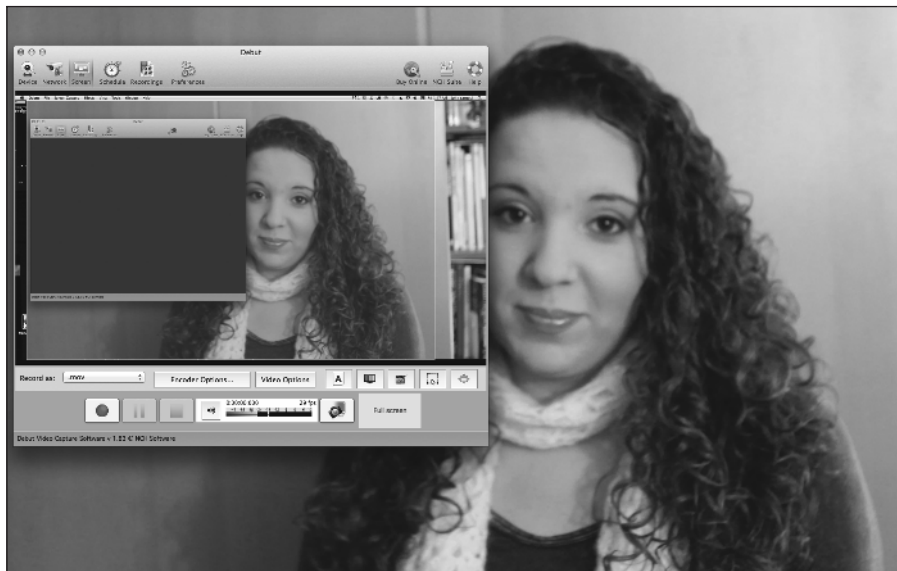


Figure 1-5:
Record a
webinar
with Debut
Video
Capture.

Understanding the Tools of a Webinar

A physical meeting — you know, one that’s held in a conference room or the back of a local pub — still requires more than a group of people to make it happen. Otherwise, that scenario may involve someone continuously repeating, “Can you hear me now?” If you don’t want to stand up and scream at the others so they can all hear, you need some basic equipment.

Sometimes all you need are chairs, a podium for the speaker, and a microphone to transform a room full of people into a meeting. Other times, it takes a little more. The same holds true for the webinar. It requires some electronic and technical gear to make it work.

Although each webinar varies, all of them need the proper conferencing tools, including computers, software, and an Internet connection to broadcast. On the receiving end, the participant needs the proper coordinates to access the webinar and a web-enabled device. That covers a lot of ground, and I touch on the details later in the book. The recipe for a successful webinar has much in common with preparing a fine meal: Both depend on the finest ingredients.

Computer

Many newer computers, like the Apple MacBook Air shown in Figure 1-6, can handle the minimum requirements of a webinar. Both newer Windows and Macintosh machines work fine. When it comes to older units and operating systems, check with your webinar platform provider to determine the proper minimum requirements for your webinar.

Software



For the most part, the application that runs your webinar is associated with a provider and level of service. Also known as a *webinar tool*, the software is the heart and soul of the operation. Take the time to find the one that works best for your needs. Many services offer a variety of choices to match your needs and budget. There’s a learning curve and eventual comfort factor with any software that plays a role too. Select a service that matches your needs and budget. Be sure that the chosen provider provides support and basic training.

Consider the following when weighing your options:

- ✓ **Why do you need a webinar?** What do you plan do with your webinar? Is it for training purposes, work-related meetings, or for marketing a new product?



Figure 1-6:
An Apple
MacBook
Air.



- ✓ **Who are your participants?** Is this for a general audience, or will the topic be specialized? Also, will your organization incur all of the costs, or will they charge participants to attend?
- ✓ **How many people do you want to reach?** Depending on the plan and type of service, you can reach anywhere from a few to a few thousand participants. Free services or a low-priced option offer limited features, including limits on the number of people at your webinar, whereas high-end packages support tens of thousands of participants at each session.
- ✓ **What is your budget?** If you frequently wish to connect with only 10–12 people and don't care about recording your webinar for later viewing, some of the free plans might work for you. More elaborate plans range in price from a few dollars to thousands per month. Do you want a flat-fee service that provides everything, or do you just want to pay for what you need? Usually that means paying per participant, with time, audio services, recording, and toll-free phone being paid for à la carte.

Video



If a picture is worth a thousand words, what happens when you multiply that figure by 29.97 frames per second? Wow, it sounds like a few seconds of video can add up to a lot of words. But more importantly, the audience sees the speaker talking and observes body language, so nothing gets lost in translation. In addition, you can illustrate certain topics with compelling video footage.

Here are a few ways webinars use video:

- ✔ **Single camera setup:** Usually the single camera is trained on the moderator. Sometimes it's a static shot, meaning that the camera position doesn't change. Other times, an operator changes the camera angle or zooms in and out.
- ✔ **Multi-camera:** More sophisticated techniques use more than a single camera. Because a webinar is live, this setup requires a technical director. (See the "Technical director" section later in the chapter for more details.) A multi-camera setup would be used for shooting a moderated panel to show the entire group and for capturing individuals as they speak or react to another speaker.
- ✔ **Webcam:** Cheap, affordable, and common, the built-in camera that comes with most new computers and web-enabled devices allows users to make their presence known. As seen in Figure 1-7, webcam video is great for a bare-bones webinar, or one where the participants want, or need, to see each other on screen.
- ✔ **File video:** You may want to show video content to illustrate a topic. Footage can either reside on your computer or be found online at sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

Figure 1-7:
Webcam
video is
not always
flattering,
but it's easy
to use,
included
on most
computers,
and is better
than no
video at all.



High-speed Internet



In the world of the webinar, the need for a fast online connection seems as obvious as needing air to breathe or food to survive. That's because the high-speed pipeline is the essential bloodline for your webinar, allowing video and presentation to play smoothly and not skip or randomly stop. Broadcasting these materials requires a significant amount of bandwidth. That means the pipe has to let a lot of information pass through it seamlessly. Cable, DSL, and satellite providers are offering faster modems, as seen in Figure 1-8, to meet your need for speed.

But *high-speed* is a relative term. Some connections are clearly faster than others. That's why you need to consider the slower side of connection. That means you should be conscious of image size, video quality, and the tempo of the show.

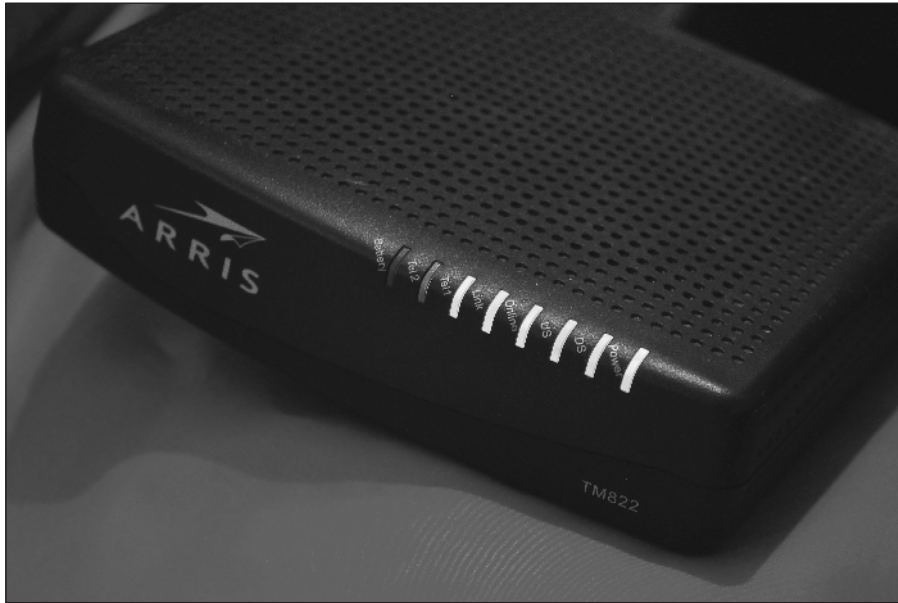


Figure 1-8:
A cable
modem.

Going mobile with some cool devices

Those pee-wee sized mobile devices that allow you to read books and check e-mail can also connect you to the latest webinar. Thanks to their alphanumeric touch screens or mini keyboards, you can fully participate while you're on the go. You can even wirelessly connect a keyboard to give you greater control over what you need to say.

These devices include

- ✓ **Smartphone:** Whether it's your Apple iPhone, Blackberry, Android, or some other phone, you can watch and participate in a webinar on your mobile phone.
- ✓ **Tablet:** An all-in-one computing device that includes a camera, microphone, touchscreen, built-in Wi-Fi, and sometimes even 4G connectivity. (Or you can just say it looks like a giant smartphone that doesn't make phone calls.) The Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy, and the Google Nexus are a few models. This extends to the iPod Touch, which also has Wi-Fi capability.
- ✓ **Laptop:** Use your laptop computer anywhere there's a Wi-Fi signal, and when there's not, you can even use a cellular card or MiFi from wherever there's signal strength to make a phone call.

Getting to Know the People in Your Webinar

Say you've signed up with one of those free webinar sites to hold a meeting for ten or twelve people, knowing there's a good chance you'll do everything from moderating the discussion to taking questions afterward. Maybe you like wearing different hats from producer to presenter. Although that sort of multitasking is fine on a smaller level, it's not practical as you begin to reach out to a larger audience. Sophisticated webinars simply require a bigger team.

How big? The size of your webinar depends on your needs, budget, and intended reach, so that dictates the size of your team. In the next few sections, I take a look at every role in producing a webinar, with the idea that most of the time, not every head wears a single hat.

Presenter



Also described as moderator and host, the *presenter* provides a face — and sometimes more appropriately, a voice — to the webinar. Think of this role as a combination of talk-show host Jimmy Fallon, a preacher, and your college chemistry professor. That means the entertainment-to-information ratio varies, depending on both the topic and the presenter.

Sometimes the person in this role clearly sounds like an expert and acts as the main source of information. Other times, the host introduces topics and various speakers. Besides acting as the master of ceremonies, the presenter also creates annotations, highlights important areas, and creates markings on the screen to help get the point across to the audience. The ability to entertain while at the same time leading, inspiring, and motivating the audience is a pretty positive quality for this role. Regardless of what you call it, the art of this job is getting through the program with flawless precision. Some large-scale webinars include several presenters, usually with one taking the role as the main presenter.

Producer



A *producer* is the person who takes all the different pieces and makes them work together. Sometimes it's the same person who is presenting the show. Other times, the producer is the head of a large team. Basically, the producer has a hand in everything from planning the webinar to making sure all of its aspects run smoothly. That includes managing the production from inception all the way to presenting it to an audience.

Director

Sometimes the balance between humans and technology requires some prodding. Actually, just getting humans to do something requires prodding too. If the webinar were a television show, the *director* would make sure that everyone was in place during the entire shoot. They do the same for your webinar, at least in some capacity. Having a director is essential for large-scale productions, especially with a merger of segments, technology, and people. Remember, if there's a glitch, the audience isn't always patient enough to stick around.

Writer

One of the things that separate a webinar from a video blog is its structure, and much of that comes from working with a good script created by a skilled *writer*. Good writing is also the secret to energizing the audience as you carefully weave the prime topics into the program while providing a touch of theatricality. It all begins with a good script.

Stage manager

A *stage manager* controls what happens on the set, or near it, making sure that everything is in the right place and that everything goes as planned. That goes beyond telling people to turn off their cell phones. For large-scale productions, the role of the stage manager relies on making sure that everyone and everything is in the right place, which is essential when it comes to a moderated panel.

Technical director



The technical director (TD) makes sure that all of the technical aspects go off without a hitch. More than likely, the technical director deals with video, especially on those multiple camera setups used for large-scale events like a webinar that uses the interview format, or perhaps a moderated panel. Someone has to manage the different camera feeds, so the TD communicates with each camera operator and switches the appropriate angle out to viewers. Because a webinar is live, there's no time to edit, so the technical director edits on the fly by switching to the appropriate camera angle. This role differs from other webinars that include less video, where the technical director also makes sure the audio and video components are working properly. Responsibilities include making sure the webinar connection stays up, as well as monitoring audio and transmission-related stuff.

Audience supervisor

For really big webinars that have a live audience, it's important to have someone focusing on the audience perspective, both on and off site. The audience supervisor monitors the audience and communicates their issues and concerns regarding the webinar. In addition, they may field questions for the Q&A period. Monitors who scour social media during the webinar looking for important information sometimes support this position.

You wearing all the hats

When it comes to very large webinars, it's entirely possible that a team of experts fills all of these roles individually, depending on the size, format, and intended reach of the audience. But most presentations require only a few people for a modest presentation, and depending on your confidence, it's entirely possible to do it all on your own. So if you're bona fide

do-it-yourselfer, technology has evolved to the point where a single business user can quickly and easily produce a pretty spectacular webinar at the comfort of your own desk.

Gauging Effective Uses for a Webinar



Webinars have created a true David and Goliath moment, with the size of an organization not playing a factor in its reach and scope. The small upstart that covers three counties in northern California can technically reach the same audience of a multinational corporation.

Although it's a level playing field, you still need to let people know about the topic of your webcast. Entire books are dedicated to techniques for reaching out to a mass audience, but you can start with an e-mail blast and by using social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Webinars also share some similarities to a physical meeting in that both provide a forum for reaching out to large groups of people. Both are live performances that make the audience an important part of the process. And like their physical counterpart, webinars come in many sizes and styles. Yet, the webinar offers some clear advantages that go beyond making the participant feel like they're in an episode of *The Jetsons*.

Employee meetings



Distance no longer acts as a nemesis to those not near the meeting site. Whether they're across the country or around the globe, webinars can bring employees together. Topics range from changes in their 401(k), preparation for an upcoming sales conference, or those quarterly staff meetings — you know, the ones that happen just for the heck of it. Even if the webinar is about the new water cooler, these meetings keep everyone informed, and more importantly let them get back to work immediately.

Why it's effective:

- ✓ Lets employees get back to work right away
- ✓ Saves on travel
- ✓ Convenience promotes attention

Training sessions



What if you logged onto to a webinar that explained how to produce a webinar? (Would it be like looking in the mirror?) Now imagine you can use this format to teach and train people on a whole variety of things. Whether you're an educational provider, a family historian, or company that needs to bring staff up-to-date on new technology, webinars can reach a wide audience.

Why it's effective:

- ✓ Keeps staff up to date on procedure
- ✓ Incurs fewer lost work hours
- ✓ Brings the classroom to the comfortable environment of the computer screen

Marketing



Technology and marketing have always had a productive marriage and that relationship has gotten a second honeymoon with the webinar. That's because companies have always depended on meetings and demonstrations to generate new business. But meetings did have a high cost, especially travel and venue expenses. Taking location out of the equation makes them affordable and saves time.

Why it's effective:

- ✓ Gets the word out quicker
- ✓ Is convenient for both the marketer and potential customer
- ✓ Lets you bring the presentation to multiple locations simultaneously

Talent development



Talent development includes training new hires and developing employees for leadership positions within your organization. In addition, today more than ever, organizations are changing procedures and adapting new policies, so it's important for staff to be aware of it. In a sense, it's like organizational education, and that's become essential for both organizations and the individual because it provides a breeding ground for future managers and specialists.

Webinars make this process more accessible by allowing the interested parties to determine when and where to participate in any work-related sessions. Sometimes that takes place while they're sitting at their desk in front of their computer screen. Other times, it's on the treadmill at the gym from their smartphone.

Why it's effective:

- ✓ Enables efficient training of personnel and saves time
- ✓ Provides both the organization and individual with opportunity
- ✓ Effectively communicates to organizations and individuals

