

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION MASTERY

TIPS FROM THE COACH TO
SOME OF THE WORLD'S
BEST SPEAKERS—AND ME



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Lights, Camera, Action

There's a lot to understand about virtual presenting—from the platform and the space you choose, and even the background you want. Here's a primer on those considerations.

Tech requirements for online presenting.

Your tech requirements are comprised of six main considerations:

1. **Strong Broadband Connection.** If you're doing a lot of virtual presentations, then get yourself a decent connection. How fast? As fast as you can afford. The last thing you want is your connection dropping out in the middle of your presentation. For minimal interruptions, a hard-wired Ethernet connection works best.

To ensure the best reception, also go through this simple check:

- Is your device powerful enough? Zoom requires a lot of power. A cheap, five-year-old laptop worth three hundred pounds probably won't cut it.
- Is anyone in your home using broadband or watching Netflix, or on a video call? These all take up valuable bandwidth. In my house, before I got a backup broadband connection, when I was running a presentation, everyone else kept their Wi-Fi use to the minimum; that way I got the best possible signal.
- Do you have any computer windows and apps open? Close them. This will make you speedier, help you focus, and avoid embarrassing accidental shares.

2. **Good Audio Quality.** Poor sound can be a nightmare. Sound is as important as video quality. If we can't hear you, or your voice is irritating just because of the quality of your mic, then you owe it to yourself and your audience to make sure it's of a decent standard. Test the sound quality with your laptop speakers by recording yourself. Also, get feedback from friends. If the quality is average, and you present on a regular basis, then get yourself a decent USB microphone. Something in the one-hundred to one-hundred-fifty-pounds range will be good enough. Two favourites of mine are the Yeti Blue and the Rode NT1. They will make a huge difference.

3. **Video Conferencing Platform.** There are many video conferencing applications and platforms available—some free, some paid. Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Bluejeans, Google Hangouts, and Skype are just a few of the most popular.

Evaluate the following considerations when selecting your video conferencing platform:

- *Audience size.* Some platforms can only handle a certain number of users at a time. Others let more people join the call, but only if you pay for a subscription. Tools like Zoom and Teams are perfect for a virtual sales pitch to a small group of investors. For

a remote conference or speech, webinar platforms like WebEx or Demio might work better.

- *Security.* As top ethical hacker Jamie Woodruff says, ninety-five percent of security issues will come down to human error. It's very rarely a genius geek surrounded by pizza boxes whirring through pages of code to find the secret "in" to your business. If your presentation contains sensitive information or is only meant for specific listeners, then a platform with a user login feature is a must. Check out the application's terms of service and privacy policy as well to see what measures they take to protect your video conference. Have a simple security checklist that you go through every time you present.

Later, when you are deeper into online presenting, remember to do test-runs of the application before your presentation starts. Make sure it works well and that you are fully familiar with it. Know the platform well enough to teach it to your audience members if necessary.

Choosing a video platform.

There are many platforms out there. They are adapting and evolving all the time, so by the time you read this, there will be two or three new ones that no one has heard of. For the moment, here are some platforms to consider. I've started with my favourites:

Zoom. Zoom.us. The family's and also my for-business favourite. Ever improving and with much enhanced security. Simple to use, good for meetings, presentations, enterprise videos, and web conferencing. What makes Zoom special apart from ease of use? I think it's that it's more human. Zoom understands that banter, fun, and humour help make presenters and their audience more fully rounded human beings.

Ecamm Live. ecamm.com. Wonderful virtual camera software. It works alone or inside something like Zoom, Bluejeans, and now Teams. It's used by YouTubers, streamers, and gamers—and increasingly by presenters. It takes about three hours to learn the basics, and you're set to go. Downside is it only works with Apple devices.

Bluejeans. bluejeans.com. This is the poorer cousin of Zoom. By that, I mean it's very similar—just doesn't have polling or the fun. However, if your business won't allow Zoom, and you like that platform, and IT is okay with you using it, Bluejeans is an excellent alternative.

Manycam. manycam.com. Similar to Ecamm (but in my opinion slightly less good because you can't use it with an Elgato Stream deck, <https://www.elgato.com/en/stream-deck>). Has

the advantage that it works with PCs as well as Macs.

Mmhhh. mmhhh.app/product. Loved this when I first saw it. Similar to Ecamm and ManyCam. Much simpler to learn and very intuitive but not as good.

Open Broadcast Software or OBS. [Obsproject.com](https://obsproject.com). Free and open-source software for video recording and livestreaming. An amazing free resource. If you're using a PC and can't use Ecamm, then this is excellent. The downside is it's quite techy and not as intuitive as other streaming platforms.

Teams. microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/free. It's safe, it's inexpensive and works brilliantly (of course) with Microsoft. It also relegates the presenter to a tiny window compared to their slides, is clunky and dull. Works well for meetings but much less so for presenting. A big "however" is that they are improving fast. As Teams General Manager Nicole Herskowitz said in early 2021, "The way I look at it now, is we need to make presentations more like TV shows." Their 'TV Reporter' view is a potential game changer.

Adobe Connect. adobe.com/uk/products/adobeconnect.html. This is a great teaching platform.

Hangouts Meet. hangouts.google.com. Great alternative to Teams. Works really well for educational purposes as, of course, you use it alongside all the other Google apps.

WebEx. webex.com More for big organisations that need secure communications. Big, corporate, and unfriendly. It's better than Teams but now way behind the competition.

Webinar and conference platforms

Most of the above have a webinar or conference version, but there are platforms out there that cater specifically to the virtual conference market. Two contrasting versions are ON24 and Hopin.

ON24. on24.com. For big training events and digital conferences. Very popular because of its marketing and revenue-generating capabilities. However, despite its claims to be easily

tailored at time of writing, it's nothing near as people-friendly and human as it claims.

Hopin. hopin.com. Simple and easy to use. Great when you want to break a conference into multiple rooms, each with its own facilitator. A little bit clunky and could be better for presenters.

Check out each platform's interactive tools.

As you research platforms to find the best fit for you, be looking at the interactive tools each offers. They help you simulate a live presentation by offering the means to take questions and comments, to write on a whiteboard, or to conduct a poll.

Chat.

Most platforms will have a chat function. With this tool, you can ask for audience input and encourage collaboration. It's a great way to keep a meeting or presentation interactive when you have a large number of attendees. They can post, chat between each other, send individual messages, or copy and paste ideas from Word.

The benefits are that chats actively engage the audience in discussion and create peer exchanges.

This is where having a host during a virtual presentation can be a huge benefit as they can answer or collate some of your chat questions. If you're going down this route, then it's essential that you agree with your host on the questions you're happy to answer.

Whiteboard.

This is a great way to make a virtual presentation interactive. Use it like a flip chart and get participants to write down their observations. You can also use the whiteboard to write down thoughts or questions sent via chat or type up group ideas (or get your host to do it for you.)

One suggestion for those who enjoy presenting on their feet is using a real flip chart, with the aid of your webcam. As long as people can read it easily, it's a beautiful way of breaking down the tech and creating transparency.

Polling.

Live polls are an incredibly effective tool for instantly engaging with your audience. They encourage participants to think not only about your questions but also about their answers. Moreover, live polls help create mental breaks, so your audience can regain attention and stay focused throughout your presentation.

With Zoom, you can integrate live polls seamlessly into your presentation and engage the participants without the need to switch between screens or applications.

The golden rule for interaction is that it has to be relevant to your presentation and must help you achieve your overall objective. More on that later.

Status Icon.

This tool is a great way to listen to your attendees. It's a chance for the audience to "vote" or respond when they feel uncomfortable in chat. It also gives you a chance to ask direct questions to an individual; for instance, you can ask for show of hand icons on who understands how your product can benefit their organisation. If one person keeps his or her hand down, you can ask what information is needed to better understand.

This is also a useful tool for quickly seeing agreement or disagreement and is easy to use and react to.

Application Sharing.

Here you can share a website, your documents such as PowerPoint, or your desktop. This can be a great tool if you are, for instance, displaying one of your products. You could talk it through, and then they could suggest alternatives.

Using Digital Interactive Tools.

You can, of course, make your presentation interactive using digital tools. There has been an explosion of collaborative digital tools. These can be used alongside your virtual presentation platform. They are particularly effective for larger presentations or webinars. Most are incredibly simple for your audience to use.

Supplemental digital tools.

Here are a few new digital presentation tools to consider. They also help you engage with your audience.

Mentimeter. Great for events and super easy to use. Create interactive presentations and meetings, wherever you are. Use for live polls, quizzes, word clouds, Q&As, and more to get real-time input, whether you're remote, hybrid, or face to face. However, you cannot share on social media.

Kahoot. More fun than the others. A scalable classroom response system for schools, work, and home that gamifies quizzes.

Slido. Better for business than Mentimeter. Again, uses polls, quizzes and audience interaction. Slido is an audience interaction platform for meetings and events. It allows meeting and event organisers to crowdsource top questions to drive meaningful conversations. Can be shared to social media.

4. Lighting and Backgrounds.

Lighting matters because it means we can see you. And if we can't see you, it means you move from 2D to well, pretty-rubbish D.

It's amazing how many senior leaders I've seen presenting from home or the office in film-noire mode—their faces silhouetted. If you have windows behind you, then pull the curtains or draw the blinds. I use simple camera lights, aimed more to one side of my face, to ensure I can be seen.

Ideally, look to face your windows, not the other way round. That way you benefit from natural ambient light.

Here's a list of lighting suggestions, in order of price and complexity. From zero-cost and very simple to high-cost, look-amazing but harder to set up.

Zero-cost and simple

- If you can, set up your computer so you're facing the window. When you present, you'll be looking into the light, and that should be enough. However, in winter, with shorter daylight hours, or if the sun's shining right at you, this can be tricky.
- Are house lights good enough? Yes. However, they tend to light from above. A simple desk lamp can work well.
- If you can, find a room with lots of light but also some decent curtains or blinds so you

can control it.

Low-cost lighting. You want a couple of lights to illuminate your face. When you're using them, keep the house lights low or at zero. The ESDDI Softbox Photography Light is excellent and costs around thirty-eight pounds. The LED ten-inch ring lights are also very good. You should be able to pick up a pair for thirty-five pounds.

Mid-cost. Elgato, Raleno, or Dazzne are all excellent. Typically, these retail for between sixty and one hundred and eighty-five pounds. I love the Elgato because you can use it alongside a stream deck, dim from your computer and most importantly for me at least has a lovely soft light, which does wonders for your online complexion.

High-cost. Do you really need it? If you have a TV studio, then yes. Otherwise, save your money.

A look at backgrounds.

I'm part of a virtual speakers Facebook group. It's like most Facebook groups—full of lovely, interested people sharing useful stuff for the good of all. It also, like many similar groups, has one or two self-proclaimed experts who give a lot of very opinionated advice.

Anyway, one day a speaker agent joined our group for a chat and even our “experts” shut up.

The presenter shared loads of great tips for virtual speakers, but one stands out: “Don't spend a huge amount of time and money on your background. Our clients are more interested in the value you give than your funky backdrop.”

Saying that, generally speaking, a plain background works well, although having a few “talking points” behind you is also useful. Guitars and framed football shirts seemed to be particularly popular during COVID-19 lockdowns. Choice will partly depend on personal preference and business culture. Essentially, make sure it's not messy. Experiment with blur backgrounds or go virtual and upload a background on your video conferencing platform.

As our agent said, don't spend a huge amount of time and money on your background. The fact that you're presenting from your living room, your balcony, kid's bedroom, or shed is not as big deal as your great content.

Too many spend more time on the layout and equipment for their virtual studio than they do

on content and delivering their talks.

The fact that you will be presenting to your team from your dining room is fine. In fact, it's to your benefit. One of the best things about virtual presenting is increased transparency from our leaders.

But there must be a balance, right? Of course, a bit like when we have visitors coming round for tea, we still want our place to look as good as possible, so if you haven't time or inclination to tidy, you might want to consider using a filter to blur out your background.

Going green.

Shooting with a green screen involves filming a person or adding visual effects in front of a solid colour. As long as the person being filmed doesn't wear any green, then you can add any number of backgrounds or effects to the shot.

Of course, you don't have to use a green screen. Most platforms provide the option of creating a virtual backdrop; it's just miles better with the aid of a screen.

Using green screen depends on a number of factors. Do you actually need it? How does it improve your virtual presentation? Is your real background good enough? Do the benefits of having green screen outweigh the disadvantages.

Advantages of green screen are that if you have a messy, cluttered, or dull backdrop, images projected on green screen look more attractive.

Used well, green screen can make your background look amazing and significantly enhance the look of your virtual presentation. The disadvantage of green screen is that many of the platforms can now give you a virtual backdrop that mimics the benefits of green screen.

A lot of very good presenters prefer the authenticity of a real background as opposed to a virtual background. Personally, I like the option of having green screen. It can really capture your audience's imagination, and you can use it to reflect the story that you're telling in front of the green screen.

For instance, you might set part of your presentation in the Serengeti. Bingo, up behind you is the Serengeti plain. It's also great for bringing cohesion to a team presentation, so you all have the same background. I tend to use it more for webinar-event-type presentations rather than informal workshops. In the end, it's a personal decision.

So, which green screens should you buy? Again, I'm going to give you a range of options.

Free

Don't buy one at all and use the platform's virtual backdrop. Its fine, as long as you don't move too much.

Low-cost.

A green sheet, curtains, or blanket hung up behind you will give you a green-screen effect. A number of people I know have just painted a wall green and presented in front of that. It works.

Medium-cost.

There are three options:

- The flip-out collapsible. These store away, and with the aid of a stand, work really well. The downside is that they can drive you crazy trying to fold them away.
- The green cloth with support frames. This can be draped across the floor as well. They work well and are very inexpensive but take a long time to set up and put away. If you've only got a small space to work from, they can be cumbersome.
- The green screen rolls down or pops up. This is far and away the easiest to put up. It operates like a roller blind.

High-cost.

This is basically a studio green screen. These are amazing but cost anything from a few hundred pounds to thousands.

5. Well-chosen Camera

It stands to reason that the camera is pretty important for virtual comms. Most computers and laptops will have a webcam built in, but the majority of the pre-COVID-19 ones are not great. Fuzzy, out of focus, poorly lit, or discoloured are just some of the ways in which the images are flawed with these lower-quality cameras, which is why so many virtual presenters have invested in a camera or webcam. So, I'm going to take you through three levels of options based on price. Be aware these may be out of date in the next couple of years.

In 2022, my suggestions are:

Low-cost.

- Logitech C920 or C922. The workhorse and excellent value for money.
- The NDIHX Cam app, and then you can use your iPhone as a camera.
- HUE HD Pro. Used by teachers everywhere and a great second or third camera.

Mid-cost.

- Logitech 930e webcam
- Logitech Brio 4K—gorgeous webcam
- Osbot Tiny AI-Powered PTZ Webcam. This one will follow you round your presenting space. Great if you've got room to move around.

High-cost.

- Song Vlog camera ZV1
- Sony RX100
- Canon EOS M50. Excellent all-rounder
- Fuji XT30

6. Computer Screens.

For most presenters, their screen will be their PC, laptop, or phone. However, an increasing number of virtual presenters will be using two or more screens.

I would recommend at least two screens or one of those massive, thirty-two-inch, panoramic screens. If you're presenting regularly, it will make a huge difference. I should also add that it doesn't need to be high-end. A hundred-pound, twenty-four-inch screen is plenty good enough. Personally, I have an iMac twenty-seven-inch high-spec; a twenty-four-inch screen, a nineteen-inch screen and a portable seventeen-inch. In addition, I sometimes run sessions with a fifth screen, on my iPad.

So why do people go for three or more screens? If you're operating with a system like Zoom, plus a virtual camera software and a stream deck, then that's a lot of information to have cooped up on one screen. The more screen space you have, the easier it is to stay in control. Saying that, I know amazing presenters who only have one screen.

Which way you go will be partly based on how often you present, your studio space, and

budget.

The advantage of a laptop is that the screen is so small that if you push your platform window to the top half of your screen, you can maintain reasonable eye contact. Even though you're looking at the screen, the gap between your eye line and the camera is tiny and can work well. The downside is they are often underpowered, and the lack of screen space means it can be really hard to successfully juggle your video platform plus chat, people, and apps.

How many screens?

It will partly depend on your platform. So, let's imagine you're using Zoom. You can run Zoom fine with one screen, but it will be busy. You also can't use features like PowerPoint Presenter view and see your audience videos at the same time. For those who present regularly, I recommend three screens, or more.

What do you do with the extra screens?

One additional screen. Your main screen will carry the platform. The additional screen is for chatting, people, breakouts, and slides.

Two additional screens. The first screen is your main presenter screen, on which you have Teams or Zoom running, perhaps alongside something like Ecamm or ManyCam. The second screen is for seeing the audience videos and chats. Your third screen becomes slides or presenter view.

If you're using a fourth screen, then you use the first two screens for the virtual platforms, while the third and fourth take your slides and presenter-view. You can also use another computer as your fifth screen so that you can see your presentation from the audience point of view, while the iPad acts as a whiteboard or spare screen.

More bits of kit.

Here are some useful additions you might want to consider for your Virtual Presenter's Studio. They are all about making your job easier not harder.

Stream decks. I have an Elgato Stream deck. You can get them in three different sizes; I recommend you get the fifteen-button version as it's a huge time saver. Instead of having to look around my computer screen for the right button to change cameras, I simply press a button on the Elgato. The same holds true when I want to change scenes with Ecamm, play some music, or forward my slides.

A more complex but exciting step-up is to use a digital vision mixer like an ATEM switcher (Mini, Pro, or Extreme.) The main difference between the Elgato and the Blackmagic ATEM, is that the Elgato is essentially a series of amazing at-a-push-of-a-button shortcuts, while the ATEM is a production controller, which switches between cameras but can also do cool fades, backgrounds, and loads of other lovely production stuff. I don't have one and have never felt the need. But I know top presenters who swear by them. I'm told, though, it's much more complicated to learn than the Elgato, so be prepared to invest some time in learning its fantastic functionality.

Raised desks. When you want to present standing up, you will need something to raise your keyboard, mouse, and computer. The answer is height-adjustable desks. There's plenty to choose from—varying in price from twenty to six hundred pounds. (Durotic makes a huge variety). You can also simply place a small coffee table on top of your desk and put your laptop on that.

Multiple cameras. Many presenters have more than one camera to choose from. But before you invest, let's look at the advantages. Additional cameras can be used for close-ups on notepad or something you want to demo; or if you want to break things up a bit and switch camera angles. I have six cameras and use my stream deck to switch between them.

Camera 1: My main webcam. It has an automatic lens, which means it has no problem seeing me when I move around.

Camera 2: A good quality camera with professional lens. This naturally blurs out my background a little, making it easier for the audience to focus on me. It also works really well with my teleprompter.

Camera 3: My second webcam. Slightly less good, which I use when standing up.

Camera 4: A HUE camera. This is an incredibly versatile little camera that can be used in a huge number of positions. I use it for focusing on my flip chart or giving a reverse angle look at my computer desk set up, or just as a side angle to give more variety.

Camera 5: A small USB camera that I have perched up high. If I'm sitting down and presenting, this gives me the option of being able to easily stand up. It's also wide angle, so it gives a better overall view of my office space.

Camera 6: My iMac camera. I had stopped using this rubbishy camera until Rockstar activator drummer, the amazing Tom Morley, suggested I adapt it a little and turn it into a star. So, using my very cheap Webcam Settings App, I've made this my artsy, black-and-white camera. I use it about once every couple of presentations for just a few minutes at a time and audiences love it. Great if I want to act out a scene and role play characters from black-and-white movies, which, me being me, I do on occasion.

Teleprompter. Some presenters swear by their teleprompter. Why? Because it means they don't have to learn content and can look right into the lens without making a mistake. You use them with your smart phone or tablet. Once you've got it set up, it's very easy to deliver content error free. Personally, I just use it for making short videos.

iPad or tablet. I have a graphics tablet (very cheap), an iPad (silly money), and a Remarkable (quite silly money). These are great devices for a number of reasons. You can

use them as a whiteboard or for making hand-written notes on your slides. The iPad also doubles as a great extra screen.

HERMAN'S ACTION PLAN

- When looking at your tech, think, to paraphrase John Kennedy, “Not what my tech can do for me but what my tech can do for my audience.” What do they need for you to land your message, sell your product, demonstrate your expertise, or connect during a meeting? What will help you do that better? Start with your end goal and work backwards. It is very easy to spend a lot of money for little gain. Saying that, I saw a friend of mine presenting with a seven-hundred-pound microphone, and I did think, “It may only be ten percent better than my one-hundred-and-fifty-pound mic, but it is a great ten percent.” Decide what your budget is and work from that figure. Occasionally, you will make a mistake when buying. It's okay.
- Anticipate where you want to get and buy for that point rather than waiting for your technology to catch up with you. Remember the driving analogy. When learning to present with tech for the first time, it will be hard. Learn it, watch your YouTube instructional videos, and then practice, practice, and do it. Going outside your comfort zone is hard but always worth it.