Simulcast Guidelines

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Simulcast events provide a unique way for chapters to simultaneously get members together in more than one local area while utilizing technology to broadcast a presentation from one of the locations to all the other locations. Due to the time required and nature of the activities, if done right, it should keep costs low and provide education to a wider audience.

Since at least two locations need to be considered and some recommendations apply to both location types, the following recommendations are split into three sections.

* Presenting and satellite locations
* Presenting locations
* Satellite locations

# Presenting and Satellite Locations

Both the presentation and satellite locations have a few requirements in common, so the following recommendations need to be considered for all locations.

## Computer

Different recommendations exist based on the location, but one constant between all locations is the list of technical requirements for the webinar platform, based on the type of computer you will be utilizing. Please see the webinar platform’s webinar support page (GoToWebinar’s [Webinar Support page](https://www.gotomeeting.com/webinar/online-webinar-support)) before hosting a simulcast or webinar.

## Internet Access

Internet access is required to run a simulcast event because it is run through a webinar platform. Because of the potential to have unreliable internet access, limiting this factor is one of the primary concerns in hosting a simulcast event at all locations. To help maintain a more reliable presentation, especially to the satellite locations it is recommended you use a hardwired internet connection whenever possible (which means plugging the computer into the internet instead of using WiFi). Wifi is **NOT** recommended because it has a higher likelihood of dropping the internet connection which has a higher possibility of failure.

If your only option is to utilize the WiFi at a location, it may be worthwhile asking about the following:

* Reliability of the service.
* Refunds on the location if the internet fails.
* Being on a different wireless network than the rest of the location (e.g. being on the locations business network, rather than their general guest network).

## Internet Speed

Additional information you also need to consider regarding a recommended internet speed related to running the webinar platform can be found on the webinar platform’s webinar support page (GoToWebinar’s [Webinar Support page](https://www.gotomeeting.com/webinar/online-webinar-support)).

## Webinar Account

The webinar session is a specific event that will occur on a given day and time. Correct utilization of this session is critical in having the webinar session active at the time you go live with the webinar because if you use the session incorrectly you could “activate” it and not be able to use it when you go live. To help alleviate any issues there are a few important things to consider:

* **Do not use anything but practice mode when doing a dry run for the simulcast event.** Using anything but practice mode will make the live event links invalid at the time of the live event.
* Only use the live webinar when you are going to go live with the event.
* Know the webinar program, it’s features, and how to operate it before conducting an event using the webinar platform, this not something you can learn on the fly.

## Presentation

The presentation is at the heart of why people are gathering at a specific location. Uploading the presentation to the webinar handouts as well as providing a copy of it to each location can help provide backup in the event of a webinar platform failure or an individual location failure. Even with a platform failure it may still be possible to carry out the session using the audio and having someone at each location presenting their copy of the presentation on the satellite location’s screen if each location has an electronic backup.

## Presentation Screen

A presentation screen should be used at each location to present the materials on screen. The screen should be large enough for all attendees to easily see the presentation. Additionally, the screen must be able to work when connected to a laptop.

## Registration Lists and Sign Out Sheets

Registration lists and sign out sheets need to be used at each location to provide evidence that attendees were at the specific location and sessions in order to get credit.

## Session Monitor(s)

An individual will be needed at both the presenting location(s) and the satellite location(s) to do the following (these duties may be split up among several individuals):

* Coordinate/run/set up the technology.
* Check attendees in using the registration list.
* Pass around the sign out sheets.
* Monitor the question and answer or chat features on the webinar platform.
* Receive questions from the audience and relay them to the presenting location.
* Turn on and off the sound at each location in order to relay verbal questions (if necessary).

# Presenting Location(s)

The following recommendations are based on a single location presenting to other satellite locations. If multiple locations will be presenting or sharing back and forth between locations via voice and video (rather than just through the chat or question and answer feature), they are also considered presenting locations, and the same recommendations apply.

## Computer

At least one computer will be needed, however, two computers may provide the best experience for those running the session, attendees and the presenter. The reason for this is due to technology management, which in turn will present a better user experience for all parties.

### One Computer

If one computer is used for the presenting location, this can be done, but it’s not recommended because it requires a bit more technical patience, ability to multi-task and expertise with the webinar platform. Some requirements for a single computer are:

* Familiarity with the extend desktop feature of the computer, which would allow the operator to:
  + Display the presentation on the main screen.
  + Simultaneously manage the video, Q&A and other features on the laptop screen.
* Familiarity with how to operate the webinar platform and switching back and forth from the presentation to change slides, while also monitoring the Q&A and chat features.

Although using one computer can be effective, the drawbacks of using one computer are:

* The instructor must have the host that is managing the webinar platform, change their slides for them.
* Operating the other features of the webinar platform simultaneously with changing slides on the presentation, because it often requires the operator to go back and forth between multiple applications or screens.
* The placement of the computer in the room, due to camera and microphone placement, in addition to where the host may have to sit to run the presentation.

### Two Computers

Two or more computers usually present the ideal situation because it may allow for better technology management, such as allowing:

* The instructor/presenter to control their own presentation.
* The instructor to concentrate on presenting the topic and not being distracted by having to check the webinar platform for questions, monitoring the chat, etc.
* For better microphone and camera placement.
* The host(s) to more easily monitor the Q&A, chat, camera and other webinar features.

Although these guidelines are not meant to be a “how to” guide, an example of how two computers could better manage the technology are as follows:

* The instructor can log onto the webinar platform at the front of the room and share their presentation, both on the screen at the front of the room and via the webinar platform to the other locations.
* The host can use their computer and webcam to run the video so the other locations can see the presenter/instructor, while also managing the Q&A or chat features on their laptop. Most people think the video would also need to be on the laptop screen, but this isn’t the case, the video can be run while other things are on the hosts screen due to technology in the webinar platform that “hides” the other webinar features and doesn’t broadcast them to the other locations.

**Note:** How to handle the audio is handled in the Audio section.

## Camera

An HD webcam will present the viewers with the best picture. And although the webcam in the laptop may be an HD device, a separate webcam is recommended. A separate webcam typically has a wider angle of view, can more easily be positioned in the room (like on a tripod), is more easily adjusted or rotated to follow the instructor if needed, and may have other features the laptop camera may not have.

Camera position is another important factor, some aspects to consider are:

* The overhead display and the creation of too much backlighting.
* Placing the camera to one side of the room or the other.
* Placement of the camera in the middle of the room.
* Traffic patterns around the camera placement.
* Cord lengths and exposure.

A tripod for the camera may be beneficial to have depending on the room set up. The tripod can be placed on the floor or on a table to present the best viewing angles for the remote locations. Testing the lighting and position of the camera are also important in determining the best camera placement and if lighting should be added or removed.

## Audio

Chapters have several options to consider that will provide good audio. Since live attendees will be in the room with the presenter, the audio considerations for the people in the room and their ability to hear the presentation are the same as any live event. The more challenging part is ensuring good audio is being broadcast to the remote locations. This may entail a little more practice and planning. Some audio options are:

* + Dial into the webinar with options provided by the location.
  + Use a microphone through the computer.
  + Use a headset on a mobile phone.

The room set up, resources you have available, and many other factors will help determine the optimum set up for your situation. For example, if you were to use an external microphone that’s wired to the computer, your presenter may be contained to a single spot in the room.

The dial in option is preferred because if the webinar platform drops, the locations will still have audio and, although not ideal, the webinar could go on with each location presenting backup slides on the presentation screens at their individual locations. If a host or presenter wants to use VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol or audio through the computer), they will need a microphone, preferably one that connects directly into the computer. Wireless microphones are also a good option for use in a VoIP setting, allowing the instructor/presenter to freely move around.

## Tape

What would you possibly need tape for? To help the instructor stay in frame of the camera, marking the floor with a colored masking tape is effective and should cover the full view of the camera (don’t forget the instructor may need guidance in all four directions; left right, forward and backward).

Tape may also be needed to tape cables to the floor to prevent trip hazards and to hold them down to desks or elsewhere when necessary.

# Satellite Locations

Satellite locations are almost more important than the main location because combined, they’re likely to have more participants than the main location. A basic checklist for the satellite locations is as follows. Can attendees:

* See the presenter at the presenting location?
* Hear the presenter at the presenting location?
* See the presentation?

How you accomplish most of these items have been covered because they relate to both the main and satellite locations, however, there is one critical factor to consider at a satellite location that hasn’t been covered yet, which is audio.

## Audio

The visuals of a presentation often mean very little without the context the presenter is providing so the audio portion of your presentation is very important. There are several ways to accomplish the audio at satellite locations, but what method that is used will entirely depend on the room set up and available resources.

Ideally, the room set up will allow for the audio to be piped into the room through the computer or via a phone and into a speaker system in the room. If this is not the case, depending on the size of the room and audience, computer speakers may be necessary. Testing to determine the best setup, considering room noise and configuration, and the ability to adjust the volume are of the utmost importance because it will provide the best attendee experience.

The ability to broadcast audio from a secondary location is not recommended, but it could provide some additional benefits. This is covered further in the camera section next.

## Camera (Optional)

A camera is typically not necessary at satellite locations unless they will also be hosting a portion of the presentation. There are some benefits to having a camera and audio at the satellite locations, but it would only be for specific reasons and should only be approached if you are very familiar with running this type of an event. Camera and audio at the secondary locations can provide some benefits such as:

* The audience and presenter seeing the satellite locations, reminding them they are not the only ones attending this presentation.
* Reminding the instructor to also talk to the satellite locations and ask for questions from them.
* A means to visually see if people have questions at the satellite locations. This can be accomplished by providing an audience camera angle/view and providing the audience with a bright florescent sheet of paper to hold up if they have a question. When called on, the satellite location can then unmute and have the attendee ask their question or ask the question for the attendee.

# Summary

Simulcast events have some additional requirements over a live event and can take more people power to run, but they can have a lot of great benefits, like reaching members where they are, creating more frequent small gatherings, and providing a less expensive educational experience. Much of the success of these events is predicated in the appropriate handling of the technology involved, being familiar with the webinar platform and getting the right people in place to run each location. Thus, testing all these factors multiple times and completing dry runs are critical to their success.