

Wazzup* with Webinars: Best Practices in Dental Hygiene Webinar Education

By **Margaret J. Fehrenbach, RDH, MS**

Have you noticed lately all the webinars that are being offered over the Internet? There are those available for showing off new dental products, others providing for dental professional continuing education, and even some are for students studying for national board review. So what is up with webinars? It is hoped that this article will answer any questions and concerns about webinars, giving recommendations for best practice in their use for dental hygiene education. Hopefully this article will help the reader feel comfortable signing up for the next interesting webinar offered on the Internet or encourage a speaker to successfully begin using the platform.

Webinar is a portmanteau word combining web and seminar, with the first known use as far back as 1998. Merriam-Webster defines it as "a live online educational presentation during which participating viewers can submit questions and comments." Other similar terms used are web conferencing or online workshops. In general, webinars are made possible by Internet technologies, particularly on TCP/IP connections. The service allows "real-time point-to-point communications as well as multicast communications from one sender to many receivers ... applications for web conferencing include meetings, training events, lectures or short presentations from any computer," according to the Wikipedia entry on web conferencing.

Joyce Young-Scholes, RDH, ASC, is president of RDHEDU.COM, an online dental hygiene facility that serves the needs of both the student dental hygienist preparing for the national board examination and the working dental hygienist in continuing education. "Webinars are the new future learning tools to reach out globally, as it is an inexpensive mechanism for delivery of education," Young-

Scholes said. "There are no travel costs, time lost at work or travel, venue costs, and most can learn better when relaxed in one's own environment." Young-Scholes stressed that the ability to review the recordings allows the new technology to really serve all types of users, whether providing reinforcement for the quick learner or repetition for the slower learner. However, because of the lack of face-to-face interaction with the participants, the presenter of a webinar is faced with some unique challenges that need to be considered and then met for ultimate success.¹

Not all webinars are really 'live'; many times, participants can review webinars they already viewed and others can access the webinar for viewing at their own pace later. But at one point, most webinars involve live or streaming video. Some also include simultaneous PowerPoint programs that use markup tools and a pointer to drive home discussion points. The presenter may choose to selectively use screen sharing during the presentation. Most offer the option of text chat for the participants to comment or ask questions, whether it is public to all participants or private between the participant and the presenter and facilitator, if one is used. This live chat can be simultaneous with the streaming video or take place at the end of the presentation, similar to an onsite seminar. Polls and surveys can also be incorporated for further audience interaction, with programs that award continuing education credits using them for testing. Inclusion of a technical facilitator or seminar director is truly a plus by all accounts, since that person can handle any technological issues that come up, allowing the speaker to focus on what they do best: being an Internet Star!

There are different types of webinars, which may or may not be accepted as continuing education for professional licensure. It is important to review state guidelines to make sure that any credits awarded count. And just because no credit is offered, this does not mean that webinar viewers will not receive information that will enrich some aspect of their professional lives.

* Urban Dictionary at www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=wazzup: A form of "What's up?" or "What is up?", which means, "Hey, how's it going? How's it been? How are you?"; accessed on April 12, 2013.

Many times, health care professionals cannot attend conferences due to distance or schedule conflicts. They may have interest in a presentation that is not offered onsite nearby. And even if they can travel to attend a structured onsite conference, a useful type of webinar is the preview presentation, which can viewed beforehand and is designed to ensure that all participants will already be familiar with important concepts once assembled. Another type of webinar is the review of agreed-on standards by dental professional associations so that members share a mutual understanding. Learning about new products keeps professionals updated as far as new technology and is a fun type of webinar, but it is important to be aware that commercially sponsored webinars may not always present a well-rounded picture of the new technology or discuss competing products that are available. Just as any with advertising or media program, commercially produced webinars have to be "taken with a grain of salt."

An online blogger whose the byline is "...time and technology matter" discussed the possible darker side of webinars in terms of quality due to the newness of the technology by sharing that "after attending seven webinars in three days, I'm wondering if I got the return on my time. These web conferences were supposed to be a great convenience. The advantage of viewing so many web conferences in a short time is I could see patterns. I decided to convert these problems into tips for presenters and attendees. Many of these tips are 'common sense' and yet they were overlooked."² It would serve the speaker, and even the director of the webinar, to check out sites such as this one that discusses how to present a "best practice" webinar for viewers.

Because privacy is always a concern on the Internet, one marketing online blogger recommended that the webinar presenter state how registration data will be used. Users may want to register using an alternative, possibly dedicated email address so that subsequent advertising messages from the presenter can be managed easily. The blogger also recommends that computer system requirements be included with registration so that the participant can prepare by downloading any necessary software prior to the webinar. Time concerns are always an issue, so the blogger recommends that the webinar confirm the user's successful registration immediately. It is also important to start on time, allowing two minutes past the designated start hour for latecomers to log in, and to always end on time.

Pat Pine, RDH, is founder of "U"nique Dental Organizational Services, a company that provides hands-on consulting services focused on customizing infection control protocols and communication. For webinar participants, Pine recommended testing the link from the confirming registration email well before the web meeting starts to determine whether additional software will be needed or the correct technology is in place for the entire program, including polls and surveys. Another way to check that everything is working for the webinar and to increase connectivity is to have the participants send in questions that can be answered later during the presentation or, as Pine does, have them answer questions about their experiences concerning the topic; then the director and speaker knows that their audience is prepped and ready to go both technologically and as far as base knowledge. Young-Scholes said that the software she uses tracks attendance by noting when the users log on and how long they are logged, thus verifying attendance for continuing education credit.

Pine also stressed that attendees should take note of the time zone specified in the webinar announcement, making any necessary adjust-

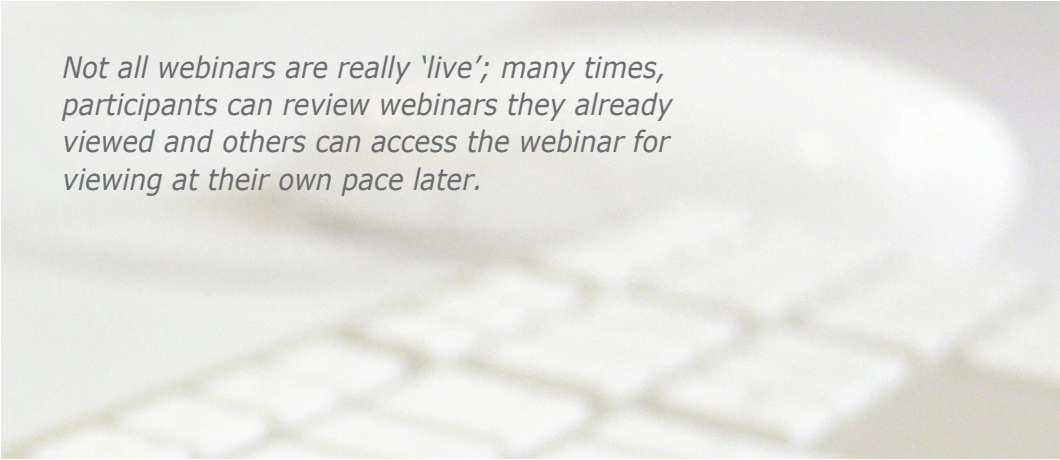
ments to take their local time zone into account. Including time zones in email reminders to participants will help alleviate confusion over start and end times that seem to present the most difficulty when she has presented in the past.

Young-Scholes said she is a big proponent of streaming video because seeing the presenter is vital to making a strong connection with the registrants. She herself has participated in multiple sessions without seeing the presenter. "After about 20 minutes, one starts to fidget and lose interest," she said. "Many of our sessions are three hours [long], and we would lose everyone quickly [if there were no video]. I have sat in on a session that had the presenter's photo, but that did not cut it either (only okay for short presentations). The 'live' view of your presenter brings the registrant right into the equation in communication with body language along with the audio/video."

Another marketing blog source recommends that webinar presenters send two email reminders to participants — 24 hours before and then again one hour before the start of presentation. A slide that says, "The webinar will begin in x:xx minutes" will show users that the webinar is working when they log in and update them about how long they have to wait. Making an announcement on the call every few minutes to let people know it will start soon and their audio is working in real time. After the webinar, it is important to send follow-up emails with any documents within 24 hours; fast follow-up helps motivate people to take any next steps while the webinar is still on their minds.³ However, users appreciate that proof of any continuing education credits can be obtained for up to two weeks after the presentation.

For webinar participants, it makes sense to try to fully concentrate on the webinar so their time is used wisely: eliminate all distractions, including other people, pets, cell phones, emails, background music, et cetera. For webinar presenters, background noise can be a real problem. Close all doors and windows, and post a notice on the outside. If presenting from the home or any area where other people or pets are present, make arrangements to ensure that they are silent during the webinar. The speaker needs to test the microphone to see what it picks up, and then try to remove the source of any offending noise, including clocks that chime the hour.⁴ The mic should be muted during any activity unrelated to the program content, such as technical adjustments and breaks for the speaker during a long presentation. Concerning visuals in real time, the background view behind the speaker can be adjusted after checking with "photo booth" apps on the computer to see what may need to be rearranged to reduce distraction.

When it comes to webinars, preparation is paramount for success on both 'sides' of the computer. Dianne Glasscoe Watterson, MBA, is president of Professional Dental Management, Inc, a consulting company devoted to practice management, and author of the *The Consummate Dental Hygienist*. According to Watterson, it is "more difficult to speak to a microphone in my office than to a room full of



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people. The dynamic is totally different. If I am going to present a one-hour webinar, I will spend at least 10 hours preparing and practicing. The presentation must be dynamic in order to hold the attention of the attendee. Slides need to have few words and move quickly. Pictures and color are important.”

Most directors stress the need for users to be patient when technological issues arise since sometimes they are out of the director’s/presenters’ control. Also, the user needs to read and/or print out any necessary material before the webinar and make sure the Internet connection is paid for and working; if possible, cut out any possible reduction in bandwidth such as active backup devices or nearby wireless devices being used at the same time.

The speaker using video interface needs to practice hand gestures and how to hold objects being demonstrated. Again, using a “photo booth” app helps with this. Speakers also need to slow down the pace of their talk and gestures to allow for better communication across the bandwidth. Allow for time for breaks for the participants just as there would be for onsite seminars. Handouts in an easily downloaded file format sent as attachments to each reminder email are always welcomed. Like the user, the presenter needs to ensure sufficient bandwidth during the webinar. Practice webinars always are also a good idea for all concerned parties.

As discussed earlier, follow-up is important for a successful enterprise using webinar technology. Additionally, it is good practice to end the webinar with a link to a survey program so participants can provide feedback about the presenters, the topic and glitches in the webinar delivery system used. The presenter should get email addresses to follow up with the webinar participants and invite them to future webinars. Users should not relegate future correspondence from the presenters to their junk mail folder since it may contain valuable documentation.

Of course, webinars are subject to difficulties such as power outages 15 minutes before the program starts, speakers hanging up on themselves with the excitement of making a point, deaf-

ening helicopters and sirens and annoying fax machines in the background. But that is what keeps it all truly live and exciting! So whether you have something to learn or something to share, make webinars part of your professional career strategy.

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