Guidelines and useful advice for participation in webinars & web-meetings

Including:
Preparation Tips
Web-call Best Practices
Helpful Technical Guidelines
Group Meetings Netiquette

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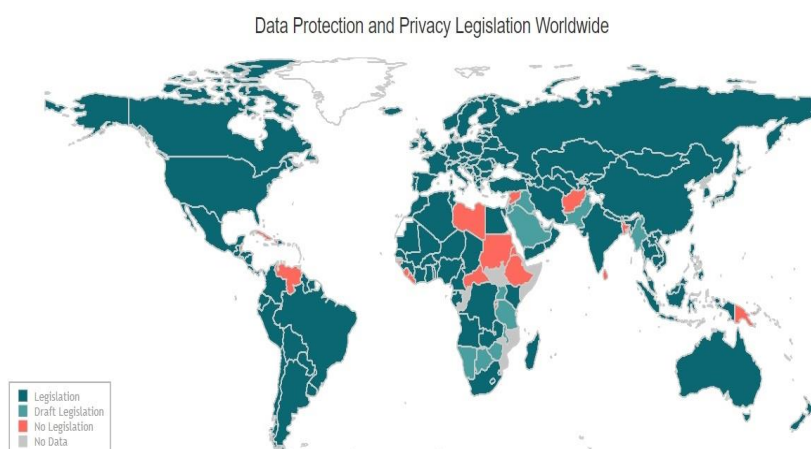
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Introduction

The general rules of this white paper apply to any kind of device you use by participating in an online web meeting or webinar. The following text includes helpful advice, which aims to give you the best possible experience by conducting that kind of web meeting on cam. It includes:

- Preparation advice
- Good practices during the web-call
- Helpful technical details
- Netiquette by being in a group

The netiquette includes advice for a harmonious meeting with other participants and the best possible facilitation from the host's / manager's aspect.

Please note that the recording of online meetings and seminars - either as video or as sound-recordings – has to obey the rules of the General Data Protection Regulation and requires permission, from both sides; the administrator of the web meeting and from all other participants. Meaning that if you wish to record the meeting (e.g., for an educative scope), you have to ask all the participants and get anyone's consent. This is something you have to do by every web meeting separately, even by web meetings based on a daily repetition for some time.

69%	10%	16%	5%
COUNTRIES WITH **LEGISLATION**	COUNTRIES WITH **DRAFT LEGISLATION**	COUNTRIES WITH **NO LEGISLATION**	COUNTRIES WITH **NO DATA**

SELECT A COUNTRY ▼   SELECT A REGION ▼

Data Protection and Privacy Legislation Worldwide

Legislation
Draft Legislation
No Legislation
No Data

Source: UNCTAD, 14/12/2021

Image 1: Protection of Personal Data in our World

General rules of participation

For adequate connection speed

An appropriate connection speed is crucial for a good flow of the meeting without interruptions. It depends on external parameters like the provider we have, the network quality of the area and the plan we have chosen. But it also depends on internal parameters, which we could control and achieve the best possible result. Those are:

- Make sure you have exclusive use of your internet connection during the meeting.

Other people (family, etc.) should not use the connection, especially not for gaming or watching movies and the like, because that could exhaust the availability of the internet connection speed. This would result in a very low quality for your web-meeting experience and most probably connection interruptions and failures.

- If you have a lot of other devices connected to your internet home connection network, disconnect them during your web meeting.

They also absorb resources from your connection speed, even if you don't see it while it's happening (e.g., application updates, online automatic backups, etc.)

- Avoid all the incoming messages from Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram and other similar applications.

The best way is to disconnect them all. It belongs to the rules of netiquette (the etiquette of the use of the internet), that you cannot attend a seminar and simultaneously read messages from other sources. There are of course exceptions like:

- the use of those apps is a part of the webinar content, or
- there is an emergency case that you have to be able to receive messages through apps that work through the internet connection.

Wireless connections

- Make sure that there are not too many walls between the device you use and your router. The walls are weakening the connection and they may also cause connection interruptions.
- Make sure you have a maximum distance of 10 meters (30 feet) from your router.

While the distance is also very important, we should also take into consideration that the connection should be on the same floor. Houses with two or three floors sharing the same connection are having mostly connectivity problems. If that is the case for you, try to get some technological advice on tech-shops, by using the keyword "repeater". Those are devices that receive the connection signal from your rooter, they amplify it and broadcast it further.

Image 2: Wifi Connections

The art of seminar

You always know what kind of seminar you will attend. But almost, in any case, you will have to take notes, open your camera and use your microphone too. So, follow those instructions for better preparation.

- Have a notebook and a pen to be ready to take notes if needed.
- If you are going to use your camera, make sure you're alone in the room/space. People moving around on your background would bring confusion to other participants.
- If the microphone will be used, make sure there is not too much noise in your environment (e.g., loud traffic noise from the road below by having the windows open in your room)

- In case of content discretion rules. In case the subject of discussion demands discretion, be careful not to violate them by having other persons in your room, who can hear the meeting.[1]

For adequate light

The lighting is also an important factor in web meetings. You probably experienced a dark monitor by some participants. It is annoying and not proper. So be advised:

Image 3: Lack of enough light

- The light in your room should be directed to your face. It is wrong if it is directed to your back, or if the light is being placed back and above your head (i.e., it shines in the direction of your cam, causing a dark image of you)

Image 4: Adequate face lighting

- Have enough lighting but not too much by being annoyed by that. A good practice in case you have a laptop or desktop computer is to put a lighting device right behind your screen. By doing so, the light won't shine directly in your eyes to annoy you, but it will give enough lighting to give out a bright image of you.

- In case you cannot put the light behind the monitor, try to have a lamp in a diagonal direction on your side and forward. In any case, not behind you.

- By web-meetings during the day, make sure you are near a source of daylight (window, balcony glass-door, etc.), with the light in the direction to your face. If this is not possible, then try at least to have it on your side, but not on your back.

Image 5: Taking advantage of daily light

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[1] For more information about the Data Protection Regulation, refer to the web-page of EU: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/international-dimension-data-protection_de

Appearance and place

Be dressed as you would meet face-to-face the other participants. Web-meetings are not pyjama- or slumber-parties. Respect yourself and the image you are providing for yourself. So…

Image 6: Correct dressed but wrong device position

- Dress up properly. Do not neglect your appearance.
- Sit on a desk or table. Not on a couch with your device placed on you or a lower surface.

- Do not lie on your bed and twirl around.
- The camera should always be at eye-level height when we sit with our back straight-up. Neither higher nor lower.

Image 7: Wrong appereance and device position

Correct stance

The correct posture is the three right angles. The thighs with the body form the first right angle, the knees the second and the feet on the floor the third. This is also the best posture for a healthy working on your computer.

Image 8: The correct body stance and the position-height of the monitor

Naming your presence

Concerning the names of the participants, we should always give our full name, i.e., name and surname. Even on more friendly meetings, the surname should be given, because more participants might have the same name. So, it is not a matter of being friendly to give to the participants the direction to write only their names.

- In case all participants have the same nationality, you could write your name with letters of your national alphabet. In case of international meetings, your name should be written in Latin, in an international understandable way (advice the Passport rules). Special characters like the German ä,ü,ö, or the French â/ê/î/ô/û, should be avoided.

- Don't use nicknames. It's not fancy, it's awkward. You could do it in a meeting with your friends, but not on a webinar with other participants.

- Do not advertise our professional status, or your business position or the name of the firm that you own or you work for. Web meetings are having a cause. If the cause is not to apply and exercise our marketing strategies, then just write your Surname and your Name and nothing else. Titles like Dr. or Professor are always allowed as part of the names, even if the meeting does not concern the properties of such titles.

For hosts and administrators:

- Professional names, logos, positions etc. are appropriate to be used only by the hosts and administrators of the meeting. After all, each participant is most familiar with those persons.

- If not, they should introduce themselves If you are a host/administrator, who doesn't know every participant, be sure to introduce yourself right at the beginning, by welcoming all the participants.

- In case the participants do not know each other, give them one or two minutes to introduce themselves. The least recommended information for anyone to the state by introducing himself is Name, Location and the Reason to be here.

Using a virtual background

Before using a virtual background, consider that a good and tidy real background is always preferable. Online meetings do not work as social media posts where we try to get good reviews (likes, hearts, etc.). It is participation whereby we should not distract anyone's attention by using an impressive background, movements, noises, etc.

Image 9: Not appropriate background choice

Image 10: A home background choice

In case you don't have a tidy environment and you have to use a virtual background, then make sure that the image is not some exotic landscape, the background of a big city, a monument or an attraction; it should be a good office or home picture. To make it work properly, without having these annoying problems by interchangeable images between the real and the virtual background, follow those rules:

Your real background should be as monochrome as possible. Take away all the small objects you don't need, which have various colours, standing in front of your walls.

Consider that your clothing should not have the same colour as your background, or something very similar. This will confuse your system to understand which surface is the background to be changed. So, if the colour of your clothes is contrasting your background, the computer can distinguish between you and your background and give you a much better result.

If you don't follow these rules carefully, the result will be confused and have a bad aesthetic, which means that you get the opposite result from what you desired.

Attending on time

We start our login process at least ten minutes before, because some technical difficulties may always arise. To be late once in a while is understandable and can happen to anyone, but coming always too late is not proper.

The maximum should be plus/minus five to ten minutes divergence from the plan.

If you see that your delay will be more than a quarter, it is advisable to notify the administrators.

Image 11: Being on time

Also, if there is a reason to quit your participation earlier, it is advisable to notify the administrator right at the beginning of the meeting. He or she might have to adjust the plan on your earlier absence. The most usual cause is that there are planned exercises during the meeting, which require whole-time participation until the end of the meeting.

Having sufficient room space

If your online meeting requires you to stand up or move (e.g., family constellations, or other exercises), make sure that there are at least 1.5 x 1.5 meters of free space behind you. Emphasis is given on the words "behind you", otherwise you will need to move your device which will be negative for you and all the others who will become dizzy by the movement of your cam.

In addition, ensure adequate lighting, direct from your device to this space of exercises.

The number of participants

There is a variety of web meetings and web seminars. The following advice does not apply to the usual university webinars, whereby the number of participants could be larger than fifty persons, or even a hundred and more. Those university webinars and the like, are web meetings that empower the anonymity of the participants to some degree.

On the other hand, in case you are going to participate in a web meeting for a smaller group with specific participants who were invited, anonymity is not the case. In that case, be advised, to take the following recommendations under consideration.

- Keep your camera always on

The face-to-face meeting is an important stance to show respect to each other. You probably encountered situations whereby you ask yourself: "they turn their cameras on and off, as we are in a game here. Why should I respect them by keeping my cam on?" This feeling is the same from the other side. So please, keep your cam on, during web-meetings in closed and smaller groups. Unless you are asked otherwise, then you adhere to the rule that will be given by the administrators and best serves the purposes of the meeting.

- It's human, very human

Sometimes the webinars have a long duration. They might even last for more than 3 hours. In this case, you might want to have some water or visit the WC. But the administrator might be about to create working groups and you might miss it. So, before you stand up to leave the meeting for a few minutes, it would be better to write a note in the dialogue box of the meeting. Personally, to the administrator, or public for the whole group. Both ways are appropriate. Messages like "Please excuse me for two minutes", or "I'm coming back right away" would be just ok. You don't have to refer to the reason you got to leave the minute for those two minutes.

- Turn off the camera, while being in the absence

In case you leave the meeting for a minute or two, remember to turn off the camera. This helps the administrator to keep in mind that you are not present. In case he just planned to start an exercise in groups, you help him to delay it for two minutes, or even take the opportunity to mention to all participants to prepare for an exercise and in case they have to visit the WC they should do it now. This is a major help for the administrator to best synchronize the procedures of his plan.

- Keep your microphone off unless it's an open dialogue. Open it only when you need to talk.

If you don't participate in an open dialogue meeting, ask permission to speak before you turn on your microphone. Otherwise, if anyone speaks without asking for permission, confusion and chaos could arise in the group.

Device-specific advice

Rules for any kind of device

- For mobile phones, tablets and laptops, if you do not have access to a power supply, make sure that your device is adequately charged.
- Be sure that the microphone is close enough to you, so that the others can hear you loud and clear.

On mobile devices (mobile, tablet and laptop) it is normally already calculated by the manufacturer and built-in on the front of your device. But if we use a PC, it would be good to use an extra microphone which should be placed near to the mouth of the speaker. Cameras used by PC's have most probably a built-in microphone, but ensure that the quality of the sound it delivers will be sufficient and without distortions.

- If you use external speakers (on a laptop or desktop computer), their correct position is right and left (on both sides) of the screen and about 10 cm further back. Not directly side-by-side. Just a bit on the back.

This concerns the direction of the input (microphone) and the output (speakers) of the sound. If your microphone is integrated by the cam on your monitor and you put your speakers right next to it, the microphone might receive also the output of your speakers directly and create feedback of it. This produces noise or the other speakers hear back their voices from your microphone.

So, pay attention to the direction that both have: the speakers and your microphone. They should be parallel to each other, not crossing each other, or even being in opposite positions flowing to each other's direction.

Mobile phones or tablets

Although mobile devices have evolved technologically at most and almost all applications for participation in online meetings are offered in both android and iOS operating systems, they are not the best way to participate in online meetings. The screen is small and does not offer a good view of presentations made on slides with text. There is also not possible to see many participants at the same time simultaneously, as might be required by some exercises.

On tablets, when our screen is ten (10) inches or bigger, the viewing mode is more preferable to one of your mobile phones.

If you are not able to use a device other than your mobile phone, at least make sure that:

- The device should be in a horizontal position and not vertical. Otherwise, your picture will appear asymmetrical as the picture of the other participants.
- Find out the exact spot of your device's microphone. They usually are at the bottom (near the mouth), so if your device stands on fabrics, your mic does not work so well as it should. This is an additional argument as to why to place your device horizontally.
- Ensure that your device is in a fixed position. Don't move it. Never and for no reason. Treat your device as it would be a desktop computer fixed on your desk. Moving in space is relatively tolerable. But moving your device even in the slightest, makes the participants dizzy, without you noticing it.

Laptops

The newer product models are already adjusted to the technical needs of online meetings. If this is not the case with your product model, there is a possibility that the microphone creates noise (the outgoing sound of the speakers might be repeated, through the microphone). You might not hear it, but all the others could hear a terrible noise.

So, if you have an older laptop, be sure to buy external speakers and place them in an appropriate position, as we described right before.

Modern laptops are lightweight and portable. So, don't fall into the trap to move them while being on a web meeting. Keep in mind, what we suggested for mobile phones and tablets and keep them in a fixed position.

If your laptop is older and overheats, it will produce an annoying noise, which will make it hard to you to hear the seminar, as it will also be very annoying to all others in case you have to speak and you open your microphone. By such a case you could:

- The parts of your laptop through which the air passes, as input or as exhaust, should be completely free. So, don't put your laptop on fabrics.
- Base your device on small objects that will give your device a small distance from the surface on which it is based upon. This distance will help your device to cool up.
- In the extreme case that those tips are not effective enough, get a stand with built-in fans powered by the USB port of your device. Make sure it's of good quality so it doesn't produce annoying noises.

Desktop computers

Desktop computers almost always have an external camera. It is rarely built into the screen. This camera as usual also has a built-in microphone. It may not have been set up automatically. In this case, it should be selected from your computer settings.

In computers, especially fixed computers, there is a possibility that overheating of the device occurs. In this case, noise starts to be heard from the fans, both of the processor and the whole device. Because sound travels more intensely through matter, it is annoyingly passed on to the microphone. Much more annoyingly than you perceive it. In this case, visit a technician and invest in a fan change with silent fans.

Buying tips

Headsets

In case you think to buy a headset, look for a Bluetooth one. Prefer this type and not the large headphones that cover the ears and feel heavy on your head, by wearing them for more than an hour. This will tire you and make you feel uncomfortable.

The same type exists in stereo and monophonic forms. The third photo is probably the most relaxing solution because the device catches like a clothespin in your garment and the headset comes out with an expandable cable and reaches your ear. Whichever format you choose, be sure to be informed about the duration of autonomy in speech and not in standby mode. I suggest that it has at least 5 hours of autonomy. Modern ones usually have from 8 to 20 hours of autonomy. The cost ranges from almost 10 to 30 euros.

Tablet – The affordable alternative

If you don't have a desktop or laptop and you cannot invest in buying one, consider buying a cost-effective but efficient tablet. The proposed technical specifications are the following: It should have…

- A good quality front camera on the side and not on the top. If the camera is on the top of the tablet, you will focus on the middle of your monitor during the meeting and this will look like you look aside. A camera on the long side of the tablet will be right in the middle because you will set the tablet horizontally during the call.
- At least 3 MB of RAM. A lower RAM would make it slow and slaggy.

- At least 32 GB of storage. You surely going to save various files on the devices, mostly by email. So, give adequate storage to yourself to comply with your future needs.
- Two speakers with good sound quality (if possible, with integrated Dolby)
- A sufficient screen resolution (at least HD if not full-HD)
- A good screen brightness and contrast specifications. The best monitor technology for that is the OLED. Get some advice through the internet or the salesperson by visiting a store.
- Sufficient battery autonomy for use outside your home/office. A duration of at least 5 hours by watching movies should be a sufficient specification. Be aware that the specification of battery autonomy by internet use, is not the one you should look for. The use of the internet demands less battery than video use. And web meetings with camera use, are more similar to video watching, concerning battery consumption.

Summary

The new technologies of mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and personal computers, are a part of our reality during the last decades.

Because of that, we all feel familiar with those and sometimes we even neglect to get advice on how to use them more appropriately and effectively.

This white paper aims to shed some light on some points of the subject, i.e., how to use those technologies, while we participate in meetings with groups and teams.

References

All the content is originally produced by the writer. It is grounded on knowledge collected during the15 years of experience, by teaching the use of Information Technology, to various groups of ages. That's why there are no direct references to any kind of sources for all the information included in this paper.

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