

How to Use Video Conferences to Strengthen Your Brand

By [Steven M. Bell](#) on May 28, 2020

By *Steve Bell and [Bob Morrison](#), Chairman & CEO, The Morrison Agency*

Since video conferences are now our most-important portals to the “outside world” and we’ve become reasonably proficient, it’s time to catch our breath and focus on how best to utilize this suddenly ubiquitous platform not just to communicate, but also to brand. As veterans of communications and branding for professional services firms, we offer some guidance across the four primary types of video meetings that we see in the marketplace

Internal Video Meetings

Despite the pandemic, business must go on, and most firms have been doing the best they can under very trying circumstances. Many have replaced the simple audio calls of the past with Zoom (or an equivalent platform), and in doing so they are trying to emulate the physical presence they gave up during this work-from-home period. Or, some leaders may not trust their employees fully and want to see with their own eyes that people are actually working from home and earning their keep. However, after almost three long months of online video interactions, chances are good they’re over-Zooming and wearing teams out.

Like it or not, employees are tired of having to sit in one place to stay within the video camera’s field of view. They’re tired of tidying up the background and making sure there are no embarrassing books or photos on the shelves behind them. And, they’re tired of having kids and pets creating scenes of chaos.

Most of all, though, they’re tired of the nonverbal overload that Zooming causes in their minds. In normal life, you don’t have long, uninterrupted direct (often close-up) eye gaze in meetings. You shouldn’t have it in your e-life, either.

Although Zooming feels more human than calling, it may be too much “humaning,” and a forced violation of personal space, which we’ve learned to deal with in other situations. In elevators for example, we avoid eye contact by looking off into space or at the changing floor numbers. Or, when someone is too close, we instinctively back away. In Zoom, however, everyone is front and center, and there’s nothing you can do about it.

So, consider easing up on the video requirements for your teams, and easing up on mandatory meetings where everyone, at every level in the firm has to be on the call. Perhaps give people the option of skipping the video part or, at a minimum, have the person speaking present via video and allow the others involved to turn off their cameras. Don’t mandate video participation any more than you might mandate how close someone sits to the conference table.

External Video Meetings with Clients

Task-oriented video meetings with clients are a different animal. Here, your brand is front and center, and every meeting represents a relationship building or reinforcement opportunity. With a couple of exceptions, the rules here are very similar to any client meeting.

Call Prep

In advance of the call, make sure everyone who will be participating understands the purpose of the call, who will be involved, and how long the call will last. For important or milestone meetings, it's also a good idea to send clients a one-pager with the pictures, names, titles and a fun fact of each person who'll be representing the firm on the call. This not only merchandises the firm and its people, it gives clients a tool to which they can refer when each firm participant is talking.

Video Call Technology & Staging

Online presentations tools vary and can be glitchy. Screen sharing is not always perfect. Video and audio often lag. And resolution can be flawed. Figuring out what works best for you is critical. Also, some client systems don't allow them to use certain platforms. Understanding that is very important. Forewarned is forearmed.

Use a video conferencing platform your people and your clients can use/access easily. Consider using a platform with rich functionality such as the ability to customize backgrounds. For some platforms you and your people can have any background you want such as the firm's conference room or building exterior. You can even create custom backgrounds with the firm name and logo. Another nice touch is to include the client's logo. A consistent background for everyone on your team makes you and the firm look buttoned up. It also eliminates distractions that arise when viewers naturally find themselves checking everyone's background (furniture, decor, pictures, etc.) and then making unconscious judgments about the people on the call.

Call Management

Audio conference calls can be very frustrating if/when everyone tries to talk at once, and this issue is even more problematic in a video setting. Structuring the flow and timing of the meeting, who's going to cover what, and the key points that each person needs to address is "Meeting 101" and certainly not new. The challenge in a video conference is the hand-off from one speaker to the next. The more seamless the hand-offs, the better. Ideally, you shouldn't have to say something like, "now I'll turn it over to you, Kim.." You can easily create key phrases that wrap up each section and provide clues for the next person to take over. Examples of these transition phrases are: "I hope that information was helpful, now let's talk about ____." or "That summarizes our _____, now a word about our experience with ____."

The other challenging part of client meetings is managing Q&A. When you open up the discussion for client questions, only one person from the firm should respond – not necessarily to answer the question, but rather to direct the question to the appropriate person on the firm team. That way, not everyone is trying to answer at once, and there are no "pregnant pauses" with everyone from the firm trying to decide who should answer. Instead, someone immediately steps and in, thanks the client for the question and directs it to the appropriate person. Research has shown that delays on conferencing systems shape views of people negatively, and delays of only 1.2 seconds can make people perceive the responder as less friendly or focused. After each question is answered, the leader adds any additional comments they think necessary and turns it back to the client for the next question. With one person acting as the Q&A quarterback, this part of the meeting can be very well-managed.

Call Follow-up

Following up every client meeting is always a good practice, and video conference follow up is no different. A nice touch following these types of meeting is to take a screen shot of the meeting (during the call) with everyone's face on the screen, then date it, and include it with your call summary. It serves as a great reminder of the call, provides proof that everyone was present for the call, and continues to reinforce your brand – especially if everyone's background had the

firm logo, building, etc. It also can be vehicle to make some personal or humorous comment about something that happened in the call.

Remote/Video Pitching

It is extremely important to manage this kind of video meeting very carefully. Chances are the people you're meeting with or presenting to don't know much about you or your firm. And we as all know, you get one chance to make a first impression. The same rules that apply to client video meetings also apply here, but the stakes may be quite a bit higher. You're probably competing against other firms for the business, so you want to make the right impression but most importantly, you want to stand apart.

A crucial ingredient in new-business pitches is establishing good chemistry with the client or prospective client. We're in a relationship-driven business, and every interaction should include the opportunity for informal conversation so you can get to know one another, demonstrate a good understanding of their business, probe for their needs/issues/challenges, and weave in key points about your experience and capabilities. The challenge in remote/video presentations is that the opportunity for informal dialogue and chemistry-building is severely compromised.

So, how do you approach these unusual new business development presentations where you have to show the mandatories including firm capabilities, related experience, relevant work, etc., and yet you know from experience that clients ultimately select a firm based on chemistry – i.e., the ones they feel most comfortable with and confident in. The answer is to make your presentation as engaging as possible by doing everything you can to merchandise the firm's people before, during and after the pitch. And by creating scenarios that force dialogue/exchange with the client team during the pitch in a fun but manageable way.

Call Prep

As we recommended for working meetings with clients, call preparation in a biz dev pitch is very important. A day or two before the presentation, send each prospective client a one-pager with the pictures, names, titles and a fun fact of each person who'll be presenting to them.

Introductions

The first step in any presentation is introductions. The firm should take the lead and ask the client professionals to lead off by introducing themselves, explaining their roles, and offering a fun fact about themselves personally – something not everyone knows. Clients love to do that, and you'll learn a lot about each of them personally and professionally in the process. Then have each person from your firm do the same thing. In advance, pick the of the speaking order of your team so everyone isn't talking over one another. By the way, the order in which you and your colleagues speak should match the order on the one-pager you sent prior to the meeting.

Meeting Ice Breaker

Before jumping right into the formal pitch/presentation, consider a business-related "ice breaker" exercise. This provides a fun opportunity for dialogue before the actual presentation. Done right, it draws out the clients in the room, helps identify what each of them are looking for in a law firm partner, and elucidates how they define business success. This learning also can provide insight into what you need to focus on in the actual presentation. Possible questions clients should answer in this exercise include:

- From your perspective, how would you define the ideal client/law firm relationship – i.e., the secrets to success?
- In your mind, what are the most important attributes you are looking for in a new firm?
- Where can a new firm make the biggest difference for your company, and for your personally?

The information gleaned from this exercise is also good content for post presentation emails in that you can refer to what each person said they were looking for in their law firm relationship and their aspirational goals for the business.

Video Call Technology & Staging

Video presentations are challenging. Although people's faces fill the screen, lighting is often terrible and different from person to person. And, because backgrounds are all different, viewers find themselves checking out furniture, decor, pictures etc., which are visually distracting and communicate something different about each person on the call. People from the firm should all have the same background. Some technology platforms allow you to easily customize backgrounds. But you also can create and use large foam core backdrops (4' x 6') produced with yours and/or the client's logo and have them delivered to the homes of all your team members so everyone has the same background. You'll want to do a practice video call with the whole presentation team to ensure everyone's backdrop is set up the same way and that the effect is an impressive and memorable.

Call Management

Orchestrating the flow of the call and managing Q&A were covered in the client section above, and all those same points apply here. The key to successful, gap/glitch-free presentations is to have one person in charge of leading all client interaction and identifying who on the firm team should speak and when.

Call Follow-up

Post-presentation communications can go a long way to reinforcing all the ways your firm fits the client's needs and expectations. Make these communications brief, to the point, and, if possible, fun. Clients are not just looking for a serious business partner, they also want people they can trust and will enjoy working with.

Practice

Meeting introductions, ice breakers, presentations, and Q&A will be successful and memorable only if you practice – as many times as you possibly can. The best-case scenario is for the firm presentation team to set up practice video conferences with people you trust. Then present to those people over and over until you get it right.

In this physical-distancing era, clients cannot come into your office and you can't go theirs either. So, you might think that gone are opportunities for fun, meaningful interactions between prospects and your people, and the ability to show off the personality and culture of your firm. That's not necessarily the case. Well-staged presentations with stimulating exercises (client/firm exchanges) followed by carefully planned communications can dramatically enhance your brand and can go a long way to creating the same effect as in-person meetings. You must treat this kind of presentation with the same attention to detail as you would any new-business meeting.

Large Meeting and Seminars

The technology requirements for much-larger, seminar-type meetings are very different. You need much more bandwidth. You need better video, lighting and audio. You need better screen-sharing capabilities. You need rich chat and polling functionality. All the above can be managed with the right technology partner – probably the same partner you used for pre-virus, large, in-person events. But you also should consider involving the right branding partner, because the issue here is not just the medium, but the message. Are you presenting your brand in the best possible way? Are you differentiating your firm from what others are doing? What do you want your firm and your brand to be remembered for? Is it coming across in all your video events and communications?

Conclusion

Many authorities agree that once the world has bested the current pandemic – which may take a year, two years or more – organizations will not return to the old business as usual. This may mean that those who oversee brands will be relying on videoconferences as a primary brand channel for a long time to come. Why not pour the foundations now?

1. Invest in right technology – current, widely used, accessible for clients, easy to use. Technology for these calls includes platform (i.e., Zoom, Google, etc.), camera, microphone, and lighting.
2. Educate staff – not only on how to use the technology, but how to do it right.
3. Take advantage of the fact that video conferencing is a visual medium and make sure you exploit every opportunity to have your brand front and center.
4. Consider assigning some firm member with the responsibility of ensuring the firms' video capabilities and brand presence are current, compelling and competitive.
5. Be sensitive to video conference wear-out and consider other options to occasionally change the pace and nature of person-to-person interactions.