



How to Choose a Webinar Product





More than 60% of marketers use webinars to educate prospects and customers as well as generate leads. It's brand awareness for the company. Many companies use webinars for demos or general training.



Regardless, everyone can agree that when they're good, they're effective. The speakers hum along providing their expertise, the participants chime in to share thoughts and ideas, and there's interaction and engagement. Something's learned. Leads are generated. The brand comes across. Everyone is happy.

But when they're bad, they take their toll on the person giving the webinar -- the speakers and the company hosting it. Even if the fault is with the webinar provider, participants don't know that. It leaves a mar on your brand -- people trust your brand less. And it impacts your personal brand, your speaker's and your company's.

That's why choosing a webinar product is so important.

Your goals and needs for a webinar product

What do you need your webinar to do? Educate? Generate leads? Conduct sales demos? Training? All of the above?

- **Success metrics.** If education is your goal, what will be your measure of success? If you're looking primarily at leads, how many leads will guarantee your product is worth it? ([See ROI of a webinar lead for more information.](#)) How many demos? How many people trained? In other words, how will you know you've been successful and the webinar tool was worth the investment?
- **Users and attendees.** How many people will use this tool? How big of an audience do you have or will you need to present to in order to make your goals? Do they need training? Support? Some companies charge for level of support. If you're not the user, talk with all [users and stakeholders to generate the scenario.](#)
- **Frequency.** How often are you planning to conduct webinars? Every month? Once a quarter? Once a week?
- **Budget.** See pricing below for more information, but know what you want to spend going in. Also, if you have the flexibility of paying annually, you may get a discount. Most providers would rather have you as a year-long customer, giving you a small discount.



Goals, the SMART way

Measuring success is difficult, but it should be smart. You've probably heard it before -- SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based. Think about what your goals are -- how many leads? In what period of time? How many people trained? How many people have seen the brand?

Example: Generate 1,000 leads per quarter in 2017, using 3 marketing professionals for every webinar. Each webinar should include 100 participants.



Checklist of features

It may not be a surprise that most webinar features are similar. However, each company has a niche -- some focus more on ease-of-use while others offer more add-ons. Determine the priorities to achieve your goals.

Maybe your users prefer a robust product -- with tons of features -- to customization because of the complex webinars they want to portray for a variety of reasons. Maybe you need to ensure you have solid support, including tips and ideas for improving webinars, because your user group hasn't done webinars before.

Order the following based on your needs:

- ☐ Easy-to-use
- ☐ Robust
- ☐ Integrations
- ☐ Customization
- ☐ Add-ons
- ☐ Analytics
- ☐ Customer service, including proactive service

Easy-to-use

Your webinar software should be easy. If you're an IT purchaser, think about what your users want. Here are a few things to consider if easy is important to you or your user-base.



Frequently, when thinking about webinars, you're thinking about three distinct phases: before, during and after the webinar.

Before	During	After
<p>Can you easily promote the webinar? Social media and email are the two usual ways people promote webinars. Your webinar solution should make it easy to include a link.</p> <p>Is registration simple? In order to generate leads, registration is important ... and it ensures your audience shows up.</p> <p>Do the speakers need a practice run and is that easy?</p>	<p>Is starting the webinar something anyone can do?</p> <p>Can you record it without issue?</p> <p>Can attendees join with a simple click ... or do they need to download something?</p> <p>Can you show slides easily?</p> <p>Is it simple to engage your audience with polls, Q&A and more?</p>	<p>Can you easily send out a link to the recording?</p> <p>Can you upload that recording into your YouTube or Vimeo account?</p> <p>Can you extend your content plans by playing that content back again?</p> <p>Can you send out a survey?</p>



Robust

Robust doesn't have to be complicated, but it does need to be complete with options to achieve your objective. It also needs to be reliable. Here are a few other things to consider:

- How big will your audience be?
- Do you need in-application email or prefer to use your own email system?
- What type of content do you need to show them? Slides? Documents? Video? Again, this pertains to the objective -- why you're purchasing webinar software.
- How important is engaging your audience using polls, surveys, and Q&A?
- How important is it to record and playback your webinar? Do you need to add your webinar to social media? Or just keep an archive for posterity?



Integrations

Along with robust, integrations extend how useful your software is -- both the applications you already have and the webinar platform you're considering. Not only do they extend software they reduce time and errors. Instead of duplicating effort and adding mistakes into your work, information can easily flow from one system to another. For example, leads can move easily from your webinar software to customer relationship management (CRM) tool for easy tracking.

- What CRM do you use? How important is it for information to flow into that CRM?
- Do you use a marketing automation system? Which one do you use? How important is it to have a system that moves webinar information into a marketing automation system?
- Do you need integration with social media?
- Do you need integration with other systems?

Customization

Some people need more customization than others ... and in different places from emails to registration pages. Is it critical to showcase your brand? If so, where?

In webinars, there's lots of options for customization. Of course, in most software you won't be able to completely customize it, but you may be able to do what matters - easily.



Add-ons

As your company grows and your needs change, you may want the ability to easily add options, including users and attendees.

- Will you need to replay a webinar? These days there are options that enable pre-recordings to happen easily, expanding your audience and what your marketing team can do. It also ensures your webinar is absolutely perfect.
- Can you conduct live webinars, even through social? Maybe that's not something you need currently, but it may be where your marketing goals are headed.
- Will your user base change this year? Are you thinking of adding staff who might be responsible for webinars?
- Will you look to increase your attendees this year?



Analytics

Measuring success is critical, that includes knowing how many participants attended, whether they achieved accreditation (like a CPE - continued professional education) and more. Determine whether these are important to you:

- Registrants and attendees
- People actually participating, answering questions or asking, responding in polls, etc.
- People who interacted with you using social media
- How many listened to the webinar after it was over
- Types of questions received
- Overall survey results to be able to share with other speakers

Customer service, including proactive service

This one is tricky -- not all webinar providers have the same level of customer service. Is it important to get a person on the phone or are you just as happy to receive an automated phone tree where your call will never be received? Do you have to pay extra for basic services, like someone helping you when you need it the most? Customer service varies from vendor to vendor and can cost additional money.



Another thing to consider: are concierge services available for flawless webinars? Although most vendors add onto the price for people to conduct the webinar, it ensures perfection. You may need it ... or you may not, depending on your comfort-level with webinars and how important webinars are to your brand.

Lastly, some vendors stand out as they provide proactive tips and ideas -- how to improve your webinar, generate more leads, etc. In fact, with some companies, this service is free -- available for all customers.



Your budget

Know your budget before going into review webinar software. Webinar services vary greatly ... and so do prices. Most companies offer a range of price options based on the number of participants and webinars needed per month. Expect to pay anywhere from \$10 per month to more than \$1,000 per month. The services depend on all the factors above. One of the costliest is video.

Often, companies provide a discount on yearly subscriptions, making it slightly cheaper to sign a contract for the year.



Research to compare

So you've received everything that's important, including quantifying why you need a webinar tool or need to switch. Now it's time to do your research into which vendor might be the best. Obviously there are a variety of ways you can determine whether one provider is better than another, including company culture. For some companies, having a company like yours -- another small business -- is important. For others, they put more value in customer reviews. Probably some mix of all of that will be right for your organization.



Free trial or demo

It's typical for each vendor to highlight the specifics that make them better. If one is more robust, they'll focus on that and away from ease-of-use. By digging deeper, you'll find out which tool is really perfect for your organization. But ... while you're on their website, ask for a free trial. Most companies will enable you to try their software for a short period of time for free. Good companies don't even require a credit card. Nothing beats personal experience. Second best is a

demo -- where they show you the software. There's nothing like trying two - three of your top vendors. You'll get a better idea of the software trying for yourself.

Customer reviews

Other reviews are another great way to determine how good the software is, especially things like ease-of-use. Websites like [G2Crowd](#) and [Capterra](#) provide a user community where you can see reviews of various software, including webinars.

Another option is to view customer testimonials on their website or ask for customer reviews. Most reputable businesses will provide you a list of people you can contact and ask about their experience.

Analyst reviews

You may want to review information from analysts -- professionals who review software for a living -- comparing and contrasting features and benefits. Many analysts are available, including [Aragon Research](#). Generally, companies that are featured favorably in reports will provide a copy to you for free.





Putting it all together

Goals

Don't forget to make them SMART.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Features needed

Remember, to most vendors, customer service is a feature as it may cost additional money.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Budget

\$ _____

Completed research to compare products

- ☐ Free trial or demo
- ☐ Customer reviews better than average
- ☐ Analyst reports favorable
- ☐ Intangibles, such as this company treats employees and the community well, its mission matches ours

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