

TOP TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

EMBRACING A NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

At the start of 2020, who could have predicted that the somewhat staid world of investments, with its love of in-person meetings and on-site due diligence, would have to wholeheartedly embrace remote work, and with them, remote meetings?

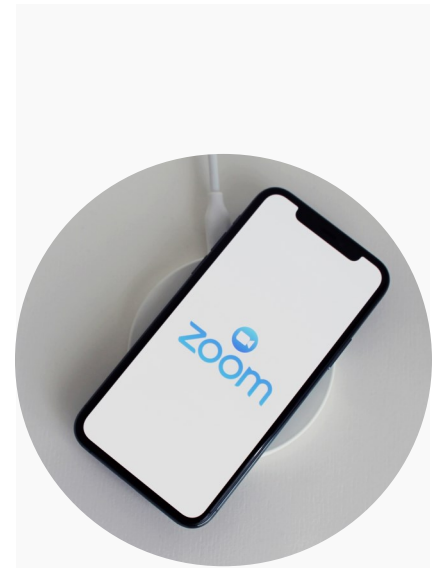
Several months into the year, our team at Alpha Capital Management has logged hundreds of hours on Zoom, BlueJeans, WebEx, and their remote meeting brethren. We've used them for everything from OCIO search finals to informal team meetings. And in that time, we've not only learned how to maximize this video platform, but we've gathered feedback from a wide variety of institutional investors, OCIOs, asset managers, and consultants on how to make the most of remote meetings.

Remote meetings have their downsides, to be sure. Following Murphy's Law, internet connections seem to be at their most unstable in the middle of important finals presentations. It is difficult to build rapport and impossible to make eye contact. And almost every meeting gives us a new opportunity to experience what Russell Investments dubbed the "Top 5 Most Painful Phrases in a Virtual Meeting." (For more on that, see Additional Resources).

But remote meetings also have plenty of benefits. They are easier to schedule and don't require eight hours of travel for a one-hour meeting. This makes it easier for senior leaders to attend finals they would otherwise miss, and allows clients to meet with a broader group of professionals at any given firm than is practical to fly in for a meeting.

It's hard to say how long any of us can expect to interact with clients solely through video conferencing. We may as well make the most of it. In this research paper, Alpha Capital Management offers our best practices for successful video conferencing. Here are our top tips:

1. It takes a village
2. Back up your backups
3. Brevity is the soul of video conferencing
4. Easy on the eyes
5. Roll with the punches



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ABOUT THE FIRM

ALPHA CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

Leading provider of OCIO and investment consultant searches for institutions. Co-creators of the AlphaNasdaq OCIO Indices. Mission to improve the outcome for investors.

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TOP TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

1 IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Remote meetings can quickly descend into chaos, with parties constantly interrupting each other (“No, you go...”) and participants trying to troubleshoot technology issues live (“Can you hear me now?”). While one extremely organized person can manage a meeting, the best meetings involve more than one organizer in key roles. Here are three to consider:

Super Moderator

The **Super Moderator** is tasked with starting the meeting, giving the (virtual) floor to the appropriate party, setting the procedure for questions (whether that is using the chat function, speaking up, using a virtual icon to raise hands), and ensuring that all participants have a chance to ask questions.

Make sure **Super Moderator** is well versed in your virtual meeting technology. He or she should know (at a minimum) how to set up a meeting, use “waiting room” or “admit to meeting” functions, mute and unmute participants, and allow participants to screen-share.

Technical Support

No one wants to delay a meeting for ten minutes while one participant provides live technical support to another. Hand that responsibility off to someone who isn’t an active meeting participant. Make sure each meeting participant knows how to reach **Technical Support**, too. Provide a day-of contact number and email for any last-minute troubleshooting.

Screen Sharer

If your firm intends to share your screen and display live content, appoint one person to manage the presentation. Ideally, this is someone who has a low-to-moderate speaking role—and it certainly should be someone with a strong internet connection. **Screen Sharer** should disable pop-up notifications such as email alerts that might distract from the meeting or display confidential information. The presentation to be shared should be ready to go on the screen (no fumbling through personal files and vacation photos live, please!). Lastly, **Screen Sharer** should be well versed in the technology, especially using special features such as annotate or pause screen share (useful for pulling up another document or file without everyone watching you click around).

2 BACK UP YOUR BACKUPS

In a remote meeting, it is much harder to control the variables for participants than for an in-person meeting. Don’t try to eliminate the variables— embrace them. For one example, let’s think about sharing a live presentation on screen. This works for participants who log onto the meeting using a device with a screen, but not for participants joining by phone. Send out all presentations in advance to participants via email or through the calendar invitation, so everyone has the material at their fingertips. As another example, provide multiple ways for participants to join the meeting as well. Most video conferencing systems allow for computer, tablet, or phone access with or without video connectivity. And if you follow our first tip and appoint the **Screen Sharer**, back up this role too! Make sure more than one participant is ready to share the deck in case of last-minute challenges.

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BREVITY IS THE SOUL OF VIDEO CONFERENCING

The culmination of the Alpha search process is the finals presentation. OCIOs and consultants who have cleared months of due diligence present in person to the Committee. Our typical finals schedule takes about 5 hours: 3 one-hour presentations by finalist candidates with brief 10-15 minute breaks in between, bookended by 30-minute (or longer) discussions to kick off and wrap up the meeting. This is a tried-and-true formula for in-person meetings but is extremely taxing over video. The human brain is wired for in-person connection. Research shows that sitting at a kitchen table interacting with a computer is much different than sitting at a conference table interacting with peers. This phenomenon even has its own name, [Zoom fatigue](#). Keep this in mind while scheduling video meetings, and try to break them up more than you would an in-person meeting. We suggest that no video meeting last longer than 2.5 hours, including breaks. If scheduling difficulties don't permit multi-day finals, try to schedule longer-than-normal breaks in between presentations to give participants a chance to stretch and walk around.

This tip also applies to the presentations themselves. Video conferencing has a few key disadvantages over in-person meetings. A good presenter watches the audience for non-verbal cues and adjusts the presentation accordingly, understanding when to belabor a point and when to skip ahead to more interesting material. In the absence of non-verbal feedback, it is easy to ramble. Be very deliberate in your presentation. Pause often, allowing participants enough time to jump in with a question or a prompt to move ahead. Allow time for technical difficulties and for plenty of questions. Organization is important for any presentation; remotely, it is crucial.

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EASY ON THE EYES

No one expects your video meeting to resemble a Hollywood movie (or even Saturday Night Live from Home). But there are a few simple ways to improve the quality of video meetings without buying a green screen or taking acting lessons from Brad Pitt. First, try to avoid the meeting opening with a blank, dark screen. Your participants should have visual cues that they have joined the meeting successfully, and that they have joined the right meeting. If the meeting participants are using video, the Brady Bunch view of familiar faces can provide that cue. Another option is to share a welcome screen at the beginning of the meeting, displaying the meeting name and perhaps a brief agenda.

Next, put some thought into your video setup. As noted in the previous tip, non-verbal cues are an important part of human communication. Although cues like body positioning, hand gestures, and eye contact are limited on video call, having a well-lit shot that shows your facial expressions adds back something that is otherwise lost. Putting a little thought into your video setup goes a long way. An ideal spot would have lots of light (both in front and behind you) and a good head-on view of you with little else in the foreground. Don't forget a comfortable chair.

Lastly, put some thought into your wardrobe. Video conferences can have a casual air about them, with participants joining in from home environments and often dressed down. We recommend that presenters dress up to add that little bit of extra professionalism. And please, wear pants. We'll know if you don't.

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5 ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

This tip was initially called “Practice Makes Perfect.” After three and a half months of virtual meetings, however, the entire planet has had plenty of practice. We should all be expert-level virtual meeting participants at this point. And yet, very few video conferences go off without a hitch, even today. It may not surprise you to hear that our most successful virtual meetings have this in common: participants are comfortable with the technology. The proliferation of video platforms, settings, and features can make it a challenge for participants to know the ins and outs of each technology—and that’s putting aside the fact that some participants are not as skilled as others with technology in general.

By all means, work with your participants to get them comfortable with your video platform of choice. Encourage them to test-drive the technology on their own or with **Technical Support** (see Tip 1), offer quick-start guides that highlight key features (see Additional Resources, below), and practice, practice, practice. That being said, a little bit of grace goes a long way. Accept that technical issues might crop up. Kids might make a cameo, the doorbell might ring in the middle of a meeting, or the mute function just might not work like it should. Address them, work around them, and move on. It doesn’t have to be perfect. We’re all in this together.



WANT TO LEARN MORE? ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Zoom users, feel free to use or adapt [Alpha Capital’s Zoom Quick Start Guide](#).
2. Zoom fatigue, including the neurological and psychological reasons behind it, are explained in this [National Geographic article](#).
3. A look how social neuroscience informs the use of virtual tools for real communication is available in this [Wall Street Journal article](#) (link behind paywall).
4. Russell’s list of the Top 5 Most Painful Phrases in a Virtual Meeting are part of its excellent webinar on virtual meetings. [Click here to register and access the replay](#).

ABOUT ALPHA CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

We are a leading provider of OCIO and investment consulting searches for institutions and have represented more than \$64B of assets in the marketplace. We also co-created the industry’s first OCIO indices with Nasdaq. An independently owned investment firm founded in 2006, Alpha Capital has four employees located in Atlanta, GA. We seek to provide unbiased advice to our partners with our investment-oriented services and solutions. Our mission is to improve the outcome for the investor.

OCIO & CONSULTANT SEARCH SERVICES

Our core business is to perform OCIO and investment consultant searches for large institutional investors. Our deeply experienced team views OCIOs and consultants through many lenses, having served as plan sponsors, investment consultants, and investment committee members. We take a disciplined, rigorous approach to OCIO and consultant due diligence, complemented by our investment expertise and CFA designations. We drive a better result for our clients while simplifying the search process.