

Audio Conference Mini-Boot Camp

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The details of launching your first audio conferences are seemingly endless – this is not a quick process. However, once you’ve made the required dozens of decisions during the first event or two, the process gets easier and the time required decreases significantly. Don’t underestimate how much staff time will be required to get this going, even if you have an outside consultant like Leslie Davidson assisting.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Timing

- I’d suggest starting to plan each audio conference at least 3 months in advance, if at all possible. You need to get on speakers’ calendars, and you may want to incorporate your promotions into other print pieces or promotions that may have deadlines well before the event date.
- As far as promotion, it has seemed to us that 2-3 weeks in advance is about as early as you can really go. (We had 69 paid attendees at our first audio conference; we started promoting 2 weeks out; we only had 1 sign up on the first day). Most sign-ups seem to happen between about 3 and 7 days from the conference.

Content

- Most important, of course, is content. There is a lot of competition these days – both paid and free – for audio conferences. Personally, I think people value the paid conferences more highly; they are much more likely to actually show up.
- To state the obvious, you must be prepared offer content of value; something unique that they wouldn’t be able to get elsewhere. People love:
 - Data
 - Predictions
 - Take-aways
 - Tips
 - Must-have info to operate ones business. Example: regulatory and compliance-oriented topics are typically a strong draw
- Who will speak? You could use an internal or external expert, or a panel. The panel takes more coordination (and is like herding cats), but it relieves one person of the whole burden of planning a whole hour’s worth of content, and also can make it a little more interesting for the listener. If you have a subject matter expert who has presented before, is comfortable with the medium, and has enough to offer, that could be preferable.
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- Speaker Prep: Be sure to gather your speakers via conference call well in advance of the event to make sure everyone knows their role and what their presentations

- will cover. Meet a second time at least a few days in advance of the event to cover how the event will flow from a technical and content perspective. Speaker prep calls will help ensure a smooth program on event day.
- Be very clear with the speaker about what will be covered; don't leave it to chance. You'll need to coordinate what the speaker will talk about with the marketing promises you make about what will be covered in the call.

(Side note: Audio Conference or Webinar?)

- Should you make it a webinar and incorporate visuals? It probably depends on what you will cover. If you're speaking about data, it can definitely help listeners to be able to look at something. You can provide handouts by email, but it's always nice to go where the speaker goes.
- Webinar technology can incorporate some nifty things like the ability to ask questions via the chat function (some may prefer this to calling in), or the ability to run a poll within the conference.

Preparation of Materials

- You may want a logo for your conference series
- You will need a graphic and copy "package" created, in order to provide consistency among your ads, email blasts, landing pages, confirmations, conference manuals, transcripts, CDs, etc.
- If you already have a website, you'll need to determine how/where the conference call presence fits into your existing structure. Do you add it to your global navigation? Do you create ads and run them throughout the site?

List Management

- If you have a clean process without a lot of segmentation or need to synchronize with an online database, this can be a pretty simple thing.
- If you do plan on lots of segmentation, and you have an existing framework for managing online opt-ins, this will require time from someone on staff.
- I'd be happy to try to answer some specific questions, but the variables are too numerous to try to lay out here. It depends on your database, your email management system, and more.

Fulfillment

- Do you already have an online bookstore? Can you take credit cards?
- Do you have an automated confirmation process? Are you able to customize it by product?
- Will you be using a vendor that supplies an individual PIN code for each call-in location? (This is extremely preferable to control the number of sites calling in, each of which you will pay for)
- Someone needs to generate those codes, track them, and send them to registrants. You may need/want to send them again just before the audio conference.
- Someone needs to track CD purchases, package and mail them when they arrive. They only cost a little over a dollar to mail (approx. \$3-7/each to duplicate based on volume), but will you send them so they are trackable?

- Consider creating a special branded package to fulfill recording orders. The package can include handouts, CLE information (if applicable), a flyer promoting future or archival events, etc.

Transcript

- Will you produce a transcript? Will you offer it to attendees?
- Getting the transcript is surprisingly easy and fast (PurpleShark is accurate, has great turnaround time, and is priced very well), but you need to think about how much proofreading you want to do before sending it out. Also, you may want to format it to be in keeping with your brand. So there could be a decent amount of “processing” in house before that transcript is ready for distribution.
- FYI – Per Meg Hargraves, “IOMA has actually stopped offering transcripts due to lack of sales. We only offer audio recordings. We will, however, transcribe an event if we receive a special request. Clients pay a premium price for that service that typically equates to transcription costs + shipping +_small profit for us.”
- We don’t ship these; we email the transcripts; to us, this is actually much easier than dealing with fulfillment of audio CDs (primarily because we are not a print publication house, so we’ve got no infrastructure for this type of fulfillment). It’s only about \$200 or so to get a call transcribed, and then it’s easy to deliver on-demand.

Customer Service

- Are you equipped in-house to handle customer service calls – especially on the day before/day of the call. People will say they never got the instructions, or they lost them, etc. In most cases, we find that they’ve gone into the junk mailbox.