Virtual meetings are still meetings

By Tiffany Markman

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How not to be an ass-hat when it comes to telecons and video conferencing...

Our meeting was scheduled for 11am. It had been informally confirmed via email about a week before, and we'd both gone a step further by accepting the relevant meeting request. We'd established that she'd be calling me, and I'd supplied my Skype username. At 10:55, I was ready. Coffee steaming. Wi-Fi working. Skype open.

At 11:03 I sent a text message, "Ready when you are."

At 11:18 I tentatively started some other writing work.

By 11:38 – and bursting to pee, but reluctant to be caught off-guard – I accepted that the meeting wasn't happening and I got on with my day.

Bloody virtual meetings! Or, rather, bloody people-who-don't-take-them-anywhere-near-as-seriously-as-they-do-the-'in-person'-meetings! If you're guilty, or if you're at the regular receiving end of ass-hats who leave you e-hanging, read this now:

1. A meeting's a meeting

By accepting a meeting request, the other person has set aside the time to talk to you – whether they're at their desk in the office, sitting at home or hanging about on the beach. They've opted to give you the time, which has a pre-defined start time and a pre-defined end time. Just like a 'normal' meeting. Don't be the ass-hat who forgets, neglects or cancels virtual meetings at the last minute.

2. Prepare beforehand

A virtual meeting requires the support of some or other technology, none of which just happens by itself. So don't be the ass-hat who saunters casually towards her device at exactly the right time, and then spends 10 minutes getting set up.

3. Get and share details

In the email or phone conversation that precedes the scheduling of a virtual meeting, ensure that you have the correct contact details for the other person/people. Don't be the ass-hat with 12 ignored Skype contact requests to wade through, once the meeting's already supposed to have started.

4. Your meeting, your call

If you initiated the meeting, it's your job to initiate and make the contact – either by placing the actual call or Skyping the other attendees. Don't be the ass-hat who stares at his device until the appointed time ticks by, and then sends frantic messages to the entire group, to ascertain who's meant to be calling whom.

5. Mute the mayhem

Don't be the ass-hat who forgets to mute his own microphone (as well as his phone's and computer's alert sounds) while others are speaking, allowing everyone to hear him screaming at his whining kid and barking dog.

6. Focus, focus, focus

Raindance Communications says 70% of people do unrelated work during a telecon, 50% read or send emails, and 36% mute the call to talk to other people. This doesn't include the many who eat/browse the web. Don't be those ass-hats.

7. Audio-only is fine

Don't default to video for every meeting. The whole point of virtual meetings is the flexibility, which allows remote attendees in other time zones to participate. Don't be the ass-hat who overlooks that others may no longer be in the office and might appreciate some degree of privacy (while in their pyjamas and 'Mom-bun').

As with everything else in life, there's a pay-off when it comes to virtual meetings: you get to save time, energy and resources by engaging remotely, but in return you have to commit to being well-prepared, on time and respectful. Or you're an ass-hat.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.
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