



ISTOCK

The new rules for presentations in the age of restricted meeting sizes

Working from home is here to stay, and meetings will probably see both in-person and remote attendees from now on, Ontario-based coach says

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POWER POINTS

Presentations are about words and ideas, backed by charts and graphics. That won't change in the new normal at work. But the setting will change, and that requires you to rethink your presentations, be it to colleagues, clients or upper management.

Dave Paradi, a Mississauga-based presentation coach, says a starting point is that working from home is here to stay, so meetings will include both in-person and remote attendees almost every time.

As well, physical distancing will limit the capacity of meeting rooms in the office.

"A room that fit 10 before may only allow four people now. This means that even if a meeting attendee is in the building, the organization may not allow them to attend in person due to room-capacity restrictions," he writes on his website.

People will also question whether being in the same room with others is really worth it, so you will need to prepare the presentation with a mind to those who choose to attend and those who opt out.

Some of those attending will prefer to wear masks. There will also be multiple screens in every presentation.

"In the past, the presenter just had to worry about the screen at the front of the room and make sure their slides were easy to read on that screen. With many remote attendees, presenters will need to be also concerned with the readability of slide text on smaller laptop or tablet screens," he says.

Given that, here's what he advises you to do.

■ Learn how to set up your computer and

meeting platform to provide an effective presentation to both in-room and remote attendees, which means learning more about Power-Point and meeting platforms.

■ You also will have to focus more on holding attention as distractions increase with participants checking other programs on their computer or using the chat function. Plan your content so it zeroes in on what concerns your audience. Try animation in your slides rather than having a static slide on your screen for a few minutes.

■ Font size will be more important, as remote attendees will have a much smaller screen than the large flat-panel screens in meeting rooms. It will be even worse if the meeting window is not full-screen on their device. To ensure they can read the text, he recommends 18- to 20-point font. "Presenters will have to reduce the walls of text they use on slides, use more slides (which works well with keeping attention) and move extraneous details to supplementary documents that the attendees can refer to later," he writes.

■ You will need to check in more with participants to gauge their reactions, particularly if their face is shielded by a mask, and to read the remote chat. He adds that the time for checking in will reduce the time for content, making planning your content even more important.

■ Your deck will now need to double as a report, with graphics supplemented by details for those who didn't attend. He recommends using "hidden slides" with those details, available for the presentation but only shown if you are asked a question and then on the handout for later sharing. He also suggests considering developing a short video summary to go along with the slide file to make sure the key messages are not missed.

■ With fewer people attending the meeting, it may take a longer time for a decision to be made, so prepare for that possibility.

"I have spent over 20 years involved in training business professionals to create and deliver effective presentations in their meetings. The changes due to the health risks of gathering in groups is by far the biggest revolution I have seen in this area," he concludes.