

Technology that inspires and communication that convinces: How to turn your online meeting into a success story



Online conferences are the perfect communication tool for setting up meetings quickly, cost-effectively and regardless of location, even with international business partners.

In our guide, we've put together lots of practical tips that work to set up meetings effectively, to moderate them, and to inspire your discussion partners.

So, let's get started!

Contents

Zoom meetings: from basics to secret features.....	2
The best tips & tricks for a technique without pitfalls.....	7
Your stage set: Space. Light. And background.....	9
Clever organisation and ideal procedure for your video meeting.....	11
Present professionally via webcam and inspire participants.....	15

Zoom: From the basics to secret features

Whether Zoom, Stackfield, GoToMeeting, Nextcloud Talk, Microsoft Teams, Webex or Skype – online tools for video conferencing, audio meetings and webinars are booming. Updates with new features appear every week.

Of the dozens of video conferencing programs on the market, c't magazine tested the ten most important in its 20/2020 issue. Each of the tools has special features; it depends on your requirements which application is the most suitable for you.

We present Zoom in this guide. Why? Zoom has all the important features and is easily accessible online for everyone. It has the best broadcast quality, both in image and sound – and above all, Zoom has useful features that not all of the other programs hold. So here goes:

The basics for Zoom newbies

Central terms

The moderator is the initiator of the video meeting, the so-called video chat. He plans and starts the online meeting and takes care of the related settings. He also invites the other participants. Participants are the invited people who have been added to a meeting by a moderator. As a participant, you don't need a Zoom account to join a video conference, just the invitation or link to the meeting.

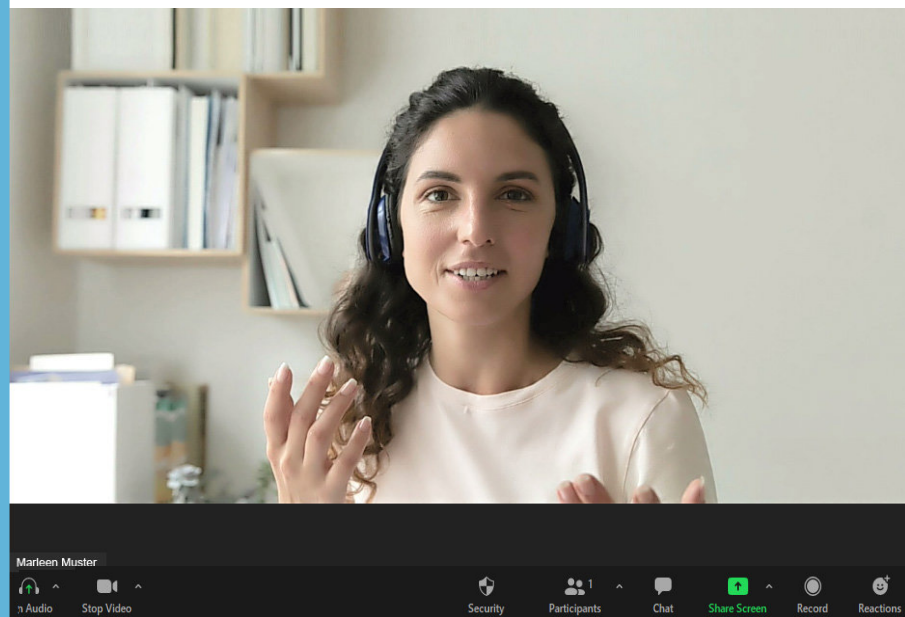
How does Zoom work?

Register online and you can start your meeting or invite guests at a specific time. As a participant, you will receive a link by mail and with one click you will directly enter the video conference. It couldn't be easier.

Important functions of the zoom interface

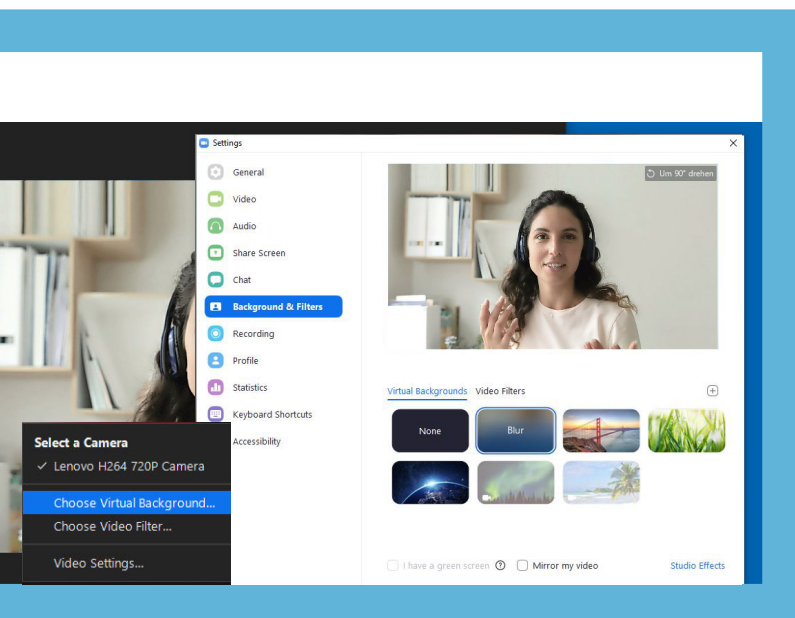
The controls for the zoom functions are located at the edge of the window. The microphone icon controls whether others can hear you. The camera icon controls whether you are visible to everyone or whether only a black area or photo is visible. shown.

There you will also find the raise hand button, with which participants can signal that there is a question.



What does Zoom do? You can...

- gather up to 1,000 participants in Zoom, depending on your subscription plan
- collaborate in virtual breakout rooms as smaller groups
- share your screen or part of your screen
- convert what is being said into writing using the transcript function so that everyone can continue to work on it later
- comment on the screen content as a participant
- use the chat function to ask questions or write comments
- set a virtual background
- edit your own camera image and, for example, give yourself a tanned skin color
- display up to 49 video windows on your screen or select a smaller number



- record the meeting so that you or colleagues or customers who could not make it can (re)watch the meeting later on
- work together on a document with the whiteboard function
- Participate in the meeting via your computer and share content in parallel via a tablet to keep your screen uncluttered

How much does Zoom cost?

If the video conference takes less than 40 min, then the free version of Zoom is sufficient. If you plan longer meetings or want to use some additional features, then it is worth buying one

of the subscriptions. Subscription prices start at €11.65 per month for conferences with up to 100 participants (February 2021). This allows you to indulge in your meetings for up to 24 hours at a time. – Not that such long meetings are recommended, but it is technically possible. In other subscription variants, you can zoom indefinitely with 1000 participants.

TIP: There's also what's called the Large Meeting option, where you can increase the maximum number of attendees without needing a more expensive plan.

For webinars, Zoom has a special offer: starting at €37/month (February 2021), you can host events or online workshops for 100 to 10,000 participants. You can even increase the audience via streaming on Facebook, Live or YouTube.

The most important functions of Zoom

The audio function

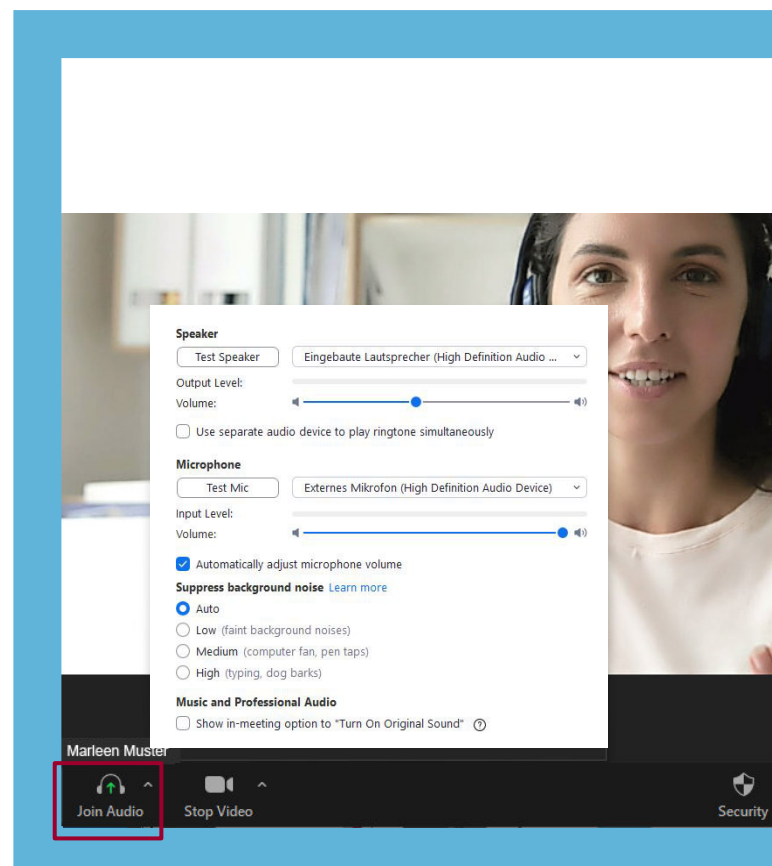
Everyone can switch their microphone on and off themselves. You as the moderator can additionally mute all participants or enable one or more to speak.

If you are not discussing something together, but one or two people are speaking, the microphones of all other participants are ideally switched off. Why?

The microphones of the others often pick up all kinds of ambient noise, including breathing sounds. If a participant is taking notes on the computer, the clacking of the keyboard can come across to the others like a heavy thunderstorm. As the moderator, you explain how to turn on the microphone and ask participants to mute their microphone and not turn on until they want to say something. Point out that the participant should also turn off the microphone on their own after they have spoken.

Alternatively, you can open only the microphones of the respective speakers. Ask the conference participants to leave their microphones switched on so that you can then activate them if necessary.

If the group is very large, this version is best; for smaller groups, the first version is more comfortable for everyone.



Share the screen

You can share your presentation, images, texts, videos and documents with others by sharing your screen. Others will not see which participants you are seeing or what is in your chat.

Breakout rooms

In large online meetings, the reluctance to speak up is relatively high. This is where breakout sessions do a great service: if you divide a group of 30 participants into 10 small groups of three people each, for example, they will easily start talking to each other and the ice will melt.

The small breakout groups only see and hear each other. You can join in as a moderator, ask about the current status and bring the groups back to the plenary at the end.

The online whiteboard

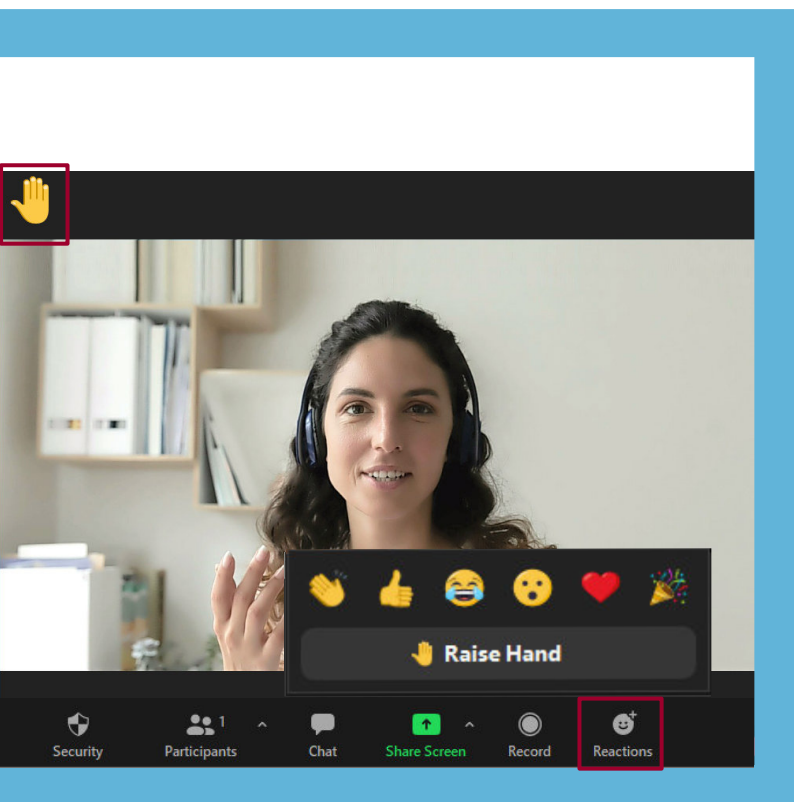
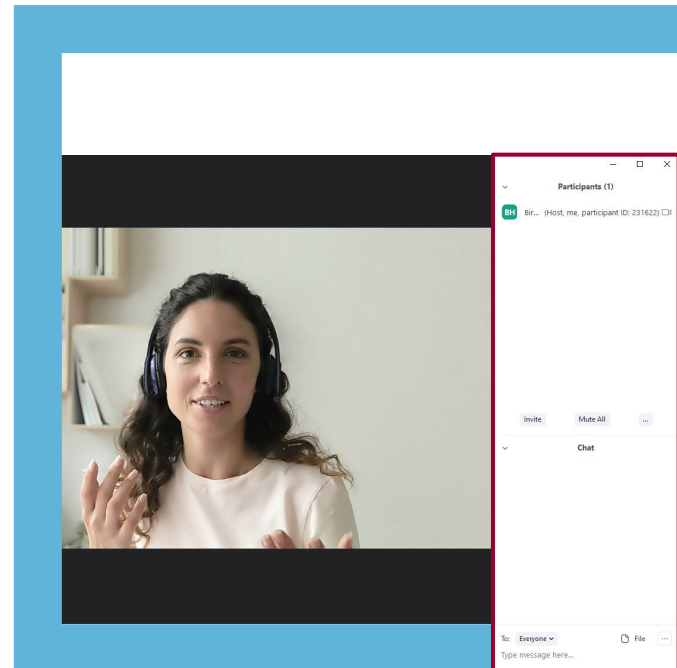
If your group wants to tackle brainstorming, the whiteboard is a good solution. Participants pin their ideas to the board using virtual cards. **Tip:** Split the board space in advance so that everyone knows where to put their cards; this saves time-consuming explanations.

The chat function

You will find the chat icon at the bottom of the screen. Here, participants can make comments in text form during a presentation or ask questions that will be answered when the opportunity arises. You can also start a poll, for example "Who has experience with xyz?".

Of course, participants can also inform you briefly and without heckling - for example, about someone joining later.

Zoom and some other platforms have private chats: individual participants can chat with each other without everyone seeing. This is useful, for example, when team members want to briefly clarify something that is about to be discussed in the video call.



Hand signals and other reactions at the touch of a button

To avoid frantic waving at the screen when muted participants want to speak, there is a function that lets you indicate a request to speak: You see a hand signal on the participant's video image.

In addition, participants can show *applause* or a *thumbs-up*, for example.

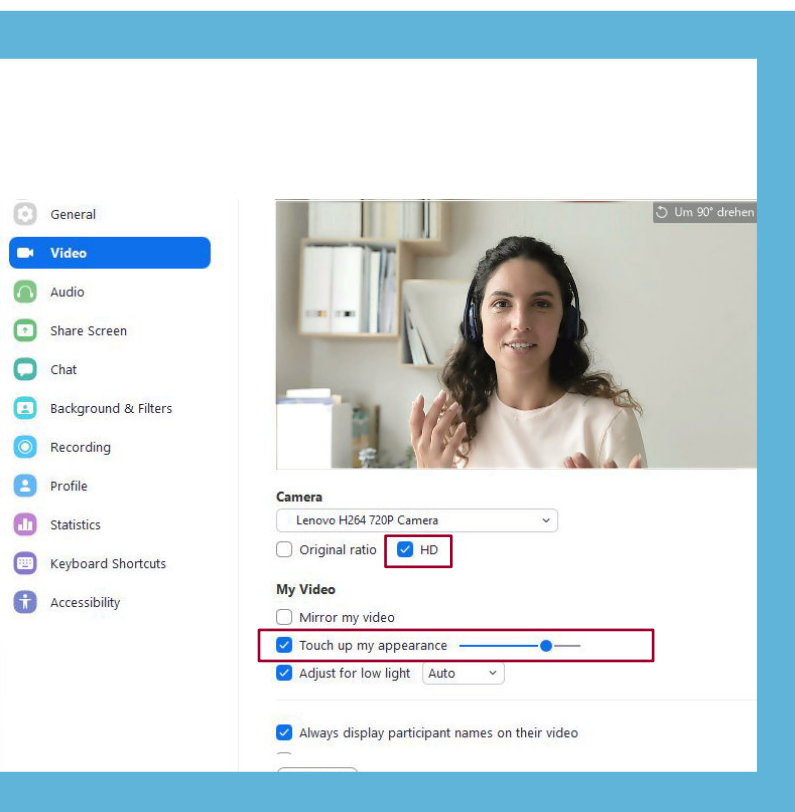
Attention! This function only makes sense if you can also see your entire audience - it doesn't do much good with higher numbers of participants.

Zoom for advanced users: These secret features you should know about

Recurring meeting with the same URL and settings

This feature is especially handy for teams that want to use regular group meetings without having to send out a new invitation link each time. In Zoom, for example, meetings can be recurring on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis – settings made by the presenter remain the same for each meeting, and the URL of the invitation link does not change.

To do this, when scheduling a new meeting in your Zoom account, check the box under Schedule new meeting for Recurring meeting and you can now choose how often and until when the meeting should be repeated.



Prettier into the meeting: soften your appearance

If you didn't have enough time for makeup or still look a little "scrunched up", you can set Zoom to retouch your appearance for the video meeting. The tool softens your face inconspicuously and makes one or the other skin impurity disappear.

To do this, check Retouch my appearance in the settings under Video. Once the check mark is set, the tool will automatically enhance your appearance in every subsequent meeting

Get better video quality

A simple click is all it takes to optimize video quality in Zoom.

Use Zoom faster with keyboard shortcuts

Save yourself a lot of time in Zoom with keyboard shortcuts. All available keyboard shortcuts can be found in the settings. Here you can also set custom keyboard shortcuts for the respective action.

The best tips & tricks for a technique without pitfalls

When it comes to technology, there are considerable differences in quality that determine whether the online meeting goes well or not:

This is how much bandwidth the online meeting needs

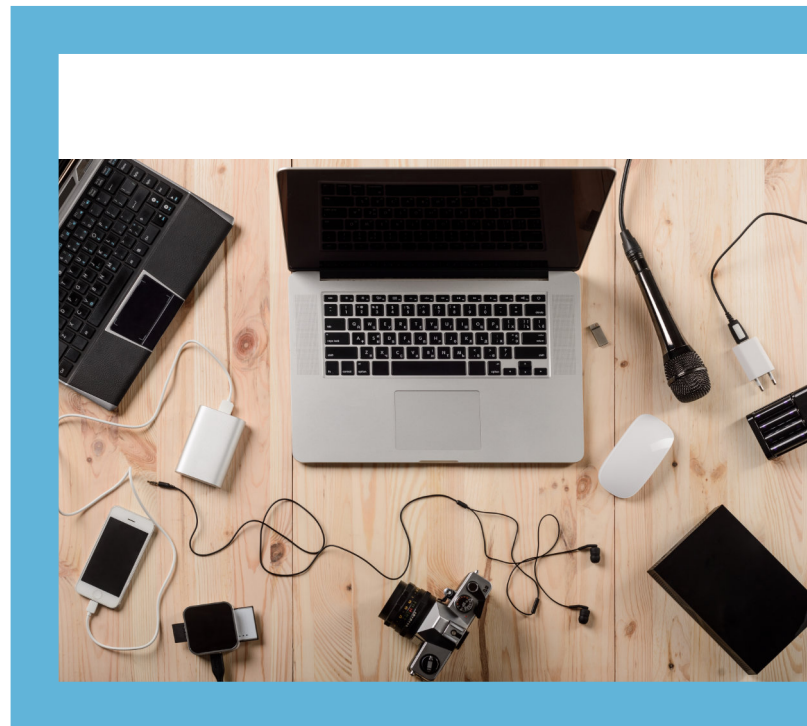
The minimum bandwidth required is 0.5 to 2 Mbps. In general, the higher the bandwidth, the better the experience for participants. In addition, the bandwidth requirement also depends on how high the resolution is set on your camera, how many cameras are activated in the meeting, and whether other features such as screen sharing are used. .

Mobile phone or computer – which is better for the virtual meeting?

The computer is undoubtedly the better choice because it is obviously easier to keep track of things with a larger screen. Even more comfortable are two screens or a computer and an iPad or tablet; to see the participants of the meeting on one device and share documents on the other.

Good sound or: the right microphone

Very clear recommendation: headset or external microphone! The microphones in computers and smartphones may be of good quality, but they are not directional, so your conversation partners pick up all the ambient noise, whether it's birds chirping or construction site noise. And not only that – the microphones hear differently, so that a quiet noise in the background, which you yourself hardly notice, comes across extremely loudly to the participants. In addition, internal microphones often sound like you're talking in a box; external microphones deliver a rich, dry sound.



Caution: don't let the microphone dangle loosely from your collar or attach it to your hair (it can create an annoying rustling or scratching sound).

Online meetings at eye level – with the right camera

Whether desktop PC with webcam or laptop with integrated optics: As a rule, the camera is not at the same height as your eyes. This means you are not in eye contact with your counterpart. You always look a little down or a little up, depending on where your camera is. That is why it is advantageous to work with an additional external camera in online meetings.

In this way, you look your conversation partners naturally in the eyes during the entire meeting - and are certain of their attention. As a temporary solution, you can also place a book or something similar under your laptop for the look-me-in-the-eyes effect. If you stick a Post-it arrow or a smiley sticker right next to the camera, it's even easier to maintain eye contact as often as possible.

Caution: Cropped heads and faces that fill the whole screen and in which facial expressions can be seen in detail, look alienating to the person on the other side.

Headphones

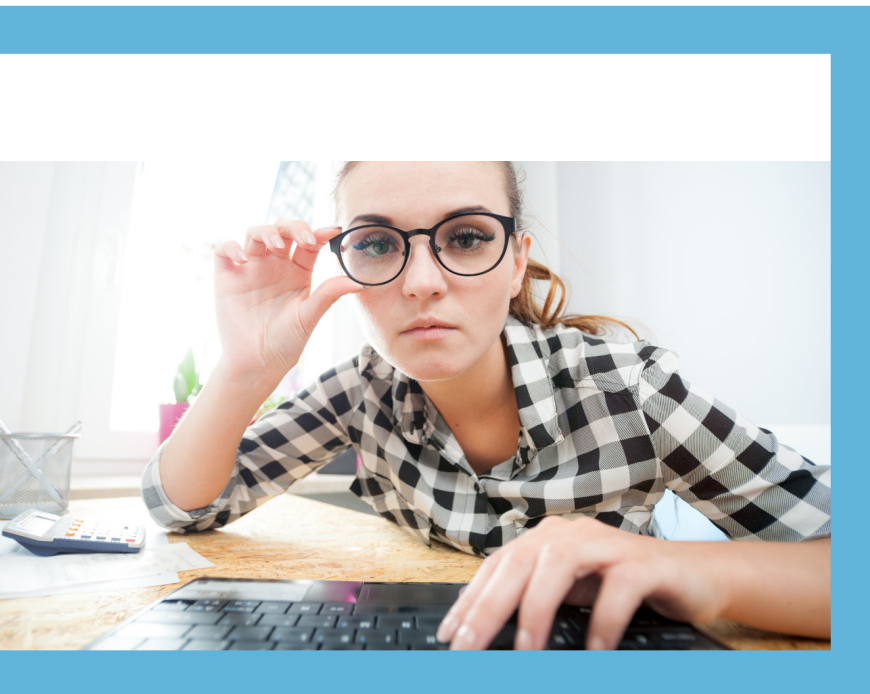
Headsets or in-ear headphones that are almost invisible to the person you are talking to are ideal. Not only does a headset significantly optimize the audio quality of the online meeting, but the clear and distinct sound also ensures that the participants can easily follow you - and that the meeting will be more successful. By the way: the closer the microphone is to your mouth, the better.

Your stage design: Space. Light. And background.

White or soft-edged? The ideal background for an online meeting

Whether you work in an office or at home, a lightly decorated section of the room looks good. This can be part of your bookshelf or a section of the office that you've styled a little more attractively (and tidily) for the online meeting.

You can also choose a neutral wall as a background, but a little perspective makes the image more pleasing. Think about what you want to show and check the view of your camera. There are many free tools for this, such as the camera app included in Windows 10.



In some video conferencing tools, you can use a digital background. Depending on the background you choose, this can look very good.

Some web meeting platforms even allow you to include videos in addition to background photos and graphics.

You can pose in front of your company logo, in a cool furnished office or on the shop floor - the possibilities are endless.

Caution! Avoid...

- irritating, unsuitable backgrounds (the paradisiacal backdrop with palm trees lasciviously blowing in the wind is suitable at most for the tourism industry - otherwise not!)
- patterns or reflective materials in the background
- colored window curtains and dazzling light through reflecting glass doors
- An artificial background often results in a much poorer image quality. And if you want to make sure that this artificial background does not occasionally swallow body parts (sometimes an ear is suddenly missing from the video image; the contours of your silhouette look jagged)
- Tip: sit in front of a monochrome wall that is clearly different in color from your face, hair color, skin and clothing
- what is distracting. Stage what supports your personality

How to put your online meeting in the right light

Worthwhile battery LED light panel

Bright red head, shady figure or pale face – surely you know these strange-looking creatures from previous video meetings. Because even if you can see your actual surroundings well, that doesn't mean the camera can.

Your goal: nice, warm light from the front. Ideally, you'll be sitting in front of a window. Daylight will brighten your face. However, if the sun shines through the window, your face will quickly look far too bright – as if it were overexposed. Make sure that the daylight comes softly from the front. Otherwise, one half of your face will be in the dark.

It is often worthwhile to purchase a small battery LED light panel! The cost is low, and your shots will be much better, you appear a lot more professional.

On such a light panel you can adjust the brightness and also the Kelvin value, i.e. the color temperature. For orientation: daylight has a color temperature of 5,600 Kelvin.



Use soft light skilfully

Ideally, you soften direct light so that pores and wrinkles are not illuminated too harshly. A so-called softbox, as used in photography, or simply a white cloth can help. A very simple solution is indirect illumination via a white, opposite wall.

The icing on the cake: Achieve very professional effects in the background with Practical Lights. This works, for example, with an invisible floor lamp or a battery LED panel with blue light.

Caution!

- Overhead lighting will make your face appear flat and two-dimensional.
- Direct sunlight and light from the side increases shadows on the face
- Backlighting makes people appear too dark
- Cool, white light quickly makes the skin look pale and wan
- Do not place objects with reflective surfaces in the camera's field of view
- For eyeglass wearers: Make sure that the screen is not reflected in the eyeglasses
-

Clever organization and ideal workflow for your video meeting

Well planned is half zoomed: the perfect preparation

The moderation schedule

Since confusion arises much more quickly online, it makes sense to have a well-thought-out meeting schedule. Write down how much time you need for each meeting point - and very important: don't overdo it!

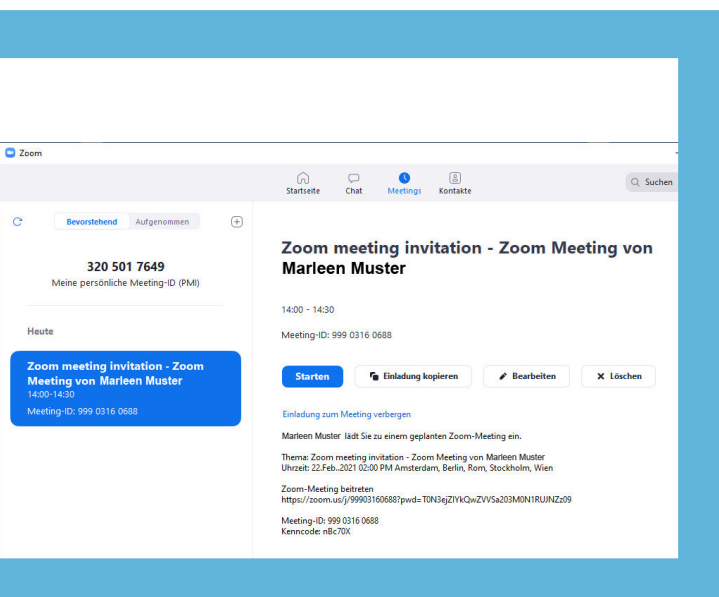
You can't do the math during the meeting. When you plan, decide who will work with whom in a small group ahead of time. Prepare as much as possible and put your meeting schedule on the table so that you always have it in mind during the video conference!

By the way, you can expect the preparation time for a work session via video conference to take about twice as long as that for a meeting in persona.

To dos before the meeting

- Be sure to try out the chosen tool yourself beforehand and do tests with the very system you will be using at the actual meeting.
- **Attention!** Some tools use different functions for iPads than on the PC
- If possible, moderate with a large screen - this gives you much more overview to see the videos of all participants.
- Send the invitation email/link for the video conference to your video guests in time. Preferably with minimal instructions and help on how to use the link.

- Also, support your guests by sending them a checklist or tips on how to prepare in advance. This way, even newbies can professionalize themselves in just a few steps when it comes to videoconferencing.



Explain the most important functions to your video guests in advance

In virtual meetings, participants need much more guidance than in a live meeting. Provide your video guests with the simplest possible orientation: How does it work? Who is doing what and where? What happens next? Who is responsible for what?

There may be old hands to whom you don't need to explain anything, but there are probably also some newbies and team members who are a bit daunted by technology. That's why a short briefing at the beginning of your online meeting makes sense.

Collect questions and topics in advance, you will save a lot of time

Collect your questions a few days before the meeting starts. The main topics will crystallize and you can plan the meeting better. In addition, it is very appreciative if you also consider input from those who cannot attend. Think and speak on their behalf as well.

Simplify your slides and information

If you use screen sharing to show slides, make the slides as simple as possible. Participating in an online meeting requires much more attention than meeting in person. Avoid text-heavy presentation slides or your online guests will disengage.

Tips for participants of virtual meetings

- Dial in 5 minutes before the official start of the meeting and make sure microphone and speakers are turned on.
- If possible, use a wired connection (not WLAN)
- Close all applications that are not needed for the video call.
- Turn off own microphone during longer pauses in speaking (e.g., during a lecture)
- Take notes: Pad and pen belong within reach
- At the end of the conference, disconnect properly so that your conversation partner cannot hear or see you any longer

The ideal sequence of your virtual meeting

Start with a quick technical check

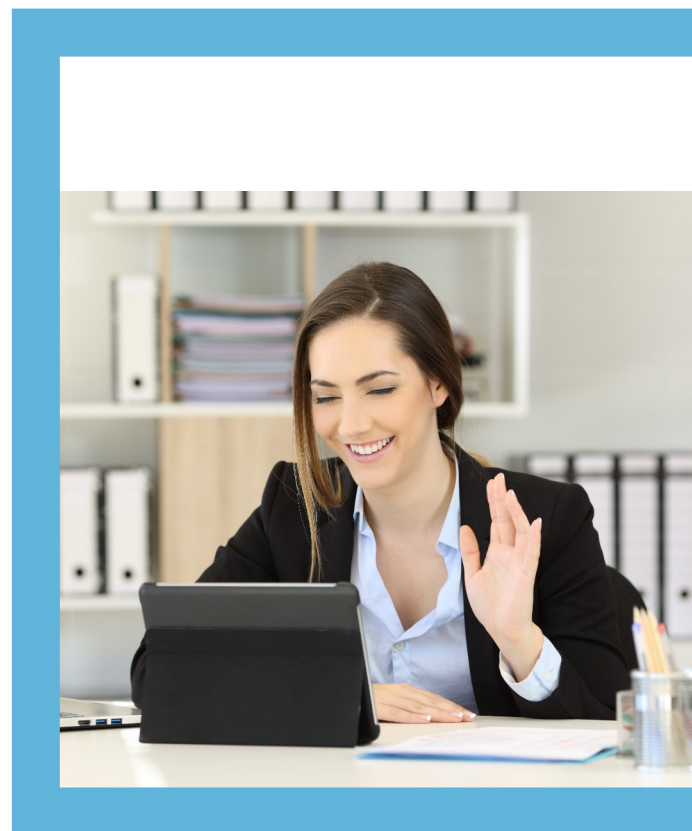
First, make sure everyone can see and hear each other properly. For example, start with a quick thumbs-up check and only then proceed with the meeting.

Break the ice with a proper introductory question

Once the technology is in place, you as the moderator, first welcome all participants and make them comfortable. Relationship is also important in the virtual space, so if possible, say hello to everyone individually and address them by name.

In small and medium-sized groups, it is good to start with a short small talk to lighten the mood. You can talk or you can also ask a question in the chat.

If the number of participants is so high that a word from everyone would exceed the time frame, then ask for a response in the chat function, skim the responses and briefly summarize the messages and the most concise entries for the others. Alternatively, you can conduct an entertaining warm-up poll and get your guests to actively participate. For example, you can ask, "How would you rate the past week?" or "If you were to describe the past week in one word, what would it be?"



Present the agenda as a first step

At the beginning of every meeting, four questions move the participants: what are we doing today, what is this for, why is this important, and what do we want to have achieved at the end. Take time to answer them in the first few minutes. Everyone can then check again for themselves whether they are right.

Rules of the game for a good online meeting

Your video conference will run best if everyone follows a few rules of the game, which you should briefly address at the beginning of the meeting:

- Keep times from the agenda; start and end on time.
- Speak as briefly as possible and as extensively as necessary in each case
- Listen to the others and let them finish speaking
- Write questions and comments in the chat
- Even if it is exhausting at the computer - be present
- And most importantly, turn off cell phones, emails and other programs.

All should be allowed to speak

Ask people who have been silent for a while to comment on the current topic or share their ideas. If you use Zoom, meeting participants can virtually raise a hand so others can recognize they want to say something. The moderator then has the option of giving voice and turning on the microphone.



Caution: Please do not leave the video conference without excuse. Better: Have a short word or comment in the connected chat area.

Keep the energy of the participants high

Staying constantly attentive during an online meeting is a challenge in itself, especially if the meeting lasts longer. For this reason, it's recommended to break the get-together into smaller, more digestible parts and engage participants every now and then. Live polls are ideal for this. But group work is also an excellent way to keep engagement high.

To end the online meeting on a good note

Conclude your meeting with clear next steps

Designate someone to take notes during the meeting and summarize the key points and outcomes of the meeting. They can share these after the meeting is over. This will benefit anyone who couldn't be there

The feedback

To round out your meeting nicely and gather feedback, use a feedback chart. Ask a few questions: How was it? What did you like? What should be improved? It is very easy to conduct a feedback survey in Zoom at the end of the meeting; it can be set in the administration settings.

Documenting the video conference

As with any meeting, documentation should not be missing! You have two options: You record the meeting, then everyone can watch it again. Or you take a screenshot of each jointly made whiteboard and insert it into the minutes.

Attention: In case of video recording, it is mandatory to inform the participants at the beginning.

After the online meeting

Follow-up

After the meeting, send a follow-up email thanking all participants. Include relevant materials, such as the link to the meeting recording and meeting outcomes, and a summary of specific next steps.

Turn your meeting recording into a podcast

People are unlikely to watch a full video recording of the meeting. But what if you send your team or clients an audio version of the meeting so they can listen to it as a podcast? A podcast version is much more convenient – you can listen to it on the go.



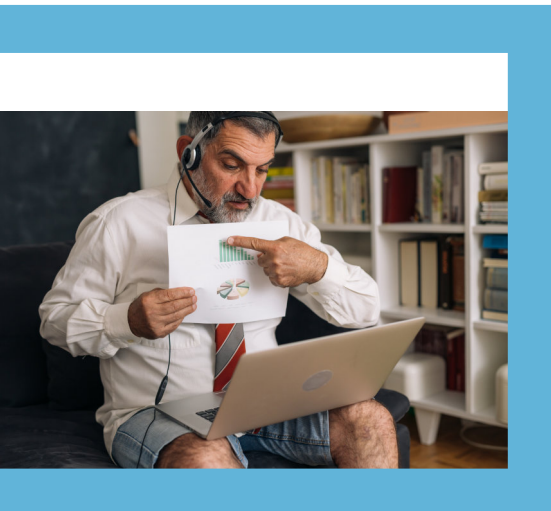
Present professionally via webcam and inspire participants

Strong charisma when standing

You achieve a particularly strong presence while standing. You can also use facial expressions and gestures better when standing than when sitting at a desk. Adjust the camera and lighting so that you can be seen clearly even when you are moving. The laptop and documents are invisible in front of you.

Tip: Use a large screen – positioned behind the camera – as a *prompter*.

Break up the online meeting with short questions. Wait for the participants' reactions, e.g. a *thumbs-up* or *clapping* as a symbol. At the finale, summarize the most important content again and motivate the participants to conclude the meeting.



Up top, down below?

Dress appropriately for the business context. As a general rule, dress a little more casually for an online meeting. If a suit and tie is customary for a live meeting, you can do without a tie in a video conference – but not without a shirt and jacket. .

Achtung!

- Eye-catching clothing such as check patterns, stripes, luminous colors and extreme contrast cause the image to flicker (interference). The same applies to small patterned items
- Fingers do not belong in the face during a video meeting

Handling the camera

Be careful not to make huge movements, because the camera makes movements appear much larger. Even if you only look a little to the side or at your teacup, it already seems absent to the viewer.

Of course, it's not easy to look others in the eye when they are represented by a camera lens, so a little trick helps here: stick an arrow, a birdie – whatever, right next to the camera so you always know what your line of sight should be.

Attention!

- Cameras and video displays like to make everything look a bit more "imposing". Nervous behavior and small, repetitive gestures are amplified and distracting
- No intense back-and-forth or up-and-down movements
- No playing around with pens, pencils, glasses, etc.
- The furtive use of a smartphone, weight training, or other activities that have little to do with the subject are irritating

Atmosphere and relationship

It's actually a truism: each of us prefers to do things that we enjoy, that make us feel good. Unfortunately, however, this often comes up short.

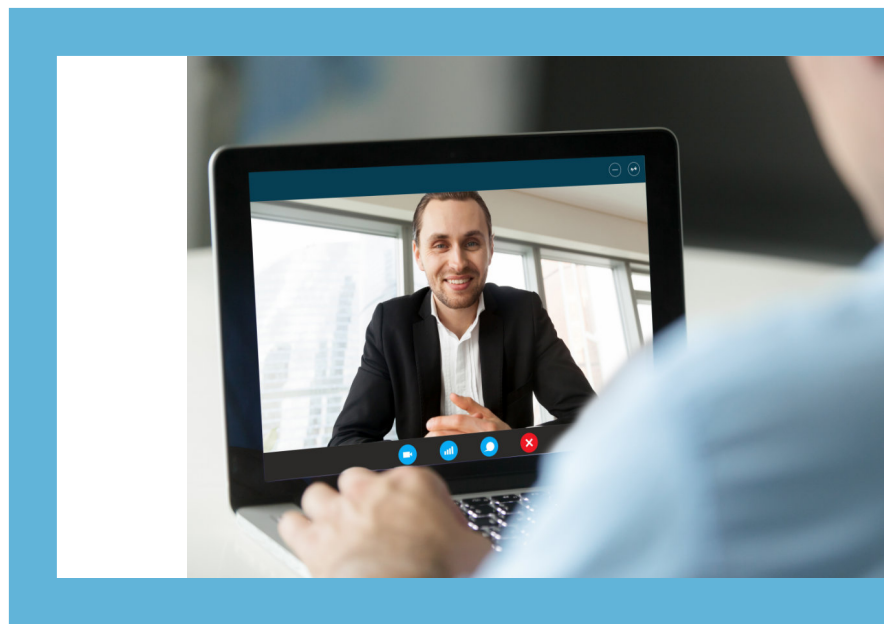
In a face-to-face conversation, it's already enormously important to have a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere; in a video conference, even more so. That's why it's fundamental that you build a good relationship with the participants and give them the chance to feel comfortable with each other as well, so that they dare to contribute in the face of distance and technology. You can do a lot to make everyone feel relaxed about each other:

The relationship level counts

Make sure that your meeting remains pleasant from an emotional point of view! Involve your guests, take time for something personal, make a joke once in a while, or show a funny picture. Anything that loosens things up is welcome.

Practice makes perfect

Relax. It's no different than any other meeting, except that people are participating who are not physically present in the same room.



... and with that, we hope you enjoy your next, perfect online meeting!

CONTACT

OptiSense GmbH & Co. KG
Annabergstraße 120
45721 Haltern am See
GERMANY

Birgit Hostmann
Tel. +49 163 3933343
Mail hostmann@optisense.com
Web www.optisense.com

