Giving a presentation is daunting at the best of times; modifying it for a virtual space presents unique challenges that can be tricky even for the most adept. That being said, online presentations are a common occurrence in many businesses and you may even face them as part of an interviewing process, especially in these times of social distancing.

So how can you deliver an engaging and seamless presentation to an audience that isn't in the same room as you are? As with most things, preparation is key.

**1. Send out an agenda**

Just like you would prior to a face-to-face presentation, send an agenda out to all the attendees so everyone's on the same page and knows what to expect. Ensure that the time and date of the presentation (especially across different time zones) is clear and that you've given a concise overview of what you will be talking about. Don't forget to include the invitation link as well as any additional instructions on how to join the presentation.

**2. Test your equipment**

Even tools you've used a thousand times can glitch, so test your equipment ahead of time: go into the general settings for the video conferencing tool you're using (e.g. Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet) and check that audio and video are working well. That way, if there are any problems, you have time to troubleshoot and take action – by rebooting your machine, updating the software or moving the meeting onto another platform, for example. At the start of the presentation, ask your attendees if they can hear and see you properly and be prepared to resolve any issues that may arise.

**3. Minimise distractions**

Bear in mind that what's normal for you can be very distracting for other people so carefully choose a neutral, quiet and clutter-free spot to do your presentation. If you're working from home, let whoever lives with you know that you'll be presenting to avoid any interruptions and turn off any notifications on your laptop and phone. If there are more than five attendees, request that they put their mics on mute when you start presenting to minimise background noise but encourage them to unmute themselves if they want to ask a question.

**4. Encourage interaction**

Presenting online can often feel like you're talking into a void, which is why it's so important to encourage interaction at different stages throughout your presentation to help bring that interpersonal connection back into the virtual space. Start your presentation with a short icebreaker, for example, and check-in with everyone regularly to see if they have any questions.

**5. Keep it moving**

People generally have an attention span of around 30-60 minutes, so try to fit your presentation within that time bracket to optimise engagement. If you're screensharing, avoid staying on one slide for too long (max. 30 seconds).

**6. Practise**

Most video conferencing tools include a feature that allows you to record your presentations. Use this to practise your presentation beforehand and watch it back or ask a friend to sit in on the receiving end. Not only will this give you a clearer sense of how you come across, but you'll also gain valuable feedback from a trusted source. Pay attention to your tone of voice and body language: Do you sound energised? Are you easily engaged listening to yourself? Are you talking too quickly or not clearly enough? Are your hand gestures distracting? Note down your reflections and keep practising to improve your presentation style.

When it comes to online presentations, the most important thing to remember is to be gentle with yourself. If presentations aren't your forte and simply being on camera is something of a challenge for you, make sure you do all the preparation you can, have faith in your knowledge (just as your attendees will) and do a few breathing exercises to help calm your nerves just before the meeting. And remember, the more you do it, the easier it'll become!