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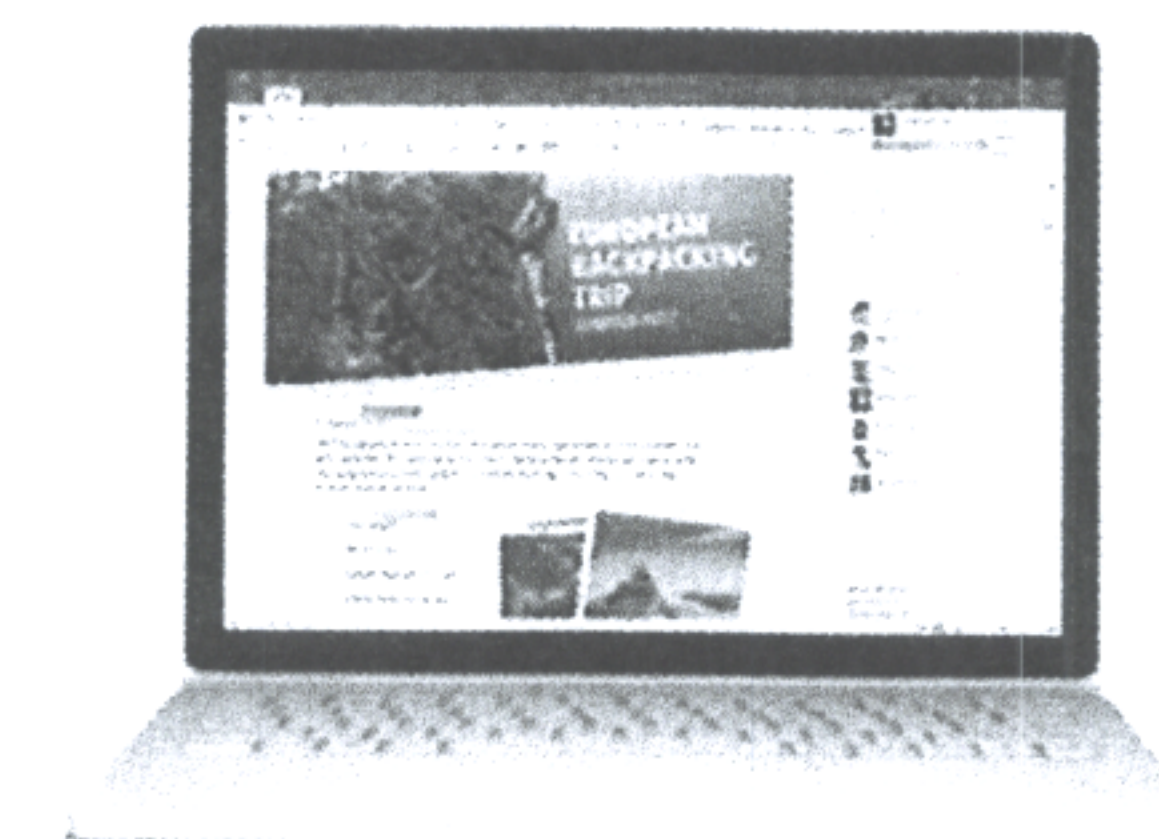
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# 6 ways to make your online meeting agendas pop



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By Dianna Booher, Microsoft Guest Author

Far too many online meetings bear little resemblance to a face-to-face meeting in energy, engagement, or ideas generated.

More often than not, these online meetings veer off track in one of two ways: Either they become as silent as a funeral, with monologue after monologue delivered into a vacuum of mourners.

Or they mirror a gaggle of sales associates celebrating in an airline lounge after winning a big contract—everyone chiming in to add their two cents with no direction or focus. But this doesn't have to be the case.

To make your online meetings as lively yet as productive as their face-to-face counterparts, consider these guidelines:

## 1. Use a formal agenda.

Having no agenda communicates to attendees that you intend to “have a chat” rather than get business done, exchange ideas, and make decisions. Formalize the agenda in writing and send it to attendees at least a couple of days ahead of time for their review and preparation.

Also continue to project it from time to time as you move through your meeting. (You'll see why as you read further.)

## 2. State topics in question form.

Avoid this typical topic format:

- Sales for 3rd Quarter
- Tradeshaw Booth at ITH Conference
- Competitor's Marketing Campaign During August

Instead, phrase the topics as questions so that your discussion is laser-focused rather than rambling:

- What percent of your 3rd quarter quota has been met to date?
- Is exhibiting at the ITH tradeshow worth the \$35K cost and 2 days' time?
- What's the best strategy for selling against Logard's August marketing campaign?

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### 3. Specify the format for each agenda topic.

On the written agenda, state the format for each topic: “For open discussion” “For report only” “Q&A” “Poll attendees” “For recommendation” “For decision” Often, attendees leave a meeting thinking their time was wasted because no decision was reached. But as the meeting leader, your purpose may have been only to raise an issue and gather input. Letting the group know your purpose upfront gives a sense of accomplishment even on such topics.

### 4. Allocate a time for each topic.

You can always adjust the timing as you move along. But estimating the time gives everyone a sense of what you expect. If your agenda states Deepak is to report on lab results and the time allocation is 5 minutes, he’ll know not to spend time putting together a 30-minute slideshow.

### 5. Alert any responsible person to bring necessary information.

If you expect Jana to show up with data as the basis of a discussion, don’t surprise her. Add her name to the agenda as the “responsible party” so she arrives prepared.

### 6. Summarize conclusions and delegate follow-up actions—ON the agenda.

In online meetings particularly, remember the strong temptation for attendees’ attention to wander to cell phone screens or paperwork piles. Summarize key conclusions and decisions and jot them into the blank column on the projected agenda. Then in a final column, record the follow-up action: Who’s responsible to take what action by what date.

Presto. Your completed agenda now serves as your meeting minutes. Pop that final agenda back to your attendees and no-

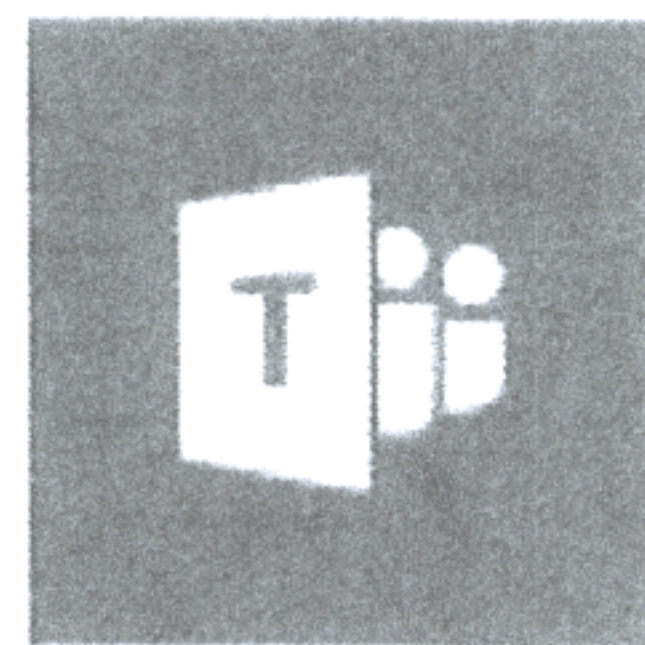
shows afterward (as a downloadable for their reference)!

Your agenda does the heavy lifting. Productive online meeting done!

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Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 47 books, published in 60 foreign-language editions. She helps organizations to communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. She blogs regularly for Forbes, HuffPost, and The CEO Magazine. [www.BooherResearch.com](http://www.BooherResearch.com)  
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