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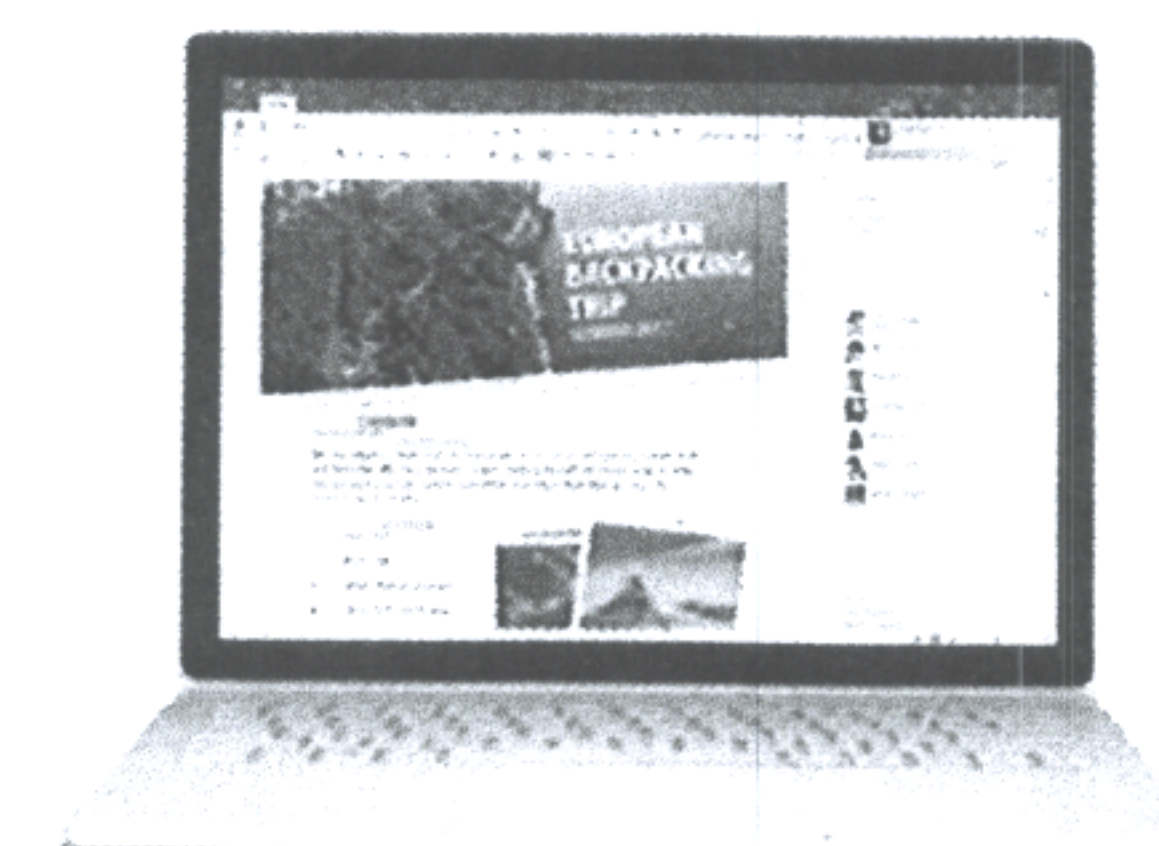
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How to lay the perfect foundation for an online meeting



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By Dianna Booher, Microsoft Guest Author

Planning and leading a successful [Online meeting](#) is much like planning and constructing a building. Except that the meeting is faster and cheaper—and can achieve far more.

To ensure that both the building and the online meeting are successful, follow these four steps:

Make Detailed Plans

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Builders have blueprints. Every detail shows up somewhere on the drawings—on the foundation silhouette, the front elevation, the side elevation, the rear elevation, the roof, the electrical, or the plumbing. Likewise, meeting leaders need detailed agendas: Topic questions, responsible facilitator, timing, format.

In addition to the plans, make sure you're familiar with the platform technology. If necessary, practice with the tools to make sure you don't waste the attendees' time during the meeting to deal with glitches that could have been prevented. And should technology fail despite practice and prevention efforts, having a back-up plan will make you a hero.

Engage the Right People

Builders hire award-winning contractors—those they count on time and again to design and construct spectacular showplaces. Meeting leaders also know their results depends on getting the right people in the room—and engaging them to generate innovative ideas.

The ideal meeting number depends on your purpose. But research puts that number at 7—if want discussion other than asking people to "chat back to you in the chat box." With too few participants, the group fails to generate enough ideas. With too many people, attendees hesitate to speak up.

Of course, if you're simply presenting information and all the communication is one-way, then audience size is irrelevant. (Consider such an arrangement more like a presentation than a meeting.)

Have a cancellation system in place so that if a key participant can't attend, you can quickly cancel the meeting and not waste everyone's time.

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Pay Attention to Security

Builders agree about one of their biggest problems during construction: stolen equipment from the job site. So, they take care to address security with fences, guards, signs, and locks.

As an online meeting leader, take care to address security concerns with logons and sensitive document uploads/downloads. Mark sensitive data to be shared as such. Make sure at-home workers understand confidentiality policies and controls.

Consider the “Zoning”

Builders must comply with all sorts of zoning regulations—from number of parking spaces required, to roofing composition, to electrical codes, to signage heights.

As a meeting leader, you too have to consider zoning: What’s the ideal time to schedule a meeting for your global audience, for your frequent travelers joining from the road, for your clients? Is the platform you’ve chosen equally familiar and accessible to all?

Set Timelines, Allowing for Flexibility

For builders, timelines prove critical in scheduling the various contractors to do their work. Contractor C must be finished before Contractor D can begin. And bad weather can play havoc with any schedule, making flexibility key.

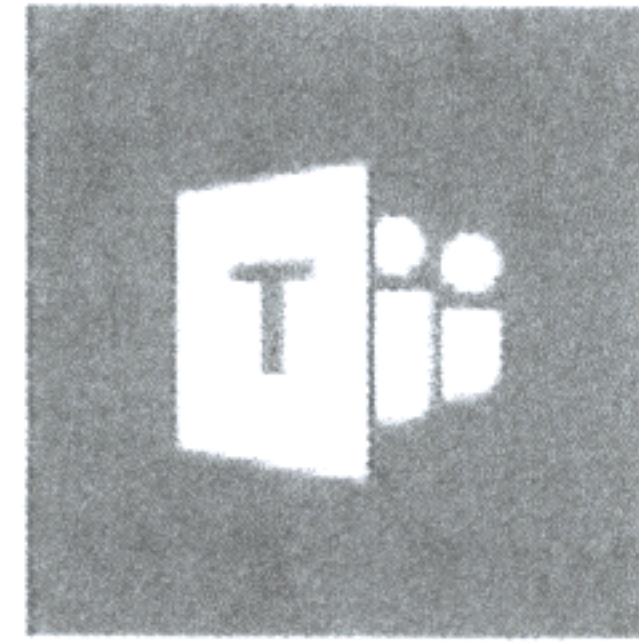
Similarly, as the meeting leader, you must be so familiar with the agenda that you can adjust discussion on the fly, summarizing effectively, skipping ahead where necessary, rearranging when it suits the purpose—such as to accommodate late arrivers or early leavers.

Just as any building stands or falls based on its foundation, your online meeting succeeds or fails based on sound planning.

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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
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