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WEBCAST FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work when conducting and recording webcasts. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** for moderators to more **technical recording tips**, as well as addressing any specific **webcast transcription issues**. We hope that this will help our clients to make recordings of the highest quality which will, in turn, cut down on transcription times and costs.

Please see our webcast transcription services page for details of the services we offer and our Equipment pages for further advice.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Obtain necessary permissions from your subjects. Ensure that they're aware they'll be recorded and that it will not only be broadcast on the Internet but also transcribed. If it's important to capture on the recording that they give their permission, do so at the beginning (even if that bit won't be broadcast!). This will protect you from any conflicts in the future and show clearly you have addressed these issues. If you intend using commercial music in the final version, ensure you have the necessary licences.

Brief the transcriber on exactly what you need to be transcribed. Usually webcasts consist of a fuller version of a programme or an interview than a podcast, so be sure to clarify exactly what the **type of transcript** you need (see our definitions page for clarification). Do you need any housekeeping issues or background transcribed? Decide if you want your questions to be typed in shortened format and only the responses in full.

Think about the **recording location**. Recording in a quiet environment is critical to ensure the best quality of sound recording. If you're recording at the interviewee's location, you may not have total control but if you can provide guidance beforehand, it would be helpful.

Interviewing on location can sometimes add atmosphere but try and **consider the acoustics of where you'll be recording**. A large empty room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions) produces significant echo resulting in a 'booming' on the recording which could make it difficult to hear and interfere with the broadcast quality of the final recording.

Filming set-up - if the filming session is a meeting or stage/platform situation with multiple participants, don't automatically assume that the camera will help the transcriber to **identify each speaker**. You will still need to provide information on who the various speakers are and how to identify them.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Preparation is key - think about the structure and format of your webcast. Rehearse any questions out loud, not only to get an idea of the flow of the words but also to gain a realistic idea of how long they will take. Ask open ended questions to allow the interviewee to expand. Beware of asking questions which could only have yes or no answers. Don't cut out all your verbal 'quirks' or it'll sound wooden but be aware of how many 'ers' 'ums' 'you knows' etc you tend to interject as that will take longer to edit out later.

Brief the participants - some people are seasoned interviewees but some will be understandably nervous about being recorded. As well as briefing them on the content of the interview or the questions you'd like to cover, it would also be helpful to remind them to **speak clearly and not too fast**.

If you're recording at their location, ask them to try and **minimise background noise**. You may have to spend some time on arrival asking for radios or televisions to be turned off and doors to be closed. It's also a good idea to inform them if the final webcast will be edited or broadcast in full.

Ensure that you **run through basic microphone techniques** - remember this is broadcast quality material you're after and how your subjects 'behave' is as important as the recording environment or the equipment you use. Anyone not used to being recorded may lean too close to the microphone and speak too loudly - a gentle reminder to stay at least six inches away and to speak normally may be needed.

Familiarise yourself with the recording equipment, especially if you've never used it before. It will be very offputting to the interviewee to see you fiddling with the equipment to try to make it work. Similarly, either before you leave or during a break, check you are capturing what you need to.

Turn off all mobile phones - text messages or voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but your recording equipment will pick it up, and the resulting buzzing noise will drown out whatever is being said at the time. Turning mobile phones to 'silent' or 'vibrate' mode is not enough - they need to be turned off.

Ensure everyone can be heard- if any speakers have quiet voices or mumble, they'll not be picked up by the recorder, however sophisticated it might be. If you can't hear what they're saying, then the chances are we can't either on the finished recording.

Ask people to speak up or to repeat anything you don't hear clearly. Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If they regard taking part as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they'll want their contribution heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

During the recording - try and pause for a few seconds between each answer and the next question, or when you go on to a different topic. If you make a mistake, just pause and start again. This is a hard technique to master but it will **make any later editing easier**.

Be firm during the recording. Although it may be difficult to interrupt for fear of putting people off, if they begin to go off at a tangent, you may have to, although these bits can always be edited out later. If you have several interviewees, they may speak over each other if they become animated about a topic. You may need to remind the participants to **speak individually** or to repeat what they've just said so you can capture one clear recording of their answer.

Assist in clarification - if the interviewee shows you something, be it a photograph or documents, it would be a good idea to say what IT is for the recording. Letting the interviewee just say, 'that is what we used' isn't always obvious, even on a filmed webcast. You may remember what 'that' is at the time but will you later on when it comes to analysing the transcript?

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT...

Record in a noisy environment such as restaurants, open spaces, airports, pubs, trains, cafes if it can be avoided. Background noise is often more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time. Voices can easily be swamped by extraneous noise, especially when people are softly spoken. If people talk about what to them are sensitive issues, they'll invariably drop their voice so anyone nearby can't hear what they're saying. If they do, the recorder will not pick them up. **Record indoors if you have a choice.** We recognise that with some webcasts, a certain amount of background noise may be deliberately included to indicate you've recorded on location - just try to strike a balance between too much 'background colour' and audibility of the recording!

Leave windows open - however hot the day may be, windows need to be closed. Noise from traffic, roadworks and aeroplanes will all impact on your recording. Unless using a noise cancelling microphone, most mics are not as selective as the human ear and can't filter out extraneous noise in the same way we can. They record everything they hear and the loudest noise will dominate.

Sit near noisy machinery such as air conditioning, photocopiers, heaters or computers - even radios in the background can dominate a recording and make it impossible to hear.

Have crockery near the microphone - if you do, the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording.

Speak over your interviewee. In a more conversational type interview, it can be tempting to interject comments during the interview. In normal conversation, we tend to say 'yeah' or 'right' or 'okay' on a regular basis, if only to indicate to the other person that we're actually listening to them. It may be hard but try and break yourself of this habit because **your interjections may drown out what the interviewee is saying** and these will be impossible to edit out later.

Shuffle papers near the microphone. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that's what the microphone will hear and it will drown out whatever is being said. If you need to refer to a list of questions, it may be worthwhile either having them on one side of A4, if possible, or on cards for ease of reference.

Write near the microphone if you can avoid it. We have often heard recordings where the scribbling of a pen is the loudest sound we hear throughout the recording!

RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO...

Use recording equipment that is fit for purpose - we assume that **digital recordings** will be used for webcasts. Digital recordings produce an excellent sound quality which cuts down on transcription time, minimises the number of inaudibles and reduces costs. Please read our comparison between digital and analogue recordings. It's essential that the final webcast is of broadcast quality, or your audience will quickly lose patience and stop listening. This will obviously impact on any future audience you may be trying to attract.

Choose an uncompressed digital setting - most digital recorders offer recording settings ranging from SHQ (stereo high quality) down to LP (long play). SHQ produces the largest file size but the best quality. HQ is a good compromise but LP produces the poorest quality. Don't compromise on quality just to save memory space.

Use the **highest uncompressed quality level your recorder offers -** issues over file size and length of time to transmit the digital files are trivial compared to the production of a good quality recording. You can probably get away with a lower quality for dictation, but will need the highest quality for multiple participant interviews, conferences or focus groups or meetings.

Decide on a suitable digital audio level - 8,000kHz should be suitable for dictation. 44,100kHz is the highest end of the range and produces exceptional recordings but there is a trade off in larger file sizes.

Digital file compatibility - check that the digital file format you are using is compatible with digital transcription software, or that it can be converted into a useable format. Digital transcription software will only transcribe from certain digital file formats, so it's vital to ensure you choose a format that can be transcribed. If it is not compatible, it may be possible to rerecord the video onto audio in order for it to be transcribed. This takes 'real time' so will add to the turnaround time. We discuss the pros and cons of the more common file types here.

Record on one file - don't keep stopping and starting the recording. Make your recording as **one large file**, instead of lots of smaller ones. It's easier to edit from one file and not have to paste bits together to form the final edited version.

Camera positions - if you're making a video webcast and wish speakers to be identified, think about the camera positions. Unless the faces are clearly visible, it may not be possilbe to identify who is speaking. A **seating plan** will help enormously, especially as it's rare for a camera image to be clear enough to enable you to read any name cards in front of the participants. You may need to ask each participant to introduce themselves at the beginning of the recording. Or you'll need to **make a speaker voice brief** and make notes as the webcast progresses to give the transcriber a clue as to which voice belongs to which name. **Please remember that the transcriber will never have heard these voices before**, so it's impossible to ascribe names to voices without help.

RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Test your equipment - record something before you start to check that there are no technical problems with your equipment. If you can't plug your recorder into the mains and are reliant on batteries, ensure you have a spare set with you, or a charger and enough memory cards.

Test the sound levels - use different volumes and microphone distances to determine what will work. Use headphones to check the recording levels. What you hear through the headphones is a fair indication of what the transcriber and your audience will hear. If it's too faint, the **microphone(s) may need to be repositioned**. Once you can hear their voices clearly, we probably can too. Most digital recorders will set the recording level automatically, although on some, you can change this setting. This can be useful if you have a speaker with a quiet voice. If you have multiple speakers, you should adjust the microphone levels during the sound check to ensure everyone is equal in volume.

Use an external microphone - most built-in microphones are of poor quality with limited control over volume levels, and this can apply to digital recorders as well. Use a good quality, external microphone - this is especially important for the broadcast quality of your final recording. **Lapel microphones** pick up voices very clearly but can also pick up rustling clothing.

For multiple speakers, we recommend using **one microphone for every 1 to 2 people**. Asking more people to share a microphone will result in noise as the mic is passed around. An essential accessory is a desktop stand for each microphone. **DON'T** let anyone handhold their microphone - it's too noisy! For multiple microphones, you'll need a **mixer** to connect all the microphones to your recorder. We discuss microphones in more detail on our Equipment pages.

Place the microphone near the speaker or speakers - if your discussion is with several people, make sure you place the microphones evenly spaced between each 'set' of two people. For one-to-one interviews, it may be tempting for the interviewer to sit close to the recorder to check it's working, but if the interviewee is too far from the microphone, then the clarity of the recording will suffer.

Keep your headphones on during the recording. This will allow you to monitor the sound levels as the webcast progresses and adjust them accordingly. Please ensure that the headphones are plugged into the recorder **NOT** the mixer - the latter will not give you an accurate representation of the actual recording quality. If this sounds too much like 'multi-tasking', you may have to ask a colleague to monitor the sound levels while you ask the questions!

It may sound obvious but make sure that the **recording is running** before you start! I've heard horror stories from clients who've spent time, money and effort arranging a webcast recording only to find the recorder wasn't on.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Editing - listen to the entire recording to identify areas you wish to keep and which to edit. At this stage you can edit out any repetitions, pauses, verbal habits or quirks, although you should try not to edit too much from the sound version as it may become wooden and unnatural. Make sure that you save this edited version as a new file instead of overwriting the original.

RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use a slow recording speed - some recorders can be used at slower speeds and use compressed file formats. However, there is a consequential loss in recording quality and an increase in the amount of background hiss. We would recommend that you use only the **fastest speed setting** and choose an **uncompressed file format** on your recording equipment.

Use voice activation. If you use recorders with a voice activation feature and the speaker is too far away from the microphone or speaks softly, this may not be picked up by the equipment. We've found that some recorders are not very sensitive and will sometimes switch off in mid-sentence if the sound level goes below the minimum pick up threshold, especially with softly spoken speakers. There's also a slight time delay between someone speaking and the recorder starting up again, so the beginnings of sentences are often chopped off.

Copy digital recordings onto analogue - hard to believe but it has bee done! Ensure you send the digital recording to the transcriber, **not** any audio tapes you may make. The digital recording will be far superior in quality.

These guidelines relate to webcast transcription and recording. Please use the links above for guidelines designed for any other recording situation.

If you have any questions relating to webcast transcription and recording not covered on this page, please contact us on 01485 543746 or Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk and we would be happy to help.