

# Lights, Camera, Conference Call in Six Steps

You've planned a conference call, and it's a biggie. There's a lot of information to relay to your team, and they need to remember what you have to say. That's the challenge.

Let's face it, conference calls, like most telephone conversations, are neither exciting nor memorable events. It can be difficult for participants to fully absorb the information, and even harder for them to retain it. Research into human communication styles suggests that it's easier for adults to remember information when it's presented to them in more than one way. People remember only about 20 percent of what they hear, 50 percent of what they hear and see, and 80 percent of what they hear, see, and do.

As a conference call host, your challenge is to think of ways to bring new dimensions to the conference call. Only then will you be able to pique your group's interest and increase the amount of information they retain.

## Steps to Building a Better Conference Call:

### Step One: Check Your Level

Pay attention to the level and quality of your sound. If some participants can't hear, or can't be heard, then it's not going to be a productive call. At the beginning of the call, conduct a quick roll call and use it as an opportunity to have every participant verify that the call is clear and easily heard. Any problems can be caught immediately, fixed and quickly, and no one will be left out.

### Step Two: Speak Clearly and Slowly

Without having visual clues to help them follow along, listeners can easily misinterpret words that are slurred, or skip over words that are buried in swiftly moving sentences. Use a fairly simple vocabulary. A more complex vocabulary tends to slow the listeners' abilities to process your words; as a result, they may easily lose the words that immediately follow the "big" terms.

### Step Three: Provide Reading Materials

Written handouts should be provided in advance of the audio conference call whenever possible. Giving the participants an outline of some sort to follow along with will give them the chance to "see" your presentation, as well as hear it. The retention rate will increase substantially.

### Step Four: Create Visual Language

Try to include rich visual language in your discussion. In other words, use descriptions and anecdotes wherever possible. Incorporate examples into your oral presentation. Create the illusion that the participants are seeing some of the material, and you will be able to add to their information retention.

### Step Five: Paint a Picture of Your Product

Ideally, every person taking part in your conference call will have received a sample of your product, or at least a picture of your product. If not, you'll have to describe the item in great detail. It's not enough to simply say, "Here is the new Z-model DVD player." Instead, use descriptive and action words to create interest in the product. "The new Z-model DVD player is expected to do well. Let me tell you a little more about it. The shape is designed to conjure up the image of a 1950's era alien spaceship, with coloring that shifts between silver and lustrous black as you move around it . . ." With words, you are helping the participants to paint a picture in their minds. When done right, an audio conference call can be visually stimulating.

### Step Six: Create Action

Request your participants to perform small acts. For example, you can highlight an important point by suggesting that they write it down on their handout, and then repeat the information out loud. It's a simple exercise, but the very act of moving their hand to write down the point stimulates a different part of the brain. With both the right side and the left side of the brain in working order, you've doubled their chances of remembering your point. Pause during your presentation to ask participants how they can use your ideas in their daily tasks. By putting the information in a context they deal with everyday, you're giving them a more "hands-on" point of view.

Audio conference calls are basic facts of business life, but they are not always the best options for communicating new information. Try these tips to bring a new dimension to your conference call, and you can increase the retention and, ultimately, the overall success of your efforts.