

WHAT'S DRIVING YOUR CHOICE OF WEBINAR PLATFORM?

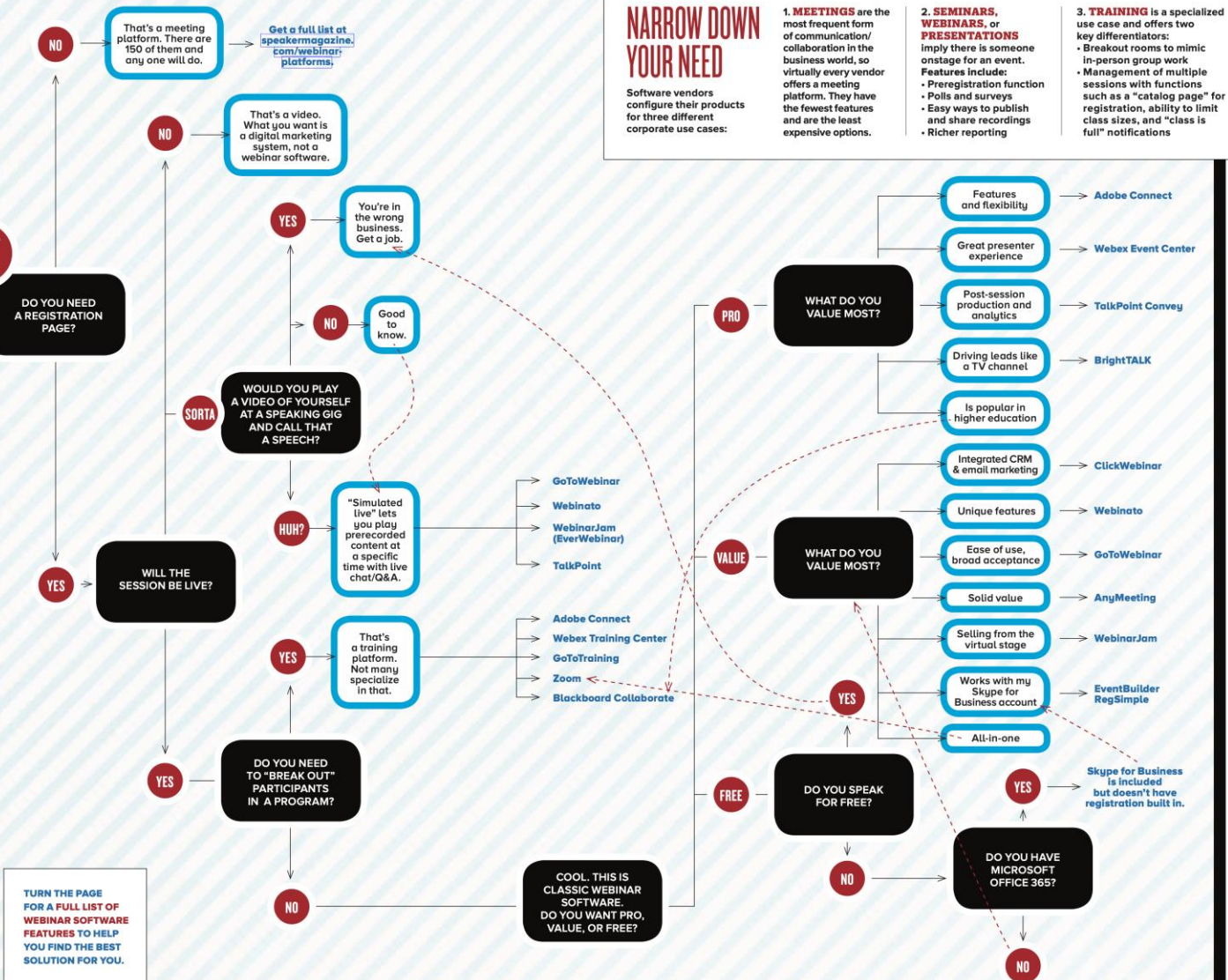
Focus on key features and kick the tires to find the option that revs your sales engine

If you were shopping for an automobile, how important would it be to you that the exhaust system “sounds sporty” or that the infotainment system is “intuitive”? Apparently, it is to the *Consumer Reports* reviewer of the 2017 Honda Civic.

“What’s the best webinar software?” is like asking “What’s the best car?”

The best software for you will be based on a very personal set of criteria. And with more than 150 webinar solutions on the market, there are a lot of questions to ask, and the answers can get very tricky.

START HERE



NARROW DOWN YOUR NEED

Software vendors configure their products for three different corporate use cases:

1. MEETINGS are the most frequent form of communication/collaboration in the business world, so virtually every vendor offers a meeting platform. They have the fewest features and are the least expensive options.

2. SEMINARS, WEBINARS, or PRESENTATIONS imply there is someone onstage for an event. Features include:

- Preregistration function
- Polls and surveys
- Easy ways to publish and share recordings
- Richer reporting

3. TRAINING is a specialized use case and offers two key differentiators:

- Breakout rooms to mimic in-person group work
- Management of multiple sessions with functions such as a "catalog page" for registration, ability to limit class sizes, and "class is full" notifications

TURN THE PAGE FOR A FULL LIST OF WEBINAR SOFTWARE FEATURES TO HELP YOU FIND THE BEST SOLUTION FOR YOU.

WHAT FEATURES DO YOU NEED?

Depending on how you plan to use the webinar platform, there are dozens of features that can enhance the experience—for you and your users. Learn more about each of them here.

1 PRE-EVENT FEATURES

What happens before an event impacts how effectively the webinar contributes to your goals. Which features do you need? Which are already covered by other software you use, such as a stand-alone CRM or shopping cart? Here's what to look for:

PORTALS FOR MULTIPLE EVENTS: Host multiple events on a single page. Useful for ongoing series or multi-part classes.

REGISTRATION PAGE BRANDING: Customize layouts, images, and colors of a registration page.

REGISTRATION PAGE FEATURES: Enable a variety of functions, such as question types, including a video, and allowing registrants to sign up using a social media ID.

E-COMMERCE: Process a credit card and not complete registration until payment is made.

EMAIL PROMOTION: Send independent, non-event emails from within the system. Some offer a CRM database that lets you manage/segment your list.

SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION: Embed publish-to-social media tools, like "share this event."

SOURCE TRACKING: Generate multiple URLs for promotion, each of which is tracked uniquely allowing you to evaluate the effectiveness of various promotional channels.

AFFILIATE MARKETING: Track referral payments in a shopping cart system.

CONFIRM, REMIND EMAILS: Deliver participation details and reminders to registrants.

CMS (CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM): Manage assets across multiple events with a centralized database.

REHEARSE: Practice your presentation with your presentation team in the same virtual room where you'll be for the live event.

2 LIVE SESSION

If you want to be more engaging than "talking over PowerPoint," these features of your webinar software will help or hurt your cause:

GREENROOM/POST-EVENT ROOMS: Convene "backstage" privately, before and/or after the event, and enable free movement "onto and off stage" at any time.

AUDIO: Allow participants to hear and speak—using their telephone and/or computer speakers/microphone.

VIDEO, LIVE: Appear on camera and connect to external cameras.

VISUAL SHARING (SLIDES, DESKTOP): Share PowerPoint or your computer desktop in a non-video-oriented manner.

CHAT: Enable participants to chat to presenters, and among themselves.

Q&A: Manage questions by flagging/mark, answering, or dismissing.

FILE SHARE, HANDOUTS: Distribute files flexibly.

POLLS, SURVEYS: Offer multiple-choice questions.

BRANDING (AUDIENCE CONSOLE): Customize the audience participation console with different colors, layouts, or images—including a partner logo, for example.

VIDEO, ASSET UTILIZATION: Use prerecorded video assets (uploaded or on YouTube).

FEEDBACK: Give audiences the ability to provide nontextual clues (e.g., handup, emoticons, attention meter).

LIVE UX (PRESENTER): Provide the presenter with intuitive and flexible tools that allow a feature to be turned on and off.

4 POST-EVENT

After a live session, what you do with the recording has the potential to be useful well beyond "share a link to the recording." These features can help:

RECORDING FORMAT: Record to the Cloud or to a hard drive and choose the output format.

PLAYBACK UX: Select the user experience when watching your webinar recording. Some offer fast-forward, rewind, and chapter controls.

3 SIMULATED LIVE EVENTS

Simulated events were once the domain of the B2C hawker crowd, but there are increasingly use-cases in the context of larger organizations as well. Examples: tightly controlled/scripted events (e.g., financial services) or those where a presenter has limited availability. These specialized features can help:

SIMU-LIVE: Host a live event that uses prerecorded content but enables synchronous/attended interactions.

EVERGREEN: Set up ongoing or repeat events where real-time interaction is optional.

ASSET UTILIZATION: Extend use of your webinar as a content asset.

ASSET MANAGEMENT: Create and manage online folders holding multiple webinar recordings.

REPORTS, WEB: Review reports online in a browser or PDF.

REPORTS, EXPORT, OR API: Export or extract data.

REMARKETING: Continue promotional activity of on-demand assets, such as digital marketing tools.

NEXT STEPS

TAKE IT FOR A TEST DRIVE

Have a good idea of what you want? Get a free trial and take it for a spin. Find out who in your NSA social media groups uses the platform you are considering and ask them about their experience. Ask to attend one of their webinars to test the user experience.

COMPARE PLATFORMS

Even an industry veteran like me doesn't have intimate knowledge of every solution on the market, so I've built a quantitative way to evaluate them. You can access the evaluation worksheet at speekermagazine.com/webinar-platforms.



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EventBuilder, a 17-person team of virtual event professionals who boast software that turns Microsoft's Skype for Business into a webinar platform. And he thinks butter should be a food group.