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Public Chatter

7 Tips for the Best Engagement Appearance You Can Pull Off

Following up on **our series of shareholder engagement blogs**, there's an abundance of tips online about how you can look your best when it comes to video meetings. You really should take advantage of that when it comes to online engagement. I'm not necessarily talking about your actual personal appearance – although there are plenty of tips online for that! – I'm talking more about your technology set-up and how you express yourself physically during the meeting. Our firm communications guru, Karen Lisko and I have combined to give you these 7 tips – but it's written in the first person: **1. Placement in the screen** – This is where I see folks fall down the most. I like to be fairly close to the webcam – so that my head is near the top of the screen, but not above it at all if I can help it. This might require you to have a stack of books under your laptop to have that at the proper distance to pull this off. Raising my laptop keeps my eye level near – or slightly above the midline – and allows room for my hands to play a role when I speak. I'm about an arm's-length from my screen. The use of hands brings more energy to my remarks, helps to punctuate what I'm saying, guide people to help understand what I mean. So I'm not so stiff. (But beware of "monster hands" – when your hands extend towards the webcam rather than off to the side. Do gesture, but keep your hands closer to your torso.)

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2. Lighting – You want good lighting that lights your face. Some folks say natural sunlight is best. For me, that can be dicey with a bald head. Same with an overhead light. I do have some natural sunlight but I have my shades closed somewhat – and supplement that with a simple ring light. You can get a nice 10 inch ring light with a long stand for only $30. It plugs right into one of your UBS ports. Otherwise, I don't have any other lights on in the room.

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3. Background – Simple is good for me. Uncluttered. This is an area where I find it's up to do what you prefer, what matches your personality. If you happen to have any choice in the matter. Some folks don't have the ability to have a dedicated space for their calls in their homes – or their dedicated space isn't too pretty. People do take note of your background for sure – probably more than the clothes you're wearing. On the other hand, I wouldn't get too wrapped up in this – people understand that you're working from home. I'm in my oldest son's bedroom – he's been gone for more than 8 years now – and I've made some small adjustments to the books on the shelves. Emptied them out a little. Virtual backgrounds can work just fine – although they can get a little annoying for some. It sort of depends on what you choose. Again, simple is good – try not to get too cute – otherwise you become secondary to your background. Which means you tend to disappear.

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4. What you wear – Solid colors tend to work best. I wear a refined black short-sleever often. I started off wearing everything in my wardrobe and that was a mistake. Stripes are distracting. Bold colors are too much. Polka dots are downright silly.

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5. Internet speed – This really could be #1 in this list but most people I've worked with have a good connection, good bandwidth, so they don't drop off their video calls. If you do, talk to your Internet provider to try and improve your situation. You can search the phrase "Internet speed test" to conduct a quick diagnostic of what speed you're currently operating at. The 100 mbps I'm operating at is nice and fast. A colleague had a new cable and broadband line buried at her house about a year into the pandemic and has had a much improved 'work from home' experience ever since.

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6. Webcam – The quality of your webcam matters, but not too much so long as you have a half-decent one. A high-quality webcam improves your picture for sure. But for me, what's more important is knowing where the

webcam is embedded in your computer. Because you want to be looking straight into the camera when you speak. This is really important. You want to be looking into the camera. Otherwise, it might feel a little bit like you're hiding something. For my laptop, the built-in webcam is in a useless spot – the lower left corner – so using an external webcam that rests on top of my laptop allows me to look more easily into the camera. One thing that's kind of hard to learn is to look into the camera rather than stare at your screen, looking at the folks talking to you – which is natural because it's easier to listen to others if you're looking at them. Plus we all strive for eye contact. Which it feels like you're doing if you're looking at their eyes – but if your webcam is off-center, you're not actually making eye contact from their perspective. This takes a wee bit of self-training. Took me a day to get used to looking into the camera – and I have to remind myself all the time. It's a pain. As for a high-quality webcam – HD quality – the clear favorite of the pros is the Logitech brand. A Brio is much more of a webcam than you probably need, it runs about $200 – if you can find one. The C920 is probably all you need and that comes in at about $90 – if you can find one. It's really easy to set up – you essentially just plug it into one of your UBS ports. By the way, you can buy a UBS port hub to increase the number of ports available to you for under $20. This is a "must have" if you're going to add an external webcam and microphone.

7. Audio – Audio quality is so important for video, more important than the webcam really. But I have it last on this list because most computers have pretty good microphones built into them – so upgrading to a high-end microphone doesn't matter too much. I do have a high-end mic – the Blue Yeti, which is a professional quality mic – and it runs about $120 right now (which is considerably above what it normally costs). It's easy to set up. It's a UBS plug-in and it can safely sit offscreen and it will still pick up what you say. I use a pop filter – that is inexpensive - to remove the strong "S" sounds that I tend to make. For investor engagements – and many other work meetings held from home – it can be important to use a headset for confidentiality reasons rather than computer speakers. Many earbud versions of headsets also have high-end microphones, and this can be a good option for those whose home offices are short on privacy.

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