



YOUR PROFESSIONAL VIRTUAL OFFICE

North Gwinnett Advanced Toastmasters
Michelle Hanchey, DTM

We've all gone virtual including Toastmasters. To build trust and rapport more quickly, it pays to strategize about how to look professional during your online meetings.

As a Toastmaster you can help create a professional virtual brand for your members and your club. Start by helping your fellow members become digitally-savvy, current, and make sure they have the tools to look their personal/professional best.

A Professional Remote Office:

Like spinach in your teeth or your zipper undone, a bad video-call is something only your best friend will call to your attention. Even if you have the best virtual presentation there is a good chance that your lighting, your backdrop, your connection or even your unconscious habits are making you look less professional than you would like.

Choose your setting:

Create a professional setting with a quiet calm office. Carpet with soft furnishings tend to create the best audio during virtual meetings. If your room doesn't have carpeting, an area rug on the floor and some floor pillows can reduce reverberation and create a warmer sound.

Background:

We don't want to see your dirty laundry piled on top of your unmade bed. In fact, we don't want to see your bed at all. It is distracting. Any distraction can take away from your message, be it a wall of posters, kitchen cabinets or nick-knacks. The safest approach is to simply have a neutral wall color in the background. Shades of grey or cream work well vs. white. *Many of today's virtual meeting rooms (i.e. Zoom) give you the option of adding a background, but be careful that it is neutral and professional.

Use laptop, not phone or I-pad:

While in your virtual office use your laptop or desktop computer.

Smartphones tend to be very convenient, but they can be hard to balance especially taking speaker evaluation notes. Plus, there is limited screen space. Even your I-pad has limitations on being able to see all meeting members on screen.

Raise you webcam to eye-level:

Our first virtual meeting we had a number of people who had their phone/I-pad/computer on their desk. As they looked down ... we looked up their nostrils. Put your computer on a sturdy stack of books or a box. Adjust it so your eyes are eye-level to your camera.

Adjust your framing:

Position yourself about arm's length from your screen. Make sure you have a bit of space between the top of your hair and the top of the screen.

Audio:

Distance yourself from any background noise, but if you can't escape the brouhaha plug in your headphones with a built in microphone. Your voice should cut through the noise more clearly.

Good Lighting:

Lighting is one of the most critical aspects of creating a professional remote office. Ensure your desk has a strong but soft light that can illuminate your face during your virtual meetings. (Tip: purchase an inexpensive 10" LED ring light with tripod for under \$25). Bright and balanced is best. Not sure about your lighting ... ask a fellow Toastmaster.

Typical lighting mistakes include:

- An overhead light gives you a halo and produces racoon eyes that also make you look tired.
- Lights within camera view located anywhere behind you is like shining a flashlight in someone's eyes.
- Experiment with your lighting so that you don't look like a lurking shadow with no eyes or half your face is covered in shadows.



YOUR PROFESSIONAL VIRTUAL LOOK

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In today's workplace we have all gone virtual and Toastmasters meetings are no exception. To build trust and rapport more quickly, it pays to strategize about how to look professional during your online meetings.

As a fellow Toastmaster you can help create a professional virtual brand for your club and your members. Start by helping your members become digitally-savvy, current, and make sure they have the tools to present their personal/professional best on-line. An easy way to start is by applying a professional look for virtual success.

A Professional Look:

Throughout history, people judge on the basis of appearances. What most of us don't understand is just how much it matters and how quickly it takes for someone to form an opinion of you.

Studies show that first impressions can be formed simply from looking at a photograph. How they feel about a photo predicts how they feel and think about that person even after a live interaction that took place one month to six months later.

Your appearance matters even more in the virtual world.

Go on a virtual meeting in a Hawaii shirt with a bedhead and you will be judged. That fleeting and uninformed impression will have your competence called into question.

It pays to strategize about how to look professional during your online meetings. Just a bit of effort can lead to dramatically improved results.

Look at The Camera When Talking:

In the virtual world looking someone *in the eye* means looking into your camera.

While this takes some practice, seasoned professionals who do a lot of web conference calls make it a point to look at their webcam when speaking or listening to a specific person on the call rather than looking at the speakers video image.

While looking at someone's image is perfectly natural (we do in person), looking at your camera gives the impression that you're looking directly at the person who is watching you. This creates a stronger connection and builds trust.

Posture:

Sit up straight, slightly forward, shoulders square to your camera and you will look in control and attentive. Positive body language will help those in your virtual meeting feel much more comfortable and positive about you.

Dress for Success:

One of the magical things about working remotely is the freedom to wear anything to work. It's the dream.

However, when you are in a virtual meeting your coworkers will be less than thrilled to see your wrinkled clothes and unkempt hair.

Dress professionally. It will give you an extra boost of confidence and enhance your professional image.

DO

- Avoid busy, repeating patterns or material with a sheen
- Stick to solid colors that work with your skin tone.
- Avoid reflective jewelry and jewelry with a jangle.

Hair:

Ladies, your hair is like a good frame. It should flatter without drawing undue attention. Allow 3/4 inch clearance around the eyes to avoid unwanted shadows. Also, a little volume is always good. If you color your hair, make sure it's not a solid blob of color.

Men, a good cut covers the top halves of your ears. No comb-overs please. Make sure no stray hairs are sticking up. Keep beards and mustaches well-trimmed and off the lips. If bald check your camera for shine. A little powder will make a difference.

Makeup:

To come across best on camera, your makeup should be an understatement and your foundation should match your skin tone. Blend your makeup to avoid foundation lines.

Choose a soft, natural shade of eye shadow and blend it well. Select a lipstick shade that is similar to the color of the inside of your mouth. Don't use gloss, any bronzer or any make-up that has a shimmer effect.

Glasses:

Your glasses can create a distracting reflection from your computer screen. If possible, skip wearing the glasses.



YOUR PROFESSIONAL VIRTUAL ETIQUETTE

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In today's workplace we have all gone virtual. To build trust and rapport more quickly, it pays to strategize about how you are portrayed professionally during your online meetings. Toastmasters is an excellent place to learn and practice virtual etiquette.

Virtual etiquette is a way to respect those participating in your online meeting.

How you conduct yourself in a virtual meeting leaves a lasting impression. Use virtual meeting etiquette to help keep your professional reputation intact.

Online Early:

Test all technology (including camera/video, Wi-Fi, and screen sharing) **before** the meeting.

Join the meeting early so you have time to say, "Hello" and to make last minute adjustments to your camera and audio.

It is considered rude to jump into a virtual meeting late, just as it is rude to walk into a face-to-face meeting as the Sargent at Arms has already begun. If you are late don't make a big fuss.

Check Your Shares:

Make sure you **close all documents** you don't want to share with everyone in the meeting. An etiquette, 'Opps', is when everyone sees you chatting with people on instant message, scrolling social media or browsing the internet. Be respectful—be present.

Block Pop-ups:

Prevent distracting pop-ups either by shutting down extraneous applications or turning on "Do Not Disturb" if you're running MacOS. While you may think you're able to just ignore them, notifications are specifically designed to disrupt your attention.

Stop multitasking:

Don't let your camera computer catch you checking your email, texting on your phone or brushing your hair. PS: You lose 40% of your productivity multitasking.

Monitor your sound quality:

If you're offsite and you've got a dog barking or other noise in the background, mute your phone. If you're using a phone line to improve audio quality, mute the speaker on your computer to avoid feedback. Watch your audio volume. Is it high enough? Too high?

Mute your microphone:

When not talking mute your microphone.

Don't eat:

Just because people can't smell it doesn't mean they can't hear or see you chewing. Trust me, no one wants to see you stuff your face.

Camera On:

Keep your camera on at all times. If you have to leave for a moment turn your camera off then turn it back on once settled. Also, it is a good idea to darken your camera if you sneeze or have an itch then immediately turn your camera back on.

Hands off the Keyboard

Whether you're typing notes or secretly chatting with a friend, keep your **hands off the keyboard**. This way the meeting has your complete attention and you aren't annoying or distracting other participants. If you want to take notes, jot them down by hand and you will retain more information.

Distractions:

We saw a few members roll around in their swivel chair; shuffling papers while cleaning their desk and even standing-up and walking away from the camera during a speech. Things they would never do during a face-to-face meeting.

Eye contact:

It is a powerful way to engage others which means that during a virtual meeting you will be looking at your camera most of the time.