

The Value of Face-to-Face Meetings

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” - Henry Ford.

With social media use continuously growing and the increased need of virtual events due to the worldwide pandemic, it is easy to see why networking through technology presents countless opportunities.

However, even in the age of the smartphone, a need for in-person discussion lingers - and it isn't disappearing. In fact, 84% of people say that they still prefer face-to-face meetings, according to **Great Business Schools**.

So why does this style of meeting still matter in the digital age we live in? Here, we answer that question.

Communication isn't always verbal

“The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.”
– Peter Drucker.

Whilst the power of technology and the digital phenomenon that we live in is nothing short of remarkable, there's something about a virtual meeting that fails to connect with people emotionally.

Micro-behaviours such as gestures, eye contact, body postures or facial expressions are more likely to be missed by being on camera so far away from their screen or being a tiny image on your desktop.

These non-verbal signals are useful in determining the engagement level of your client and failing to recognise these could put you at a serious disadvantage regarding outcomes and further discussions.



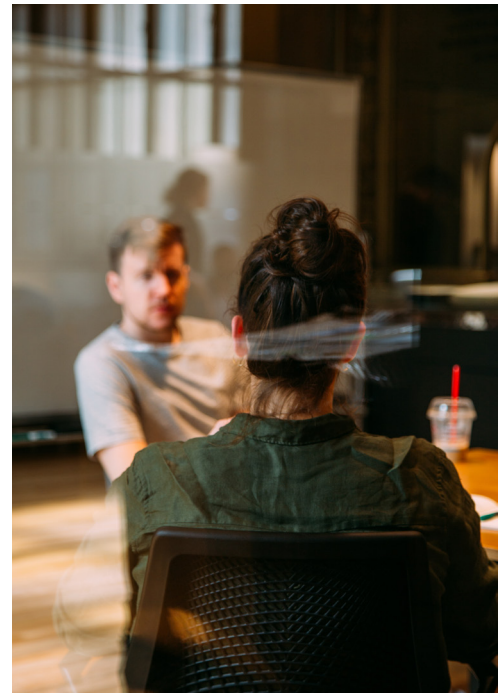
There's no better way to connect with others than standing in-front or sitting next to them (at a social distance, of course)! You can also pinpoint those in the room that are the deal-breakers, decision-makers or other major influencers by reading their body language. The raise of an eyebrow or faces pulled reveals so much more than what is said - webcams will fail to pick this up. This is something to consider heavily when attempting to make a sale, close a major deal or even dig a little deeper in fact-finding.

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The Meeting and Beyond

So, the meeting has come to a close, you've left the call and you can get back to what you were working on previously. But where's the pre or post-meeting conversation? Never underestimate the power of a casual discussion - it could present a breakthrough. Whilst video conferences are convenient in terms of time and cost, they simply do not provide that interaction beyond the meeting.

With opportunities for small talk, you are providing yourself with details that you may not have encountered in the meeting which can often be quite revealing. It is an opportunity to make an investment in professional relationships by sharing a coffee break or getting to know each other outside of the work place a little more. In business, personal means powerful; these personal details rarely occur through a video conference.



Focus and Productivity

Technological issues play a major role in this debate. Virtual meetings also come with problems such as camera quality, connection failure, someone not realising that they are on mute or spending 10 minutes trying to adjust computer settings. This can be a major setback in focus and productivity, even before the meeting has got going properly.

Managing elements of interaction such as Q&A is another minefield; the remote audience is often more reticent talking when they can't see others and the timing of submitting a chat, and having the question answered is a speciality that not all moderators get right.

Furthermore, face-to-face meetings can be shorter than conference calls or virtual meetings. Perhaps there is increased pressure to get straight to the point when sat in a room of people, rather than sitting at your desk waiting for your turn to speak.



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Face-to-Face is still relevant for the ROI and more

Whilst there's no doubt that face-to-face meetings come at a cost, the return on investment (ROI) pays back as long as objectives are defined, and measures of success are in place. Of course, the criteria will differ between organisations and by event type and could include, but isn't limited to, brand awareness, new business/retention, product knowledge/education etc.

Having a form of measuring satisfaction is one success criteria and results more often than not are going to be higher when in a face-to-face environment - quality of the delegate list, i.e. did they network with peers, did they learn something new and how will that learning be put to use, did the event meet or exceed their expectations, have they more affinity with the hosting brand more so now than they did before...the list goes on.

The entire experience, from the pre-meeting discussions and preparations to having casual, post-meeting conversations with your stakeholders is meaningful and is a contributing success factor.

According to **Great Business Schools**, 84% of people believe face-to-face meetings contribute to stronger, more meaningful business relationships, whilst 77% say that they prefer to have the ability to read body language and facial expressions. These stats demonstrate exactly why, even in the golden age of technology, in-person meetings still hold real value. Face-to-face meetings won't be going out of style anytime soon; it's harder to establish a real connection when seeing a sea of faces on a screen.

Technology will see through though; current limitations in online meetings will only fade at the rate that technology is evolving. Perhaps the role of COVID-19 and its implications on the workplace will dissolve other limitations when focus and productivity, for many businesses, would have had to increase to address the pandemic. Maybe this is where **Hybrid meetings** step up...



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