



NAFD Communications

UN-MUTE YOUR VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS POTENTIAL

Top tips for virtual funeral arrangement meetings

This time last year, the funeral sector was beginning to use something plenty of us hadn't even heard of before - Zoom.

Sure, video conferencing was nothing new, but did we expect it to become one of our main communication tools with clients and colleagues almost overnight? Fast forward 12 months and with restrictions still in progress and likely to ensue for some months yet, did any of us also expect to still be using it quite as regularly in 2021 too?

And while, as novices, all manner of things can, and did, go wrong – indeed “you're on mute!” became such a well-used phrase it even made it into the London 2021 New Year's Eve fireworks display – expectations of virtual professionalism have moved on and people are widely now expected to know how to use the technology and present themselves accordingly. Just look at the news? In the early days of the pandemic, interviews were lost or cut short due to connection issues,

poor video quality or inexperienced interviewees – now, interviews are much smoother and professional, even if still being done at the last minute via a mobile phone.

For funeral firms, moving arrangement meetings online was something that happened almost overnight and, although it is likely that the majority will move back to being held face-to-face once the pandemic is over, it is also quite possible that virtual meetings will now always have a place in funeral service.

How you come across in a client meeting or funeral arrangement on screen will leave a strong first impression (good or bad) with the client. This can be unfair, but perception is reality – how people perceive you to be (rightly or wrongly) because of what they see is the opinion they will form of you and your business, so it is more important than ever to look good, sound good, and know how to use the tech.

The Wordsmith Communication team runs a lot of media and video presentation training, which itself has moved from face-to-face to online since last March. Some of the training focuses on appearing on national television, but some is simply about better face-to-face communication with clients and colleagues – and these skills translate across all kinds of virtual meeting, becoming particularly important when the person on the other end may be feeling vulnerable, emotional or uncertain.

We see the same issues crop up again and again: the floating head, when someone is so close to the screen it looks like their head is not attached to their body, the up-the-nose shot (urgh!) when someone is on a mobile which is sitting flat on the desk and looking down into the camera, and the busy background, which is far more interesting than you, are but three. There are plenty more.

And while people still accept and understand that sometimes you will need to answer the door for the Amazon delivery or a home-schooled child will desperately need your attention for something, levels of patience are definitely shorter than they were. We've had plenty of time to get this right and customers expect us by now to know what we're doing – even if it's knowing how to handle those disruptions in the right way.

The Wordsmith Communications team has put together 10 tips to remember when meeting colleagues or arranging a funeral by video to help you create the best experience possible. So whether it's Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, Skype, Facetime, Messenger video, WebEx or any of the other video conferencing providers, there's no excuse not to look and sound the part!





TEN TOP TIPS FOR VIDEO MEETINGS

1. **Set the stage.** Check the Wi-Fi is working and connection strong enough, know and test your equipment and check the lighting is right (never video call in front of a window!). If you will need to share information on the screen do you know how to do it and is the information ready – check what else is open on your screen before you share it!
2. **Clean up your background.** This is one of those rare occasions when a blank wall comes in handy, but don't sit right up against it or it will look like a police mug shot (Morgan Harris, we're looking at you!). Make sure you don't have a lot of distractions or clutter behind you that might make the wrong impression. People will judge you by what they see.
3. **Avoid artificial backgrounds.** Either your holiday shots, or the standard backgrounds that come with Zoom or Teams, unless one has been professionally created by your company with the right branding. When you move, parts of your head may vanish!
4. **Get your camera angle and light right.** If the camera is below your eyes, it will make your jaw and chin look disproportionately large and everyone will get to see up your nose. Nice. As a general rule you will look better when you're looking up, not down. Adjust the height of your laptop or computer so the camera is level with your hairline. And good lighting is really important. It's also important to fill the frame, ideally head, shoulders and chest – not too close and not too far away.
5. **Body language – yours and theirs.** Sit up straight, avoid using hands as they appear massive. Remember, on video your face is your main body language tool, so use it wisely. You're on camera, so ensure you are interacting even if you aren't speaking (nodding, eye contact, smiling, etc). Pay as much attention to the other

person's body language as you would if in the room. Do they look comfortable with the conversation? Are they trying to speak? Do they need a break if they are upset?

6. **Look at the camera.** As hard as it might be, don't look at the person you are speaking to as, to the client, it will look like you're not looking at them. Look and speak into the webcam.
7. **Speak slowly and clearly.** We don't have any of the usual clues to pick up on what you're saying and there might be a lag or fuzziness caused by the internet connection, so slow down and make sure people can hear and understand you. (PS, you don't have to shout "CAN YOU HEAR ME?" – you will know by people's faces!)
8. **Know your controls – and know when to use them.** Understanding

the technology at your disposal is really important. Get to know your system, how to mute yourself, turn your camera off, share screen, use the chat box for internet link sharing, etc.

9. **Camera etiquette.** Keep your camera on as often as you can, and all the time in a one-to-one meeting, unless you are leaving the room, in which case turn the camera/microphone off. It might be early morning or late evening, but do people want to see you eating? Essentially, respect the process and treat an online meeting exactly as you would face-to-face.
10. **And finally... don't be interrupted.** Let everyone who might interrupt you know what you are doing. Clothes, lighting, camera position, room tidy, eye line – all good... until the dog starts barking, your mobile starts ringing, or the children come in looking for a snack!