

## **The Efficient Planner**

by Nancy C. Nelson, CFP

*A collection of practice management and client service ideas submitted by NAPFA members.*

### The Dos and Don'ts of Video Conferencing with Clients

My request for input on video-conferencing with clients showed that, as with most things technological, NAPFA members are all over the map. Some of us are newbies, like me: for my one call I used Skype and my Mac laptop with simple built-in camera, microphone and speaker. I did get sophisticated enough to prop the laptop up on some books (it was a more flattering view than aiming up at my neck), and made sure the background looked good (contrary to some of the advice below, I did sit in front of a window, with a nice view to the forest outside). Others are bleeding edge technology and have been doing this for years, and still others have found contentment with a good old-fashioned telephone call. Here then are the edited responses:

- “We use GoToMeeting (GTM) and send out links prior to our meeting. Even as simple as following a link is to most of us, 50% of our clients have trouble doing that. We then talk them through connecting real time which is very easy with GoToMeeting. We use Skype with some clients, however, Skype is much more complicated than GTM, so beware. I use Camtasia to record my videos and convert them into flv format for my blog, website, and YouTube. I wear whatever I wear to the office in my weekly videos....they are not professional so I don't see the need to pretend they are anything more than what they are, an informal one-sided chat. I built a customized back office for my web and blog as I found most templates were not robust enough to make the management seamless and effortless.”  
[Rick Kahler]
- “I also just did my first Skype meeting with a client, who lives in Germany, using my Mac laptop with built-in web cam. It was important to me to look as though I was in a conventional client setting, so I made sure to check the video feed (under Skype preferences), hung an innocuous picture on the wall behind me, cleared away the usual office clutter and dressed professionally as I would for any client meeting. I tried to spend more time looking at the client and less time looking at my notes, since videoconferencing already puts some distance between you. Of course, awareness of time zones certainly helps, too! I haven't yet shared files using Skype, because I'm not sure how secure they would be.” [Cynthia J. Petzold]
- “I use Citrix services “Go To Webinar” (GTW) and “Go To Meeting” (GTM). For clients that live out of the area, GTM allows me to securely share my computer screen so we can review accounts and financial plans without the need for them to travel great distances. I have not as yet incorporated a web cam to share video images; I simply speak with them on the phone while conducting the meeting - more of an enhanced telephone meeting. The service is quite reasonable and is easy to use. I have used GTW to provide online seminars for clients and prospects. It is easy to use and cost effective. I think clients like knowing you have the capability to offer these kinds of services. It can allow even very small firms like mine establish themselves as every bit as technologically advanced as the big national wire house firms. The technology also can help maintain a good relationship with long distance clients. [Joe Taylor]

- “We really like Mikogo for screen sharing and it is free! [www.mikogo.com](http://www.mikogo.com)” [Iris Mack Dayoub]
- “I’m finding I’m holding more phone/web conferences now more than ever. Clients appreciate this alternative to save them time driving to my office. I only use phone/web conferences for topics I feel are appropriate; I believe some issues are best handled face-to-face. So far, I’ve been keeping things simple. I use a conference call if the client and co-client are in two different places. I send each of them an e-mail invitation via GoToMyPc so that we’re all looking at the same information together. I also try to e-mail or snail mail part or all of the material we’ll be covering in advance of the meeting whenever possible. This allows the client(s) to review the information and formulate questions ahead of our call. I also have clients who either travel extensively all over the world, or, who are busy executives with little time to leave their offices. I find that scheduling appointments about 2 -3 months in advance is helpful for all concerned. I haven’t found that anything has been lost by not having a camera.” [Connie A. Stone]
- “I am in Richmond, VA, but have clients in NY, NH, NC and SC. We meet virtually. I share my computer screen using DimDim, a free web conferencing service that is giving WebEx a run for the money. My clients see me, and we are literally on the same page. This technology is also nice for ad hoc meetings with a local client by phone ... "here, let me show you" is a big client pleaser. From a hardware standpoint, I'm 100% Mac. While Macs come with a great video chat tool called iChat, it only works when the client is on a Mac. The built in iSight camera works great, and all I need to do is close my office door and adjust the lighting so my clients see me clearly. Two tips for video conferencing users: look at the camera, not the screen, and consider using a phone line for voice so the web conference tool doesn't have to handle video, data and voice, which may cause slow response depending on the Internet connection speed at both ends. I'd be happy to talk with anyone who wants to know more.” [Dave O’Brien]
- “ I use Skype a lot; here are some tips: Beware the backlight. Do not have a window in your camera shot. For business, use a headset for the microphone. It makes the sound clearer and eliminates most background noise. If your connection is not good (screen freezing or scratchy sound) hang up and try again right away. Worst connection times for me (east coast) are between 7pm-8pm. I think the network is overloaded with grandparents saying goodnight to grandkids!” [Jorie Johnson]
- Barry Kaplan’s firm, Cambridge Southern Financial Advisors, was an early adopter of GoTo Meeting (GTM), and had so much success with it that they were featured in an advertising piece that is still on the Citrix website ([www.citrix.com](http://www.citrix.com); search on Cambridge). The article mentions numerous advantages of GTM, including security encryption of transmitted data, elimination of travel time for both planners and clients, and the fact that meetings are about half the usual length, since there is a tendency to get right down to business.
- “I have used old-fashioned telephone conferences with clients for the last 25 years. My rule of thumb is that we both have the same paperwork in front of us. If they are sending back my questionnaire or statements of investments, I ask them to keep a complete copy and send one to me so we can discuss them most easily. It works for clients who communicate clearly and understand the basic jargon of our field. In fact, I have several clients I have never met (or seen) and work exclusively by phone and mail with them.” [Marge Schiller]
- “Skype video is now my default tool for long distance clients. Having the nonverbal communication a part of the conversation is invaluable and I notice a greater ease in my

long-distance meetings. I have a Mac, which came with a camera, and many of my clients do too -- so it's a matter of people downloading the free software, then exchanging Skype names. I helped a client fill out an online account application yesterday through the "share screen" feature as well as securely sent her a file. The one technical issue I've learned to be mindful of is that Skype + Vonage (my phone service) compete with each other -- so whenever I Skype, my husband (who also has a home office) has to stay off the phone, and vice versa." [Jennifer Lazarus]

- "I have found that adding video to telephone calls enhances communication. I have personally been doing video for quite some time; at the beginning of this year, I put a camera on every desktop in the firm and have encouraged each person to use it. I use Skype for non-confidential calls only because I am not convinced of the security of Skype, particularly if I want to show documents or files, which we routinely do. We use Webex for calls and video conferencing when reports are involved. I can have a meeting going with one-click with a piece of software that Webex puts on my desktop tray. We have licensed Meeting Center, which can have up to six people on camera at the same time. Cisco has different levels of service depending on what you need. The fee is about \$60 a month for the one we use and well worth it for the peace of mind using the Cisco network. We put together a complete client presentation that can go from one report to the next with a mixture of file types (word, excel, ppt, pdf, etc.) If I need to show somebody something as it runs, I can show an application. Webex will also allow recording of the meeting and transcripts. We use them for staff meetings, client conferences, and you name it. I can turn the presenter role as well as the host role to other users at any time. My assistant gets the Webex meeting set up, I am reminded 15 minutes before it begins and, click I am in the meeting. I have found that there is a great deal of difference in cameras. I got a dramatic improvement in quality when I moved to a Logitech 9000 Pro (about \$100) over the \$20 Logitech. ( I have been told that the quality is dependent upon the weakest link in the system).My speakers are simply plugged into the sound card of my computer. Occasionally, I use a headset, but with quality hardware it is unnecessary. I use the built in speaker and camera on my Sony laptop and am quite satisfied with it. A few Tips: Proper lighting is very important, as is paying attention to the background. Better cameras have zoom, tilt and pan capability that can add a lot of quality. Don't answer the video call when your wife is still in her pajamas and subject to walking into the room behind you." [Scott Neal]
- "Most our clients originated here in Cincinnati, then retired or relocated to Florida, Chicago and out west. We frequently had conference calls with these clients, then in 2007, started having remote desktop calls using gotomeeting. This enabled us to build presentations and show supporting documents during our calls. One tip is to send the presentation and documents the night before as reminder of our scheduled call, to check for any technical difficulties that might arise, and to give clients the ability to review what we will be presenting. We have been internally and locally testing video conferencing using Adobe and Skype, but not actually using video conferencing with clients for a meeting yet. Our goal is to send clients a camera/mic and assist with setup if they choose later this year. A local client I personally set up is now talking with her relatives and friends overseas, and hopefully will mention "my advisor set me up on Skype" when talking with friends and relatives. [Rob Siegmann]

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