

# Keep Your Eye on the Camera and Other Tips for Virtual Broadcast Interviews

For months, we have adjusted to the new standard of business interaction: working from home virtual meetings, etc. These changes are here to stay at least for a while longer. For publicists representing professional services firms, another virtual layer has become standard: the television/broadcast interview conducted over video conferencing platforms such as Skype, Zoom and WebEx.

In the pre-pandemic era, a pitch to a television producer could result in an in-studio interview or a camera crew arriving on location at the firm's office. These days, broadcasters still need sources, but with the recommendations for staying healthy plus the restrictions on travel, the opportunities for television interviews have shifted to the virtual arena. These spots, along with print and online interviews, allow for added visibility, thought leadership, and reinforcement of the [firm brand and culture](#).

Interviews in a virtual setting are quite different from what you may be used to. Let us help you prepare for the live virtual interview that will be recorded but not heavily edited before airing or posting online. (Note that, depending on the reporter's preferences, questions may or may not be provided in advance, but it is always worth asking about.)

## Creating Your Broadcast "Studio" at Home

A broadcast studio comes with professional lighting; chairs of a certain height; directors to give you countdowns; and plenty of experienced camera, makeup and fashion experts to help you do and look your best. Your home "studio" is just you. Here's how you can make it work.

**Your desk:** It is acceptable to have a bottle of water on your desk, but make sure that is the only drink/food item in view. Remove any other distractions or items that might show up on screen.

**Lighting:** The lighting in your home will dictate where you should set up for your interview. Select a room with natural light, open the curtains and blinds, and make sure that the light is either in front of you (meaning behind your computer screen) or just slightly to the side. Do not sit with the light at your back. Turn off overhead lighting if needed. Your computer screen's brightness also figures into the overall lighting and should be tested to see how your face is highlighted or shadowed. Websites such as CNET offer product reviews if you would like to optimize your lighting conditions by adding a small mounted light to your computer.

**Sound quality:** Most computers have built-in microphones that should be just fine for the interview. If you want to upgrade the sound, you can purchase an external mic similar to



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what podcasters and streamers use. If you are using headphones with a mic, use the wired version, which will eliminate any Bluetooth connection or battery issues. The most-important element of sound, however, is that your room is quiet. That may mean closing an office window, putting a sign on the door that warns family members that they cannot knock or interrupt, locking your door or taping a note to your doorbell instructing “Please do not ring.” Do not type on your keyboard during the interview – the clicking sounds will transmit to your interviewer.

**Notifications and noise distractions:** Eliminate all notifications that normally pop up on your screen or make noises. This means completely closing an e-mail program, all apps, social networks, chat/messages and calendar reminders. Do this before your interview because shutting off notifications may take more time than you think – for some applications, you just have to quit or close, while others require you to uncheck a notification setting. Some of the culprits include Microsoft Teams, Skype, Slack, calendars/reminders, email (incoming), online messages/texts, your cellphone ringer, text and voicemail sounds, and your landline (if you have one). Remove digital watches that might distract you with alerts. Typical household sounds can interfere as well – be sure to silence buzzers on appliances, like dryers and dishwashers. (When you’ve finished the virtual interview, remember to turn everything back on again!)

Note that it’s also not acceptable to take a call, glance at caller ID or look at an incoming text while you wait for the interview to start – and certainly not during the interview.

**Background:** There are dozens of tips available online for keeping your room clutter-free, using virtual backgrounds, and checking that whatever objects are in the background (even books on a shelf or artwork) are neither controversial nor embarrassing. Be careful of background items that may seem pleasant but serve as a distraction. For example, a large plant may be beautiful in the room, but its location behind you may add a strange extension of leaves by your shoulder or face. For privacy purposes, remove any personal family photos.

Before scrambling to “[Marie Kondo](#)” a room in preparation for an interview, I suggest purchasing a foldable screen (also called a room divider) with at least three panels that is preferably six feet in height. These are inexpensive, available online and easy to find.

If no screen or divider is available, check on whether your firm has a branded virtual background. (Ask your IT department for help with set up and testing it out.) While virtual backgrounds, either provided by Zoom or found online, can be entertaining, they tend to distract, and sometimes cause a warped or in-motion view of the face.

**Chair:** Chairs at professional studios are deliberately set at the right height for the camera and are stationary – they don’t swivel around. When providing high-level media training to clients preparing for sensitive media interviews, my colleague Lisa Altman demonstrates her chair tips to show swiveling, pivoting, and rocking back and forth. The participants may laugh, but it’s a serious tip, because those movements are not only distracting to a viewer, but also tend to indicate a level of anxiety and can weaken credibility. In your own studio, sit on a steady chair that does not roll, pivot or swivel; one in which you can sit up tall and straight with your feet grounded on the floor. If you work at a stand-up table, plant your feet to the floor and do not sway or switch your weight

from leg to leg.

**Camera location:** While it may be convenient to use your cellphone for a broadcast interview, we highly recommend that you use a laptop instead. Just be aware that your usual line of vision is slanted downward to a laptop placed normally on a desk. If you test out your video with this typical setup, you'll see that the camera angle is probably not very flattering. (The problem is so prevalent that new lingo has emerged about unwanted views that over-emphasize chins or noses, unnaturally break mid-forehead, or are too close or tilted.)

Avoid these problems by setting up in advance. Sit on your selected chair at your selected desk with your laptop open. Then, using either several solid books or a flipped-over basket or container, raise the laptop to a point where the camera (that dot in the center top of your screen) is at the same level as your eyes. Look at yourself by turning on any video program (FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc.). Allow for a few inches of space in all directions to frame your entire face, including the top and sides of your head. During the interview, you will need to look straight ahead with eyes on the camera.

## Hacks for Making Eye Contact

A May [Insider](#) article about Zoom meetings pointed out that people can get fixated on their own screen appearance during a virtual meeting. It is common to watch yourself to see your reactions, check on how you are being perceived and, in many cases, give your eyes a break from the constant eye contact you're trying hard to make. In a media interview, though, you will want to make steady eye contact. One helpful hack is to put a sticky note over your own onscreen image to help you keep your focus on the camera. Some people like to tape a card right above the camera dot, while others add googly eyes as a reminder to make eye contact.

## Your Appearance

In addition to preparing for the interview by dressing professionally from head to toe (preferably a solid color that does not blend into your background, such as navy blue), plan on wearing minimal jewelry (no dangling earrings) and ensuring your hair and makeup are appropriate for the setting. If you are wearing a suit jacket, pull it down at the back, and then sit down to ensure it does not bunch up or shift around. If you normally wear glasses, keep them on. You can also try out some options in the video platform's settings. On Zoom, for example, you can check a box to "Touch up my appearance." On both Skype and Teams, you can blur your background so the camera focuses on your face by clicking the camera icon and selecting "Blur my background." Test out these options long before you do the interview to see what you prefer, so you aren't scrambling to make adjustments as the interview begins.

## Avoid Technological Glitches

Technology can be unpredictable, so it's best to prepare. Check that your WiFi signal is strong; move closer to a router if needed. Plug your computer into an outlet so you won't lose charge. Test the mic on your computer and/or headphones. At least a day before the

meeting, ensure that your computer has downloaded the video conferencing application the reporter has asked you to use; if you are not familiar with the functions, ask a colleague to help you.

## Joining and Leaving the Meeting

“Arrive” for your online interview early by logging onto the video platform at least 15 minutes before the time you are expected so you can resolve any log-in issues before the interview begins. Put aside all paperwork and devices and await the start of the interview patiently – it might start recording automatically when the reporter arrives.

When your interviewer tells you that the interview is over, and after you have said “thank you” and “goodbye,” remain quiet, close the cover of your laptop and walk away for several minutes. By closing the laptop and walking away, you remove any chance of the camera recording you as you physically and virtually leave the meeting. When you return, the meeting should have disconnected. If it hasn’t, end or quit the application.

## 10 Interview Tips

There are many great tips for doing interviews, but here are 10 to remember if you are doing a virtual broadcast media interview.

1. Know your key messages. They can be taped on a card above the camera, but they cannot be anywhere else on the screen or your eyes will shift.
2. Anytime you look at your screen or away from the camera will seem awkward to viewers.
3. Broadcast reporters look for soundbites of 7 to 10 seconds in length.
4. Keep your answers concise.
5. Listen carefully to the questions and weave a message into your replies if possible.
6. Do your best to eliminate any filler words such as “like,” “you know” and “um.”
7. Avoid looking up or to the side, or closing your eyes, as you consider your responses.
8. Be aware of excessive hand gestures.
9. Try not to touch your face or push hair aside.
10. Mention your firm’s name in one or two of your replies.

## Get Comfortable (But No Pajamas, Please)

Working virtually is what Jaffe does, so we are accustomed to working energetically from home and with high productivity by managing distractions, finding quiet locations for online meetings and maneuvering around expected interruptions. We thrive in this professional at-home environment, and we appreciate that working from home requires several adjustments; a few hacks; and, quite often, a sense of humor when the puppy is barking, UPS is repeatedly ringing the doorbell and your child wants help with a virtual math class – all when your Zoom meeting begins in 3 minutes or is underway. If you need assistance with planning and preparing for your virtual broadcast interview, we’re here to help.

Do you have any tips or anecdotes to share? Leave a comment in the box below, or

contact me, Liz Lindley, at [llindley@jaffepr.com](mailto:llindley@jaffepr.com).