

Today, millions of Americans are scrambling to work and communicate virtually. Marketing is no exception, and we've launched brand-new live and on-demand webinar marketing services to help you connect with people stuck in their homes but in need of help.

Whether you're shooting video for your website, broadcasting a webinar, hosting client meetings virtually or launching a podcast – having the right lights, camera and microphone will help you deliver a polished product.

This post is your guide to the best equipment you need to deliver webinars like a champ.

Here's how this will work.

- We'll offer advice on 3 key pieces of equipment: webcams, microphones and lights
- In each category we'll give you 3 recommendations: Budget, Best Value and Premium
- The criteria is simple: We'll combine our own experience, product reviews and advice from professionals to give you a great option regardless of your budget.

Microphones

A few weeks ago, one of our clients sent us a video to review. It was something he had planned to use for an online marketing campaign we were running for him. I opened it up expecting it to be, "meh – ok," like a lot of the videos I see.

Instead, I was blown away. The video itself was nothing special, but the audio was outstanding. It literally felt like he was right in the office with me and it helped pull me into the surprisingly engaging video. The better you represent yourself online, the higher chance you have of making a personal AND professional connection with your clients. Here are the three microphones to help you get there. *Because microphones are the most important part of your webinar quality, we'll spend a little extra time reviewing them.*

Value: Blue Snowball Ice

First off, I love the design of this mic. Anyone can make a log-shaped microphone with silver foil on it, but rethinking the shape into a sphere makes this little guy stand out. And don't let its small shape fool you; this little guy uses cardioid-only mic pattern, which is the most popular for mics in this class. While it lacks a lot of customizable options, this fixed-pattern condenser is ideal for someone looking for a plug-and-play, no-nonsense vocal recorder. Blue is renowned for studio-quality recording tools, but their Snowball is an accessible product that's grabbed a chunk of the conference call and online communication market. Still, it makes the list as a very spiffy, affordable and approachable mic.

Pros:



- **Price: \$49** (the standard Snowball includes more recording patterns to accommodate multiple vocalists and a wider range of frequency response for another 20 bucks).
- **System Requirements:** Standard USB – Mac or PC compatible (If your Mac is like mine, and only offers those new USB-C ports, you may need a dock or adapter)
- **Portability:** The small stature of this mic makes it ideal if you're going to lug it between your home and office

Cons:

- **Sound Quality:** “B” – good enough for videos, but most suitable for conference calls
- **Flexibility:** The standard settings on the Snowball Ice are good enough for a lot of standard uses, but with few setting and pattern options it's lacking for more adept users.

Best Value: Blue Yeti

The Blue Yeti has become the most popular desktop-recording microphone. It's simple enough to use on everyday video conference calls and sophisticated enough to produce professional vocals. As you may know, the Yeti is a mystical abominable snowman character and the foot-tall 3.5-pound mic tells you pretty clearly where the name came from. This is the microphone I use and love, and in my opinion the size doesn't bother me. It's a cool ornament on my desk, and I rarely find myself lugging it around and cursing its size. This mic has become the standard for podcasters and home recording after becoming the first microphone to with the coveted THX certification.



Pros:

- **Price: \$129**
- **Sound Quality:** “A” – This mic rocks! Compared to similarly priced mics, the Yeti delivers noticeably better depth and detail. As CNET says, “It delivers big sound from a big microphone.”
- **System Requirements:** Standard USB – Mac or PC compatible
- **Flexibility:** Perhaps the greatest feature of the Yeti is its easy-to-use modes. With a single switch on the back of the Yeti you can select 4 different patterns; omnidirectional (picks up sound from all directions), cardioid (focuses on sound directly in front of the mic), stereo mode (uses left and right channels to capture a wide and realistic sound), and bidirectional (pulls sound from directly in front and behind the mic). Another great feature is its zero-latency headphone monitoring that allows you to hear your voice as you record without any delay. The front of the mic has a simple on/off mute button allowing you to rapidly mute it if you cough or are interrupted.
- **Cool Perks:** The Blue Yeti comes in a few different colors. The standard metallic & chrome is sold at \$129, while the black, blue and other colors range from \$149-\$169 (it's purely an aesthetics thing – they all function the same).

Cons:

- **Design:** Some audio-purists take issue with the Yeti's unique shape and heavy weight. Personally, it doesn't bother me.
- **Quality:** The microphone itself is very well built, but light-weight plastic knobs connecting the mic to the stand are a little flimsy. If it bothers you or if it breaks, you can always mount it on a cool stand!

- *Other*: Picks up a fair amount of sibilant noise (s, z, sh sounds).

Premium: Rode NT-USB

If you told the blokes down under who make this Australian mic that this was an ordinary, desktop podcasting mic, you might find him and his mates wanting to fight. Instead, they claim, this black beauty packs the punch of condenser quality normally only found in studio-grade microphones. In demo recording sessions the pros at Music Radar noted, “On spoken voice and sung vocals it delivered with no lack of bottom-end warmth or top-end clarity and no obvious tonal anomalies.” For those of you who don’t speak sound-geek, that means it’s good with a lot of different voice types and applications.



Pros:

- *Sound Quality*: “A+” – Music Radar calls it, “Your computer’s perfect partner for recording vocals.”
- *System Requirements*: Standard USB – Mac or PC compatible
- *Ease of Use*: With a simple USB connection and a variety of recording modes it checks all the boxes on sound without becoming too complex for a novice user to figure out.
- *Bonus*: Comes with an Integrated pop shield. It will help your P’s not pop, and it looks really cool.
- *Quality*: The jet-black mic is cased in a solid frame and comes with a stylish tripod making it ideal for desktop recording.

Cons:

- *Price: \$169* – It’s not going to break the bank, but its advanced features and settings come with a price tag to match.
- *Features*: This mic is good at what it does, but you won’t find the diverse set of recording modes the Yeti offers. Instead its two knobs simply control headphone output levels and the other blends the balance between the dry sound at the source and the signal coming back to your computer. While it’s a cool feature, it simply lacks much customization.

Webcams

I’m a little torn on recommending cameras for webinar production. On one hand they can be a pain in the butt perched on top of your screen with cords hanging haphazardly behind your display and the hassle of selecting a different input. I find external cameras especially frustrating because I live with my MacBook, constantly toting it back and forth to the office. On the other hand, the standard cameras (even on the \$3K MacBook Pro I’m typing this on) are often low quality and offer odd angles (I’m pretty much done with looking up people’s noses on video calls). In the end, the higher quality offered by a quality webcam is enough to make those of us investing in webinars at least seriously consider adding it to our equipment stash. If the end objective is to have better video than a normal laptop camera, the criteria for this review will be high video quality (1080p) and a respectable frame rate (60fps). Here are our top picks:

Value: Razer Kiyo – \$99

Right off the bat, it's clear that this is different than most webcams because of its integrated ring light. This sleek halo light can be adjusted to brighten up your face even in a pitch black room, or for a softer tone. Another unique feature of the Kiyo is its built-in saturation boost. This adds a great level of added vivid detail but can blow out certain colors as well. With a 1080p sense, this camera has excellent sharpness, and also includes a fast acting autofocus (for those of us who fidget while we talk). Overall, this is a great camera with several bonus features at a very affordable price point.



Best Value: Logitech StreamCam – \$169

This camera was redesigned from the top down to offer a totally new webcam option. Its square shape won't clutter your office, and it can switch from portrait to landscape mode with a simple 90-degree twist. As the name suggests, it's lightning fast at refocusing and has a lot of additional functionality available with a fantastic driver software included from Logitech. The thing that sets this camera aside is its unparalleled picture quality (without going 4K). This helps you deliver great video quality without hogging massive amounts of hard drive space. A few other features I love is its built-in USB-C connectivity and overall ease of use and minimalist styling.



Premium: Logitech BRIO – \$199

Let's be honest, if you're not an Instagram star, you don't need a \$300 webcam, so I've added my runner-up for best value as the premium(ish) camera here. The Logitech BRIO is just a hair more expensive (10 bucks) than the StreamCam, but has its own unique advantages. What it lacks in innovative design and portability it makes up for in unparalleled picture quality. This is the only 4K camera we picked, so if you can handle larger files, you'll be happy with the outstanding video it produces. Logitech takes full advantage of the high resolution by including 5x digital zoom that will hardly make a difference in picture quality. The only negative report on this camera was an issue with autofocus speed, sometimes glitching while in transition. If you're trying to "futureproof" your tech, this may be a good choice, but most streaming and webinar services don't even broadcast in 4K.



Lighting

When it comes to lighting there are really three options: softboxes, ring lights and LEDs. It just so happens that the prices on each type make a nice, even progression from one to the next. For true studio-quality video lighting you'll want a variety of light angles, but for simple face-to-camera webinar video, a single light is fine. Lighting is particularly important for webinar video, and the difference between a well-lit shot and poor lighting is remarkable. The good news is that something as simple as a plain old lamp will do the trick. But there's no fun in that – let's buy some lights!

Value: Softbox Lighting: \$39

Softbox lights are simple. There's a CFL bulb surrounded by reflective material and covered with a translucent filter. Because the technology is straightforward, the price is very affordable. Softbox lights are used everywhere from DIY home studios to professional applications. The downside to softboxes is that they're a bit of work to set up and take down. Unless you have a place you can store them assembled, budget a few minutes before and after your shoot to take them apart and put them away. Also, the rods that hold the softbox in place can sometimes poke through the material, and frequent reassembly can damage them. This particular kit on Amazon comes with one softbox, the CFL bulb, a tripod and a carrying case for \$40.



Best Value: Ring Lighting: \$60

Ring lights help to create beautiful video because the lighting is coming from the exact perspective as the camera lens. These easy-to-use and versatile lights enable you to source uniform light from the camera's point of view. They're usually made from a circular fluorescent bulb, but some have a circle pattern of LEDs in a halo shape. Ring lights are especially good for face-to-camera video because they can be used very close to the subject without the glare that other lights produce. They allow the camera to nest directly within the halo, but they can also be used off-center to create dramatic shadow effects. These may not be ideal for you if you wear glasses as sometimes the circle shape of the light is visible on your glasses' reflection. This particular kit on Amazon costs just \$61 and includes a variety of mounting options, a tripod and a storage bag.



Premium: LED Lighting: \$102

LED lights range drastically in price from around \$100 to several thousand dollars. The primary factors that influence price are how customizable the light profile is, whether they're battery powered or plug in and what range of color tones are included. Because LED lights use so little electricity, you'll not only be able to power them with batteries (in some cases) you'll also notice that they emit little-to-no heat. Some light kits put off a good amount of heat that can cause presenters to glisten or glare on camera. LED lights also often have several options for lighting that range from the color of the light to its intensity. This flexibility can save you from having to buy different types of lights when the LED is so versatile. Finally, LED lights are smaller than other lighting options and require less setup time making them ideal to store in a professional office environment. This entry-level LED light kit comes with 2 adjustable lights, 2 filters, 2 tripods, rechargeable batteries and a carrying case for just over \$100.



Conclusion

There are a lot of options when it comes to setting up your office for a webinar broadcast. At the end of the day, it's hard to make a bad decision with so many options and equipment available for a modest budget. For my money I like the Blue Yeti mic, the Logitech StreamCam webcam and the LED lighting kit.

Ok, you've got your gear all picked out, now it's time to do a webinar! If you're looking for a marketing partner to set up and fill up your webinars, give us a call. We are passionate about helping advisors build their practices with high-quality digital marketing, and we'll help you any way we can!