

Successful virtual interviews

A candidate's guide



AS COVID-19 DRIVES REMOTE WORKING, OUR GUIDE WILL HELP YOU SHINE ON YOUR NEXT VIDEO INTERVIEW.

The current global pandemic has changed business communication radically. Virtual interviews have become the norm at even the most senior levels. For some, this might be no challenge, for others, a little more learning is required.

This guide considers some important issues for your next interview, whether it's with one, or several, interviewers. It's built on what we've learned from thousands of online interviews with candidates, both one-to-one and panel, for roles of all seniorities, across our global network.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF VIDEO INTERVIEWS?

NARROWING OF BANDWIDTH

In a virtual interview situation, there are fewer cues to help you interpret what people say. This is particularly difficult if the technology is less than perfect. Whilst we make allowances for that in our social and day-to-day digital interactions, the stakes are much higher when you're in a hiring interview.

BUILDING RAPPORT

You'll need to pay particular attention to building rapport in the two-dimensional world of the video interview. For example, it's important to pay attention to the introductions, keep effective eye contact, and pay attention to body language and other interpersonal cues.

PRESENCE

The flattening of the interaction, and reduction in cues, can affect the perceptions of your gravitas. You'll need to project yourself more (without overdoing it), speak at an appropriate speed, and create a business-compatible image (e.g. personal attire and background to the video) in order to manage your presence on screen.

CULTURAL ASPECTS

In the pre-pandemic world, whilst many first-round interviews were often carried out remotely, final rounds were typically in-person. If the final round is online, you'll need to find out how to explore the 'fit-with-the-culture' side of things.

These are the aspects usually facilitated by the physical and social cues of a visit to the office. For example, the 'feel' at reception, and sense of the broader work environment.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER, AND AS A FILTER

The better the technology, the more effective it will be. This requires planning and preparation, especially if networks, and home broadband arrangements, are in heavy use.



BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

PLANNING FOR YOUR VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

Like most important times in your career, preparation is key to success. By the time you get to the actual interview, there should be no surprises on your side of the camera. You will then be able to focus on the job in hand.

It's a very important planning point prior to the interview to look up the company and research the people you'll be meeting. You should go into an interview knowing whom you're speaking to, what role they play, and what reputation they've accrued in that role.

You should do this for several reasons:

It will help you decide whether this company is a good fit for you. Remember, your next role will, in one way or another, end up influencing your career.

It will also help balance the scales of power in the interview. If the interviewers have done their homework, you will go into the call as a known entity, everyone in the 'room' will have read your CV and any public-available information, so it's a good idea for you to do the same. Your 'interview' needs to resemble as much as possible a peer-to-peer conversation and, to accomplish that, you need to know whom you're talking to.

MASTER THE TECHNOLOGY AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

Yes, you might have attended plenty of Zoom conferences and Skype calls, but never assume the next one will be perfect. Nothing creates a worse first impression than a candidate who seems to be struggling with the technology.

Make sure that technology is working, that you have the correct software installed for the call and that you have a strong connection. Test your camera and microphone ahead of time. Check your volume levels.

Finally, make sure alerts that might pop up on screen (and distract you) are turned off.



NOW, CONTROL THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Remove any distractions, such as nearby phones (mute your mobile), or other tech (and anyone using it too) and have a notepad and pen handy.

Make sure you are in a quiet location. Let others around you know that you are not to be disturbed. Log in ahead of time to ensure a smooth start.

Set up with an appropriate background, a neutral room with soft natural light is best. Essentially, there should be nothing more interesting in the picture than your face.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR APPEARANCE?

Think about the appropriate dress code for the interview and avoid very bright colours or complicated patterns. You might be at home, but you still need to create a business-like image. Imagine you are doing the interview in the prospective employer's office and dress accordingly. Different industries have different dress codes, so make sure you are dressed accordingly.

HOW DO YOU COME ACROSS ON-SCREEN?

Do a trial run with a friend or colleague and ask them for feedback on how you presented on screen. It's a safe space to get genuine feedback, and adjust accordingly. Perhaps, think of the news or current affairs television personality that you find effective and consider how they present themselves.

Good eye contact is particularly important in a technology-enabled interview. The camera should be at eye level so you avoid looking down on or away from the interviewer. Moving the on-screen tile/video image of the interviewer so that it is adjacent to the camera will help

And speaking of appearances, don't fill the whole screen entirely with your face, it can be quite over-powering after a while. A ratio of one third of you, to two thirds background, is generally more soothing on the eye.

It can be all too easy to let your eyes wander during an interview, try to avoid looking away from the camera – it will make you look distracted or, worse still, disinterested.

Do not use any notes or briefing materials, other than those you might have if you were physically present at an interview. You will look distracted if you are repeatedly looking away, so prepare thoroughly instead.

Maintain a good posture (no slouching or fidgeting) and nod and smile as appropriate to the conversation. Take care to avoid excessive or distracting movement. Even a small movement is greatly magnified on-screen.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

IN CONVERSATION

A video interview is not a normal or natural interaction, but that doesn't mean you can't connect with the person on the other end. Don't be afraid to have a short aside about a common interest if you do find one. The interviewer might enjoy the break from the routine questions they have to get through.

It's not easy to connect with everyone, but it's a crucial part of a virtual interview. You want the interviewer to be able to remember a personal story you told or a common interest you share. This is one way to ensure you stand out. Of course, the interviewer(s) will be making copious notes (especially if they are interviewing on behalf of a client) but after the interview when they're chatting amongst themselves, that personal connection you made can go a long way to keep your name in the game.

So, once you're 'live', and the introductions have been made, the small talk is over, and it's down to the business of the interview, here are some things to remember as the interview unfolds.

Think about timing – don't speak over the interviewer, and ask for clarification if a question is indistinct or interrupted by other participants.

It is not as easy to build or maintain rapport with a panel of interviewers through video conferencing. Consider responding to the questioner by name and then check at the end of the response whether they require any expansion.

Be yourself, the camera will betray any 'acting' or non-natural behaviour. This is a chance to let your personality shine through and make an impression. And you can only do that if you have done your prep and can be truly in the moment, so to speak.

BE READY TO DISCUSS RELEVANT ISSUES

Be prepared to be asked for your point of view about relevant issues. If you're going for a Board position, for example, you need to be fluent in answering questions like "What is your stance on regulation X currently being levelled at our industry?" The more you can be an equal partner in the conversation, the more qualified, and peer-like, your candidacy will seem.

BE READY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR MOTIVATIONS

You are going to be asked why you want the job, and it's important that you can provide a coherent set of reasons. The typical job interview answers won't suffice in a directorship interview, for example.

Remember, your achievements only make sense if they are relevant to the organisation you are addressing, so consider what will they mean for the interviewers, their strategies, their ambitions. And whilst a good story is intriguing, adding a good fact or three is what will close the deal. Yes, you might have successfully launched a new challenger brand into a very competitive market, but what was the brand share achieved in what time scale, on how big a budget, with what ROI?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

POST-INTERVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

Once you have answered all the interviewers' questions, make sure you have got all the answers you require before you hang up. Keeping a post-it note of your key questions stuck to your computer is a good in-interview reminder.

Make sure you understand what the next stages in the process are, so you can prepare accordingly.

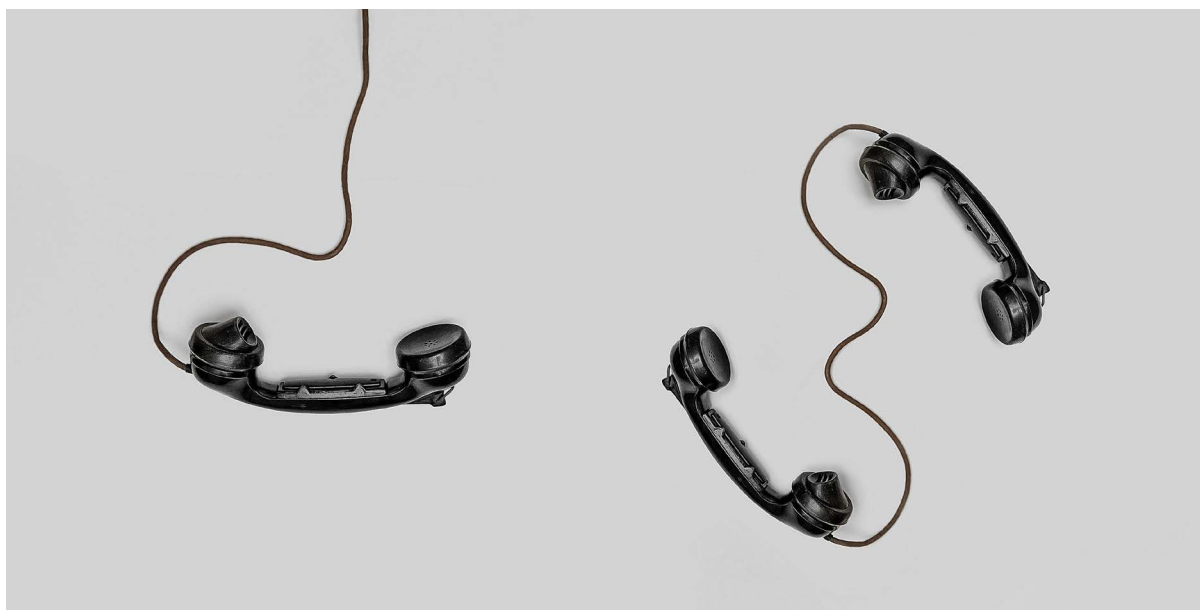
Following-up with a well-crafted, thoughtful email of thanks to the interviewers within 24 hours is essential.

Of course, this shows you value their time, but it can do more than that. It's an opportunity to resell yourself, express your unique strengths, or share any talking points you didn't address in the interview.

Was there something you and the interviewers really connected over? Don't be afraid to mention it in your email. Was there a particular challenge or issue that was discussed? Do you have any relevant thoughts on how to address it? However, don't overdo it, keep things concise to maintain interest.

Finally, it might be a good time to return to your CV in the light of your interview(s) and update anything that was highlighted by the interview.

On the subject of a CV, these are clearly still vital in this environment, as is managing your online presence, so please refer to our guides which you can find online by searching 'CV Guide' on odgersberndtson.com.



WORKING WITH HEADHUNTERS

We want to help. But remember we are busy working on current assignments, and our ability to meet potential candidates on a speculative basis is limited, especially in a situation where social distancing is still the norm.

Think about how you make your approach to headhunters a warm one. Existing contacts within search firms are valuable. Even if a consultant does not operate in your sector, he or she will be able to direct you accordingly.

If you are not well connected in our industry, then think about those in your network who are. An introduction from your chairman, chief executive or HR director can be a powerful means of opening the door and differentiating yourself.

We are delighted if you stay connected with us and keep us informed. As your roles or responsibilities change, please let us have a revised CV and contact details.

If you secure a new role, let us know. Ensuring that we understand your objectives, the sorts of roles you seek, and your capacity to undertake them is vital intelligence for us and lies at the heart of our work.

In short, please help us to help you.



TALENTED PEOPLE ARE OUR LIFELOOD

THAT'S WHY WE HAVE A CANDIDATE CHARTER

Whether we approach you about a specific opportunity, or you contact us to share your CV and career ambitions, we want you to have a constructive experience of engaging with Odgers Berndtson.

We recognise that we have a commitment to you, as well as to our client, and we undertake that our dealings with you will be professional, courteous, rigorous and honest.

You can find the details of our Candidate Charter online by searching 'Candidate Charter' on [odgersberndtson.com](https://www.odgersberndtson.com)



ABOUT ODGERS BERNDTSON

For over 50 years, Odgers Berndtson has helped some of the world's biggest and best organisations find the senior talent to drive their agendas.

We deliver executive search, assessment and development to businesses and organisations across over 50 sectors, whether commercial, public or not-for-profit, and draw on the experience of more than 250 Partners and their teams in 29 countries.

Our approach is to create deep partnerships with the clients we serve, the candidates we recruit, and the colleagues we work with.

So, we always take time to thoroughly understand your leadership needs first and foremost. Then, we match that intelligence with our depth of knowledge of the sector, the role, and, of course, the potential talent pool.

Plus, our global network offers a further diversity of experience, knowledge and access at the highest levels across the world.



