



Conducting Virtual Spiritist Activities

*A primer on how to plan and
carry out a successful online
activity.*



by
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Overview

The internet has and will continue to play an important role in providing access to information to people all over the world in the foreseeable future. Spiritist societies and groups may want to think about how to best leverage current technologies so they can carry out virtual activities or extend their regular programming to those who are far away or cannot make it to the physical location. To help societies and groups best navigate the vast amount of technology tools that could be used to conduct virtual activities, *The Spiritist Institute (TSI)* has put this primer together. While it is not meant to be exhaustive of the topic, we hope this document will give you a starting point from which to consider your options.

Summary of Recommendations

To save you time, we are summarizing recommendations upfront. (You can find more detailed information in the following pages.) They are as follows:

Planning:

- Plan your activity before you select a technology tool.
- Have a good understanding of what's required for an effective meeting.
- Ensure adequate internet connectivity for all participants.
- Practice with your technology tool ahead of time.

Technology Tools:

- For private activities, we suggest Zoom or Webex.
- For public activities, we suggest Streamyard or BeLive.

Broadcasting Tips:

- Content is more important than tools and equipment.
- Spiritist Societies and groups should consider broadcasting to YouTube, Vimeo, and other platforms for widest reach.
- Good microphone sound is usually more important than a good image.
- You can record activities and stream them later.
- Public online activities should be shorter than in-person events.
- Don't get caught up on the numbers since events will continue to be available for consumption.

Planning

When starting any new activity, it is always a good idea to start by deciding on the type of meeting you will hold and its appropriate schedule, duration, and purpose. Each type of meeting has different technical requirements, hence the importance of starting by defining the type of activity in mind before selecting a tool. Take some time to plan your activity. By being clear upfront, you will save a lot of time later on. To help you best plan, here are examples of important guiding questions:

- **Purpose:** What is the purpose of the activity?
- **Audience:** Who will likely attend? How many will generally attend?
- **Branding:** What are you calling this activity?
- **Type:** Is it a private or public meeting?
- **Frequency:** How often will it take place?
- **Participation:** Do you expect attendees to participate and/or collaborate during the meeting?
- **Duration:** For how long will it last every time it takes place?
- **Organization:** Who will be responsible for organizing this activity?
- **Resources:** What budget do you have to conduct this activity?

For technical purposes, the most important question to answer is the private vs. public question. Let's investigate that further.

Type of Meetings: Private and Public

Although Spiritist societies and groups carry out a wide variety of activities, we will distinguish them into 2 broad categories for our purposes: private and public meetings.

By “*private meeting*” we mean every activity that is only available to members of the Spiritist society (or a subset) via invitation only – such as a regular study group, a mediumship study group, a volunteer planning meeting, etc. On the other hand, by “*public meeting*” we mean any activity the Spiritist society may wish to make available to the public at large without any membership requirements – such as public talks, social gatherings, general study groups, etc.

Selecting the right type of tool for each type of meeting is very important since you do not want to make private meetings accessible to anyone on the internet just as you do not want to make it hard for the the public at large to find and attend your public meeting. Once you have decided on what type of activity you will carry out, we can move ahead to tool selection.

Internet Connectivity

Simply put, an online activity will not succeed if you do not have adequate internet connectivity that includes speed and latency (how long it takes data to travel between its source and destination). High Speed Internet connectivity is a requirement for all of those leading, moderating or collaborating in the activity. Activities requiring video are especially dependent on good bandwidth and the absence of delays. Please consider that you need at least 3mbps of "upload" bandwidth ("speed") to broadcast video. Most service providers tell you what your download bandwidth speed is -- they do not often tell you your upload speed because they do not expect you to constantly upload content. To gage your bandwidth, visit <https://www.speedtest.net/> and look for both the download and upload numbers. Make sure they are both over 4 Mbps -- otherwise you will be risking dropping your connection mid-broadcast. And remember: if you are not the only one broadcasting video, make sure your guests and collaborators have a good internet connection too! Naturally, you cannot control your audience's internet connection, but a good check and validation will ensure your team does -- otherwise you also risk jeopardizing your activity.

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IMPORTANT: If you feel that you do not have adequate internet connectivity, then you may want to consider recording your activity offline and uploading it later to a social media platform.

Practice With Your Tools Ahead of Schedule

Let's get this one out of the gate quickly: once you have your activity planned, the necessary bandwidth, and the tools you need, make sure you practice ahead of schedule! It is true, practice makes perfect -- and it is not different here.

It is always a good idea to "role-play" everything in a "dress-rehearsal" to get a true idea of what could go wrong during your activity. Practice with your equipment and with the people you are planning to run the activity with. Also consider asking your key collaborators or speakers to arrive at least 15-20 minutes earlier so that you can iron out all technical problems, make proper adjustments and configurations ahead of the start time. Tech challenges will happen...

So, practice before your activity! You will learn a lot -- and you will be thankful you did. Hidden benefit: your stress level will be lower and your chances of a smooth event will be higher.

Technology Tools

There are dozens of good collaboration platforms out there – but not all of them will suit your activity well. Now that you have clearly defined your activity, it should be easier to choose.

Tools for Private Activities:

For private activities that are not meant to be shared with the public at large, we recommend *Zoom* and *Cisco Webex* as our top choices. For budget options, we prefer *Skype*.

- *Zoom* and *Cisco Webex* are powerful tools that accommodate large numbers of users while remaining relatively easy to use. They can both record meetings for streaming live or for later, screenshare, and do not require the audience to create an account.
- *Skype* is a zero-cost tool that is well known around the world. On the downside, it requires every user to have a *Skype* account -- an additional requirement of members, even if the account is free.
- There are also other tools out there there such as *BlueJeans*, *GoToMeeting*, *Google Hangouts*, etc., but for the purposes of this, we would really like to recommend *Cisco WebEx* and *Zoom* - more details below.

Tools for Public Activities:

For public activities that are intended to be broadcast to a larger audience, we recommend *StreamYard* and *BeLive* as our top choices. For budget options, we suggest broadcasting directly with either YouTube or Facebook.

- *StreamYard* and *BeLive* are easy-to-use tools that allow you to broadcast multiple speakers on camera at once while following live comments. *Streamyard* edges out *BeLive* as it allows broadcasting 6 participants on camera to both *YouTube* and *Facebook* at the same time. *BeLive* requires you to choose one or the other, and it also limits you to 4 participants on camera at any given time.
- Broadcasting directly to either *YouTube* or *Facebook* with a cellphone is our budget choice. It requires no additional spending but it limits you to one service at a time. As another caveat, your mobile device and service plan have their own limitations. Make sure you are familiar with them! You can still download the video broadcast and upload it to the other social media platform after the fact.

(Comparison table in the next page)

Tools Comparison Table for Private Activities:

Below are the options we have investigated:

TOOL NAME	# OF PEOPLE	REQ'D DOWNLOAD	URL FOR EACH MEETING	PEOPLE ON CAMERA	SCREENS HARE	RECORD	EASY TO MANAGE	LIVE STREAM (SOCIAL MEDIA)	COST PER MONTH
Zoom	100-1000+	YES	YES	UP TO 100	YES	YES	EASY	YES (FB)	FREE (UP TO 40 MIN) & PAID (\$0 - \$20)
Cisco Webex	100-2000+	YES	YES	?	YES	YES	HARDER	YES (PAID PLANS)	FREE & PAID (\$0 - \$30)
Citrix GoTo Meeting	150-3000+	YES	YES	UP TO 25	YES	YES	MEDIUM	NO	PAID (\$14 & ABOVE)
Citrix GoTo Webinar	250-3000+	YES	YES	UP TO 6	YES	YES	HARDER	NO	PAID (\$15 & ABOVE)
Apple FaceTime	32	YES (Apple Only)	NO	32	NO	NO	EASY	NO	FREE
Google HangOut	10-100	YES	YES	10	YES	YES	EASY	NO	FREE & PAID G-SUITE (\$0 - varies)
WhatsApp	4	YES	NO	4	NO	NO	EASY	NO	FREE
Facebook Messenger	50	YES	NO	6	NO	NO	EASY	NO	FREE
Skype	50-100	NO	YES	50	YES	YES	EASY	NO	FREE (UP TO 50) & PAID (\$0 - varies)

Tools Comparison Table for Public Activities:

Below are the options we have investigated:

TOOL NAME	REQ'D DOWN LOAD	PEOPLE ON CAMERA	SCREEN SHARE	RECORD	EASY TO MANAGE	LIVE STREAM (SOCIAL MEDIA)	COST PER MONTH
<i>StreamYard</i>	NO	6	YES	YES	EASY	YES, MULTIPLE	FREE & PAID (\$0 - 40)
<i>Be Live</i>	NO	4	YES	YES	EASY	YES, ONE AT A TIME	FREE & PAID (\$0 - 30)
<i>Zoom</i>	YES	UP TO 100	YES	YES	MEDIUM	YES (FB)	FREE (UP TO 40 MIN) & PAID (\$0 - \$20)
<i>Cisco Webex</i>	YES	?	YES	YES	HARDER	YES (PAID PLANS)	FREE & PAID (\$0 - \$30)

Broadcasting Tips

Broadcasting your group's activities can be as easy or complex as you make it. It used to be that you needed highly trained professionals and expensive equipment to produce a show. Now, all you need is one camera or a cell phone and you are ready to reach a global audience. No matter what you decide to do, remember that there is no right or wrong way. Just like we learn in Spiritism, you can always learn, experiment, and get better, little by little, when broadcasting your activities. Here are some pointers to make your journey easier:

Focus on content over equipment

Content is always more important than the equipment. At the end of the day, if your content is not interesting, no amount of fancy equipment will captivate your audience. You can spend thousands of dollars on equipment to livestream an activity and not achieve the reach you want. On the other hand, you can also use your cell phone and find a global audience. The key difference is the content you are producing. So, focus on the quality of your activities first and then work on improving your broadcast. Remember: when it comes to broadcasting, it is ok to start small. You can always change your equipment, approach, and tools as you go along. Bottom line: content over equipment.

Broadcast to YouTube too, if you can

There are many different social media networks and you probably have your favorite(s). Broadcasting to all of them at the same time is nearly impossible -- and would require complex expensive systems. Don't feel like you have to. Pick one or two, if you can, and stick to it so you can build a following over time. That is to say: so your audience knows where to find you.

The top 3 social media networks for broadcasting are *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Instagram*. Whatever your choice(s), we advise you to consider also including your videos on *YouTube*. *YouTube* is a well established network that does not require your audience to login to watch a video -- and, thus, it makes it easier for them to access your broadcast.

Additionally, *YouTube* works well both in desktop and mobile format, and is also commonly accessed via Smart TVs, which means your audience can easily view your videos in the comfort of their living rooms or wherever their TV's may be. All of that is possible with other platforms, but usually not as easily.

IMPORTANT: we are not saying you should not broadcast anywhere else. We are simply saying that, if you have the option to, please also broadcast or upload to YouTube.

Sound is more important than image

Although we all enjoy crisp and beautiful images, sound is oftentimes more important than we imagine for broadcasts. Audiences are more likely to tolerate less than ideal image than inadequate sound. Therefore, if you have one area on which you may want to focus when starting to broadcast, that area is audio. After all, it is important that your attendees can hear the content. Video is a "nice to have".

Whenever broadcasting, we suggest you use a good quality microphone or headphones. Broadcasting using your phone or computer's built-in microphone is unlikely to sound good even if you are in a quiet place. It may sound distant or echo without clarity. Having a good microphone or headset will be a huge improvement to your streaming capabilities. Even your standard mobile headphones are likely to sound like an improvement over your built in computer or mobile mic. In short: think about audio!

You can record and stream it later

If a live broadcast seems too hard or if you cannot broadcast to multiple networks at the same time, remember this: you can always upload your recorded activity to your social media of choice. That is, if you record it. If you do, you may take some of the pressure that comes with a live broadcast off your shoulders as well. You can broadcast live to YouTube, for instance, and then download your YouTube recording and upload it to Facebook, Instagram or vice-versa - whatever combination you want.

IMPORTANT: your activities do not need to always be "live". Remember you can record them and upload them to your platform later.

Virtual activities tend to be shorter

Of course you have amazing programming you want to share with the world. We are sure you are excited about it too! Remember, though: virtual attention spans are shorter than usual. It is always easier to keep focused on something when you are right there, in front of it -- and away from all the distractions of your real life. When you broadcast live, that is not the case: you are competing for your audience's attention with whatever else is going on in their lives and homes: kids, pets, chores, other family members, other programs, events, etc. So, consider shortening your activities when you are conducting them online. Is your in-person meeting a one-hour affair? Consider making your online version 30-45 minutes.

REMEMBER: it is a lot harder to pay attention to anything when you are not present.

Don't get caught up on the view numbers

You may have seen some videos with an incredibly large amount of "views". While those large numbers are very exciting, they may also give you a false impression of the video's true reach. Because a video has "x" number of views, it does not mean that "x" number of people actually watched the entire video. All it means is that the video was played "x" number of times -- but not all the way to the end. For example: *Facebook* and *Instagram* count 3 seconds as a "view". If a video has played for 3 seconds since it was loaded on your news feed, it counts as a view. So, the best way to have a true sense of "reach" is to look more closely at the stats you have access to as the video creator in whatever platform you use.

Don't be discouraged if your video does not have thousands of views. What we should shoot for is "longer" views, which means people are truly following your message from beginning to the end. Better to have less and longer views than more and shorter ones.

And don't compare your videos to those of other people! Compare your videos to your previous ones -- to see if you are creating content that keeps people engaged, connected, and participating.

Conclusion

We hope this document has helped you get a better understanding of how you can plan and carry out virtual broadcasts (live and recorded) of your Spiritist group's activities. Producing content does not need to be very complex or difficult -- regardless of whether you are streaming it live or uploading it to a social platform later.

All it takes is some planning, preparation, great content, a good tool, and some basic equipment. And you can always improve! The more virtual activities or events you conduct, the better you will become. So, get started! We look forward to seeing your content online!

Feedback and Suggestions

We want to help. Yet, we know that no document is perfect -- especially for a topic that can be so vast as online broadcasting and video recording. Still, we have tried our best to keep this free guide simple for you and to offer practical advice on how to carry out virtual activities as easily as you can. We think you may have great content to offer the world and we hope we have been able to point you in the right direction. So, good luck!

If you find a mistake or have other suggestions, please do not hesitate to let us know by engaging with us via our website: <http://www.spiritistinstitute.org> We are always looking for ways to improve and would welcome your help and input in making this guide better for everyone that comes upon it.

Thank you again for your time, attention, and consideration,

The team at *The Spiritist Institute*.

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About The Spiritist Institute

The Spiritist Institute's mission is to advance Spiritism in the English-speaking world. To that end, we carry out a series of different projects and efforts to increase the awareness, study, and practice of Spiritism wherever English is spoken.

The Spiritist Institute (TSI) is a non-profit 501c3 organization committed to making a positive impact in the world. We understand we are a small drop in a large ocean -- and we can use your help to create some beautiful ripples in the world together.

All our work is a labor of love: none of our officers or volunteers receive any compensation for their contribution. Trying to change the paradigm on spirituality is not easy: as an all-volunteer organization, we rely on the generosity of donors and the dedication of our volunteers to help us move our mission forward. We could use your help, too! Join us!

To learn more about The Spiritist Institute (TSI), please visit www.thespiritistinstitute.org.

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