How to Get The Most of Your Virtual Brainstorming Sessions as a Remote Team

Virtual Brainstorming Sessions Overview

What is a brainstorming session?

Brainstorming is one of the most important parts of the creative process. A brainstorming meeting involves employees coming together to think of creative ways to solve problems. Companies hold sessions for everything, from marketing to choosing a [cloud-based contact centre](#).

Sometimes, a few voices can overpower the group, so its important to use agendas to ensure everyone is included. Another great way of making sure everyone is involved is by holding virtual brainstorming meetings.

Free to use image sourced from Unsplash
[Alt text: an in person brainstorming session]

Why use virtual brainstorming?

In the post-covid era, most companies are still operating using remote work to save money, time and promote wellness in their employees. Virtual brainstorming meetings are just another part of this and if done correctly, they can be just as effective as in-person sessions.

Like any other meeting, they require careful planning and consideration but if done correctly, virtual brainstorming meetings can be a concise and organised way to come up with your next big idea.

How are in-person meetings different from virtual meetings?

As everyone who worked through the pandemic knows, virtual meetings have very a different dynamic to in-person sessions. Although not everyone will attend physical meetings, no one can hide behind the 'camera off' function, making communication much easier.

In person meetings also encourage conversational flow without the cumbersome task of turning your microphone on. So, in-person meetings often allow for easier communication, however, well planned virtual meetings with [set agendas](#) can be just as effective.

Advantages of virtual brainstorming

One of the main benefits fo virtual brainstorming meetings is that everyone can join, regardless of location, saving you time and money. Meeting virtually also avoids food and drinks costs as well as protecting you from the wrath of parents who need to organise childcare.
Further, virtual meetups allow collaboration on virtual whiteboards and documents. This saves you the cumbersome task of passing around sheets of paper and summarising ten different people's notes.

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[Alt text: a virtual meeting on a computer]

Tips on How to Brainstorm in a Virtual Meeting

Define the purpose and the goal of the meeting

In order to have a successful brainstorm, you need to clearly define the purpose of your meeting. Create a specific question to answer. Instead of 'How can we improve our online presence?', ask, 'What first step can we take towards getting more social media followers?'. Then, send the question to attendees so they can come to the meeting with specific ideas.

As a manager, you should also consider your goals. Would you like to create five action points? For everyone to have tasks to complete by the follow up meeting? Decide your goals and share at the start of the meeting to provide clear, achievable objectives.

Prepare a meeting agenda beforehand

Running a successful remote team meeting is all about preparation, so creating an agenda is essential. Start off with your goals so that employees know what they are working towards.

Next, set ground rules to ensure you meet your goal with respectful collaboration e.g. 'don't interrupt'.

After that, build on your original goal using questions for your team to work through. Using prompts like a SWOT analysis template will help you create a thorough plan and encourage creativity.

Finally, allocate time slots for each issue so that you cover everything. Don't forget to include voting, next steps and action points so everyone knows their responsibilities.

Use collaborative tools and technology

Virtual brainstorming meetings are great because you can collaborate in real time on documents without having to transfer hard copy ideas to plans after the meeting.

Virtual brainstorming tools and technology such as Google Docs, virtual whiteboards and the Fellow App allow everyone to share their ideas. They are also a great way to ensure you leave the meeting with a clear plan detailing everyone's ideas as you can work through a document together to finalise your approach.
Also, using collaborative tools means you have a record of your ideas and their development which you can revisit if needed.

Set a time limit for the meeting

If there is no time limit, meetings can go on forever, with ideas being debated and issues passed back and forth. Make sure to not only set a time limit for the meeting in its entirety but for each individual section.

Establishing time limits will mean you make decisive plans and have clear next steps by the end of the meeting as there will no time for further debates or discussions.

Also, setting time limits also shows you are aware and respectful of employees time. By ensuring you the meeting won't spill over into their lunch hour, you are creating a positive work environment.

Free to use image sourced from Unsplash
[Alt text: a flip clock changing time]

Designate a meeting facilitator

Before the meeting begins, make sure you assign a chair to ensure everyone respects the meeting rules and sticks to the agenda. By designating this position before the meeting starts, it will be seen as that persons duty rather than an annoying employee nagging everyone to continue.

The meeting facilitator will also check that everyone is getting involved in the discussion so that everyone's voice is heard and ideas are not missed.

Finally, make sure to check with the facilitator that they are happy to take on the role before the meeting.

Schedule a follow up meeting if necessary

If you have assigned tasks and set specific goals, it might be useful to organise a follow up meeting. This will allow you to check employee progress and hold people accountable for their tasks, referring to the action points at the end of your last agenda.

Send out relevant documents via Google or fax, such as using a [virtual fax number in Canada](#). It will also give you time to assess any issues that have come up with your plan and create solutions to them. As before, make sure you create a set agenda with time limits and rules so that you have a productive and efficient meeting.

Top Five Virtual Brainstorming Tools

1. ## Fellow.app

   Fellow encourages accountability, productivity and improvement in and outside of meetings.

   It's includes meeting templates, an agenda builder and notes recording for pre meeting organisation. It also provides action assignation, idea organisation and feedback tools to ensure steps are taken towards your goals.

   Fellow starts at $6 per person, per month.

2. ## Monday.com

   Trusted by big brands like Coca-Cola and Hulu, Monday is a supercharged brainstorming tool. It is most effective for managing your workflow after the meeting and putting ideas into practice.

   It includes a variety of useful features such as fully customisable workflows, task tracking boards and synchornised productivity tools.

   Monday starts at $9 per seat, per month.

3. ## Clickup

   Clickup is a one-stop for workplace management. It includes task, documents, chat, goal tracking and more.

   Create boards to consider ideas before refining them into task lists. Once you have brainstormed, the goals tool tracks your progress ready for your follow up meeting.

   Clickup business starts at $12 a month.

4. ## Friday.app

   If other apps allow you to see the bigger picture, Friday excels in the small stuff.

   It's team management software and daily to-do lists allow you to track your team's progress. It also encourages productivity with its time management and calendar apps.

   Friday is $6 a month per team or $100 a month per company.

5. Rock.so

   Rock.so integrates chats and project management to keep your team up to date. Instantly assign tasks based on conversations so that your team is on the same page.

   This app also integrates with most software like Notion for a truly integrated team.

   Rock.so starts at $29.99 a month.

6. nTask

   nTask allows you to break down complex projects into manageable tasks. It includes project planning software, collaborative boards and task management. It's easy to use interface makes planning a breeze with drag and drop.

   nTask starts from $8 a month.

What to Include in your Brainstorming Meeting Agenda Template

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[Alt text: a laptop, notebook, glass of water and phone on a table]

A great business is founded when creative people come together and share ideas. Therefore, brainstorming is essential to make sure your businesses reaches the next level. But, without a clear agenda, those ideas are just bouncing around without any clear plan. Therefore, any great team brainstorming meeting first requires a great agenda.

First, set a goal for the meeting. This will create focus and is a measurable way of checking the meeting was successful. Secondly, set ground rules to ensure respectful collaboration. Next,

plan for brainstorming including the issues which must be raised. Then, allow time for voting on each point and set out the next steps.

Parting Advice

Now that you know how to have a successful virtual brainstorming meeting, here are the tell tale signs of a failed brainstorm.

Firstly, lack of organisation. If you fail to plan, conversations will go on too long, discussions will have no direction and you will come out with no actionable points. So, make sure you're prepared and create a brainstorming meeting agenda with a clear purpose beforehand.

Secondly, low [engagement](#) will mean you won't hear everyone's ideas and opinions and you could miss important points. Encourage engagement by sending out prompts beforehand so everyone comes armed with brainstorming meeting ideas.

So, use an agenda template to effectively plan your meetings and alongside the advice given in this point, you will have a successful virtual brainstorming meeting.