The Art of Interviewing Digitally

by Sinead Canning

If you're considering moving jobs this year, the chances are, you'll be asked to do a digital interview. Since the beginning of the pandemic, remote interviews have become increasingly common Although the pandemic is hopefully coming to an end, we believe that video interviewing is here to stay.

While there are some things worth noting, the reality is that they are not that much different to in-person interviews. In this piece, I'm going to chat about the top three things for both the candidates and the interviewers, conducting interviews remotely.

There are three things that I think people who are actively video interviewing need to consider:

Setting

While we are used to seeing people's homes on screen and being a little bit more casual with colleagues, try to steer clear of having clutter in the background. Simple is best. A clean, fresh background – you don't want the interviewer's attention on anything but yourself.

If you're interviewing at home, make sure to let your family or housemates know so you won't be disturbed.

The room should be well lit and try not to have your back to a window as it might be distracting for the interviewer.

The important thing to remember is to treat the interview with the same level of professionalism as you would with an in-person interview. Some people tend to choose a virtual background – feedback from interviewers is that this can be distracting. Stick to a genuine background.

Check the tech

Check, check and check again. It might sound basic but the truth is so many things can wrong on the day. From sound to light to internet connection, the list goes on.

Many different platforms offer video interviews. If you are not familiar with the software, practice with someone in advance of the real thing. Make sure the software is compatible with your personal laptop and that your internet runs at a speed strong enough for the software. Perform a speed test beforehand.

Be yourself

Greet the interviewer as you normally would in person. Establish a rapport and a connection. It can be harder to pick up on body language and social queues in a video interview. You want your personality to shine through and we would recommend some non-interview related dialogue at the beginning and end of an interview. Ultimately, you will feel more comfortable by being yourself and the conversation will flow better.

Dress to impress – it's important to dress professionally even if the interview is not in person. A lot of us have become accustomed to dressing slightly more casual whilst working from home but interviews should be treated differently. Remember, first impressions matter and you always want to put your best foot forward.

For interviewers, video interviewing is also relatively new. Several things can help ensure the process is smooth for both you and the candidates you are meeting:

Provide candidates with all necessary information

Many people can find interviews to be nerve-racking. The more information a candidate has the more relaxed they will feel. They should be provided with the names and titles of each person who will be involved in the interview. Candidates like to do their own research beforehand and that can include searching the interviewers on LinkedIn to get a sense of their background and how long they have been with the company. Make sure candidates have a clear idea as to what to expect from a time point of view. Give them an idea as to how long they can expect to be speaking with you for – it will likely be the case that they have taken time off work and so transparency is key.

From my experience, the most popular platforms that are being used for digital interviews are Microsoft Teams and Zoom. However, there are more out there so let candidates know what technology you will be using and bear in mind that they might not be familiar with it. Provide any instructions you think necessary, the more the better!

Unfortunately, technology can sometimes fail us. It's useful to provide a phone number to the candidate in case something goes wrong.

Be prepared

The structure and format of the interview should be planned in advance. While you might be eager to get going – set aside time for some casual conversation at the beginning. This will help relax the candidate and put them at ease. Introduce each interviewer and let them give some detail about themselves and their specific role within the company.

It might be the case that you ask the candidate to go through their CV, detailing their experience or you might have a list of competency-based questions that you want to ask. Either way, keep notes. A lot of employers keep a scorecard if doing a

competency-based interview. This helps to alleviate bias and can be very helpful to refer to after the interview with other members of the interview panel.

One of the downsides to video interviews is that the candidate won't have the opportunity to take a tour of your office. To make up for this, go the extra mile to provide the interviewee with information about the company, the culture and the team they might be joining. What stands out about your offices or key points of interest about where you're located?

Allocate sufficient time near the end of the interview for questions from the candidate. They should leave the meeting feeling like they have a good understanding of your expectations and the responsibilities involved in the position.

Keep it professional

Whether conducting the interview from home or the office, keep the background neutral. Alleviate any distractions by turning off your phone and email notifications. The candidate will have dressed professionally and it's important to do the same.

Eye contact and body language are key here. Try and keep your focus on the camera and not yourself on the screen.

Wrap up the interview by letting the candidate know when they can expect to receive an update. Thank them for their time and make sure they have no outstanding questions.

In conclusion:

The convenience and flexibility of video interviewing have made it a popular choice for employers. I work for Engage People Recruitment, a specialist recruitment firm in Dublin, Ireland that connects clients and candidates in the Accountancy & Financial and Banking & International Financial Services sectors. Last year, we introduced a new video interviewing technology here at Engage People. This recruitment solution enables our clients to move through the hiring process quicker and results in them spending more time with individuals who are a better fit for their current requirements. The interviews are recorded and fully GDPR compliant. These interviews are then made available to the client for review and selection for the next round.

Many of my clients are now doing video interviews for the first round of the hiring process which wouldn't have been the case before Covid-19. Digital interviews have reduced their time to hire, making the hiring process more efficient. We envisage the art of digital interviewing being a key skill that is here to stay.

Sinead Canning,
Senior Accountancy Recruiter with Engage People.