Meeting with policymakers & MEPs hybrid and in-person

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Question

What’s your #1 challenge regarding meetings with MEPs?

Type in the chat box.

Engaging online with MEPs & policymakers

1. Before the meeting
2. During the meeting
3. After the meeting

10 Things to Remember When

WORKING WITH EU COMMISSION STAFF

1. COMPLIANCE

COM staff value and must respect compliance with regard to financial, ethical and other rules/guidelines. These are valued above everything else (which can greatly limit flexibility regarding your project, even if they personally would want to be flexible).

2. HIERARCHY

Be mindful of the multiple layers of hierarchy in the COM, which has a major impact on various aspects of your work:

a. **Approval:**
There are multiple steps and layers within the approval process by various managers / department heads, which will impact deadlines/feedback. Do not expect a 24-hour turnaround for issues involving significant budget implications, or internal political discussions, or project scope change.

b. **Chain of command:**
Circumventing a project manager and going straight to their head of unit, or director, may not go down well if an official feels they're sidelined, especially if you have a dispute or conflict with that person. Don't antagonize anyone unnecessarily.

c. **CC'ing:**
Think twice when to cc (or not) a manager/staffer, especially if your message is critical of someone or something.

3. UNEQUAL PARTNERSHIP

You're a service provider who's expected to follow the COM's instructions, even if your ideas/solutions are objectively better. Don't try to assert yourself above your client, but remain assertive in your communication.

4. LEGITIMACY

The COM is struggling with a legitimacy crisis among many EU citizens; it's trying hard to do '*the right thing*' and '*what's popular*', but these two often do not overlap. If you help them with this challenge, they'll be forever grateful (and award you more projects).

5. MOTIVATION

At the kick-off meeting, try to understand the core motivation of your COM account manager(s), and remember:
"You can get anything in life that you want, if you help others achieve what they want".

6. RISK AVERSION

COM staff place great emphasis on 'low risk solutions', ie creative marketing, event ideas or copywriting may get pushed back if they're considered too 'edgy' or may risk triggering a (social) media backlash, even if you are convinced they're excellent.

7. VISIBILITY

Most COM officials want more recognition and visibility, but when praising/thanking someone, you may wish to give credit to their superiors as well (to avoid jealousy by putting the staffer in an uncomfortable situation). On the other hand, COM officials need to get prior approval when their name appears on a publication outside the scope of their work.

8. TRANSPARENCY

Most of your emails and written communication, including meeting notes, will be recorded/archived, and may be disclosed to the public under a freedom of information request, so choose your words/comments/commitments carefully.

9.DIVERSITY

COM staff come from 28 countries (even after Brexit!), and their cultural background/diversity has a major impact on their values, communication style, deadlines, and expectations towards service providers like you.

10. MESSAGING

a. **Channel:** be mindful of the communication method or channel you choose, depending on the type of communication and the *desired outcome*:

- **For controversial issues:** phone calls or meetings are best (followed by a brief written memo to confirm what has been agreed)
- **For open-ended complex questions or brainstorming:** phone calls or meetings are best (with action items or minutes noted)
- **To share updates or exchange information:** email (with numbers/bullets) is best. Try to keep your email short, concise and to the point. You are more likely to receive a response in a more timely matter if they can read, review and address our requests quickly.

b. **Proactivity:** open-ended questions in an email may take a long time to get answered, so rather anticipate and insert A-B-C scenarios in your email so it's easy for the recipient to decide. No matter what problem arises, propose ideas/solutions to save them mental effort (and cut the time you need to wait for their response).

c. **Empathy:** anticipating objections or reservations, and addressing them upfront can go a long way in getting buy-in, instead of exchanging too many emails back-and-forth (e.g. "I understand you might disagree with this approach because it's too costly. On the other hand, it saves significant amounts in the mid-term already").

d. **Language:** ask, but don't demand ("I'd be grateful to receive" vs. "Can you please send me"). Whenever possible, say "thank you" instead of apologizing ("Thank you for your patience regarding my reply.")

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What are policy makers thinking?

- What is the problem and why is it a problem?
- Why should we [the government] act?
- **What should be achieved?**
- What are the various options to achieve the objectives?

What are policy makers thinking?

What are the [economic, social and environmental] impacts and who will be affected?

How do the different options compare to each other?

How will monitoring and evaluation happen?

Outreach emails to MEPs

Is this a good email…?
Why?

Subject: ECPA conference invitation

Dear MEP Smith,

I'm contacting you on behalf of ECPA regarding the upcoming 'The future of plant protection product approvals post-COVID-19' conference.

We'd like to invite you to address the topic of Why does the EU need to speed up novel technology approval procedures?".

I understand you'd need to discuss the invitation with your political group, but we'd very much need to receive a reply within a week.

The event will take place online, using Zoom, on 27 October. We very much hope you can accept our invitation.

Thank you in advance,
[name]

#1

Dear (German MEP),
I am contacting you on behalf of EuroCommerce to propose a short online meeting regarding the Digital Services Act file. As representatives of retailers and wholesalers in Europe, we are very keen to exchange views with you or one of your advisors and discuss our comments regarding the compromise amendments to the draft report.

To get a flavour of who we are, EuroCommerce is the EU association representing big and small retail, wholesale and other trading companies in all EU Member States. Our members are both companies such as Lidl, Carrefour, IKEA, Metro or Amazon as well as national associations and affiliated federations. Our German members are the associations BGA and Handelsverband Deutschland.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding your availability in the next two weeks and remain at your disposal should you need any further clarifications.
Kind regards,

THE BODY

- OPENING (DEAR, 1ST NAME ONLY, HI)
- APOLOGISE VS THANK THEM
- REFERENCE TO PREVIOUS EXCHANGE (IF ANY)
- WHEN ASKING A QUESTION
  (STANDALONE + QUESTION + SCOPE)
- HOW MANY HYPERLINKS?

THE BODY

- SHOULD YOU BOLD OR UNDERLINE?
- TITLES, BULLETS, NUMBERING, @
- CAREFUL WITH RELATIVE DATES (TOMORROW ETC.)
- SIGN-OFF AND SIGNATURE

7 THINGS - MEPs & policy-makers are thinking before a meeting

#1
Why care?
Is this topic relevant to my (political/personal) interests?

#2
Why me?
Was this sent to others too? Am I a key player on this topic? If not, why do they contact me?

#3
Context
is this the right time to discuss this? Isn't it too early/late in the process?

#4
WIIFM?
What's in it for me? Will I get new information/data/ perspective? Do I NEED to meet them?

#5
Cost of 'no'
If I decline the meeting, will it have any negative consequence? Will I look bad?

#6
Logistics & Optics
Timing, platform, pre-approval, Transparency Reg., Media

#7
Expectations
How will the meeting run? What will we discuss?

Clarify Beforehand

- Will the discussion be recorded?
- Who else will be joining?
- Can you share info about the meeting online (the meeting only, or content)?
- If online: will you use PPT, video, screen sharing or other?
- Will someone from your on-site team or subject matter expert join in?
- Have you trained them or did they rehearse beforehand?
- What are your key messages (max. 3)?
- What does a successful meeting look like? (focus on the outcome)

For Hybrid/Online

Have cabled internet (not wireless) + 4G in case the cabled fails

If multiple presenters, make sure everyone has all the slides
(so they can display / advance it from their end if needed)

If your internet fails, have the dial-in number ready

Consider pre-recording critical parts or speeches to use as a backup

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2. **During the meeting**
3. After the meeting

Look Good

Framing Your Video Shot

Headroom

Eye Height

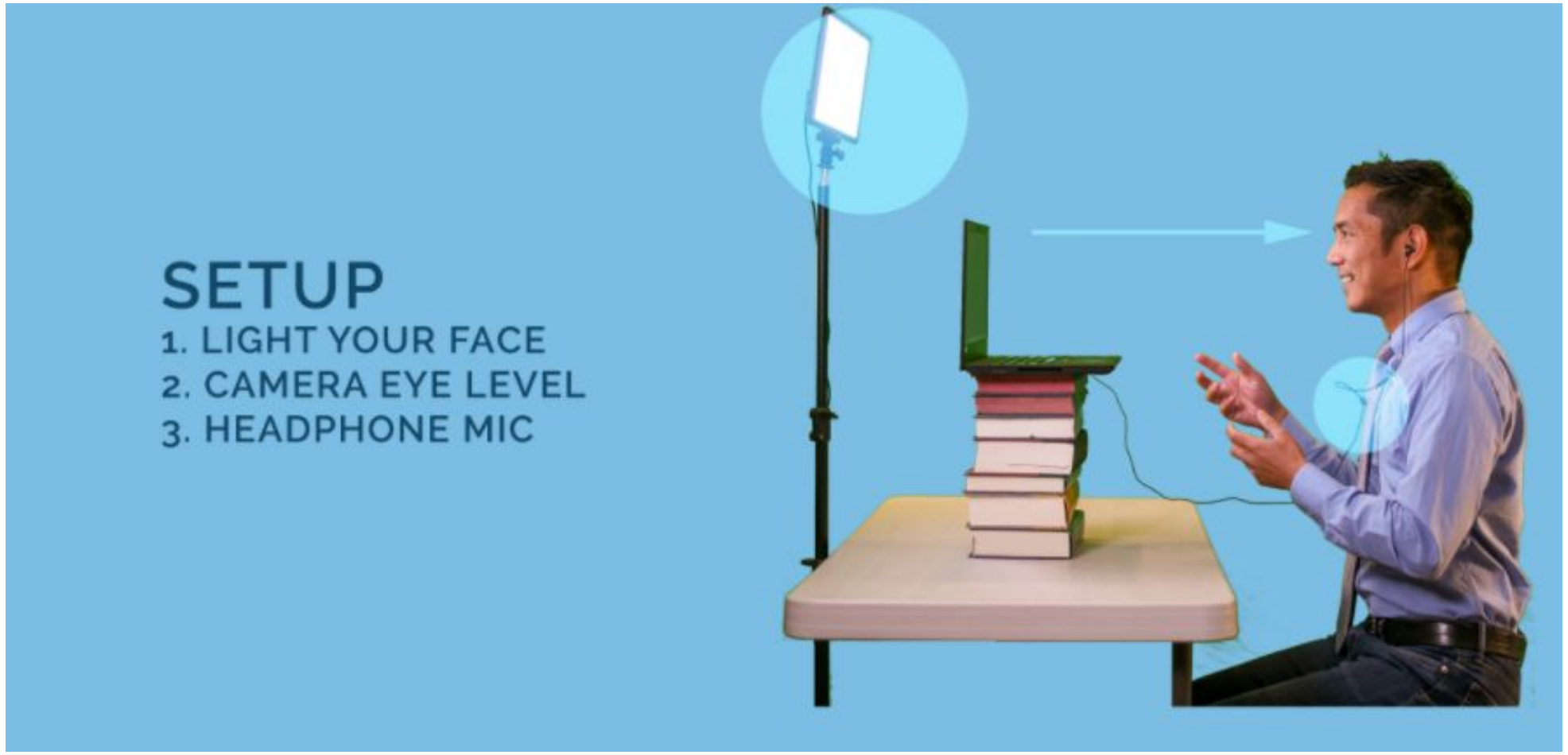
Angle

Distance (arms length)

Center vs. Rule of Thirds

Hands

Framing Your Video Shot



How do you make your hybrid meetings effective?

Type in the chat box or put your virtual hand up so we can unmute you.

How to keep the interest up

- Play with your voice
- Use pauses and breaks
- Make it a dialogue
- “Read the [virtual] room”
- Keep it shorter than you would in person
- Consider using co-presenters
- Use visuals

How to keep the interest up

Play with your voice

Make it a dialogue

SCAN ME

Keep it shorter than you would in person

Use visuals

Use pauses and breaks

“Read the [virtual] room”

Consider using co-presenters

Slides: What to do (and what not to do)

Make your slides *interesting*

Limited or no animation

- Split bullets into multiple slides

Minimal on-screen text (or annotate)

Send as pre-reading handout

On-screen and post-event versions

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You may consider…

- Send a follow-up “thank you” email (with extra data/background info)
- Informing them about your take-away from the meeting
- Sharing your social media message about the meeting (if pre-agreed)
- Sending them useful information about something they mentioned at the meeting

USE “CONTENT REPURPOSING”

If you have a recording, you may: (if agreed/approved)

- Have it transcribed and published
- Cut it into smaller chunks and post them on your website or social media
- Share notable quotes on Linkedin, Slideshare or Scribd
- Turn the audio into a podcast
- Write a memo about your take-away
- Create an infographic from the content

ANY FINAL QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

Connect with me:
linkedin.com/in/andras-baneth/