

Want to Create Engaging Screencasts?

Several months into the development of Camtasia Studio 7, the Customer Engagement Group set out to discover what makes a really good screencast – one that engages the viewer until the very end and leaves them wanting more.

So, we got several video-creators and video-watchers together in a room and conducted a focus group activity centered around this question:

What makes a screencast interesting, good, or engaging?

Here's how this activity worked:

1. Each person was given a black marker and a big stack of colored sticky notes.
2. We were asked to put our thoughts, ideas, shortcuts, and tips-n-tricks on paper – one item per note. There was no group discussion during this part of the activity. Nor were there any right/wrong answers.
3. Each note was read aloud by the creator and then stuck to a wall. This became a constant stream of people writing, reading, and pasting. This process ebbed and flowed with no formal rules.
4. After all of the thoughts and ideas were captured, it was time to sort the notes into similar groups or categories. Anyone who wanted to participate could do a sort and they could explain their decisions as they went along. Several people could work together to sort the notes.
5. The notes were sorted, resorted, and then sorted again as the categories were refined (the groups or categories had no names – they were only defined by notes being grouped together).
6. When the sorting and grouping was complete, the categories were given names by the focus group participants.



So... what did we learn? The results might surprise you!

The group discovered that the vast majority of “what” creates an engaging video happens **before** you ever click the *Record* button inside Camtasia Studio!

Things like:

- ▶ Setting clear goals for the video
- ▶ Speaking slowly
- ▶ Creating a script for the narrative
- ▶ Using a good microphone for better audio quality

The rest of the “what” had to do with understanding some of the guiding principles of screen recording and some basic editing tasks within Camtasia Studio.

We thought you would like to see each of the categories that the focus group came up with along with their thoughts, ideas, shortcuts, and tips-n-tricks for creating interesting, good, and engaging screencasts.

We hope that you find these as helpful as we did!

Be Prepared

1. **Know your audience.**
Will they be familiar with the terminology and concepts presented in the video? Do you need to make a separate introductory video?
2. **Are you motivating, teaching, or selling?**
Do one of these in your video and don't attempt to do a combination of two or three at one time. Create appropriate content to fit your selected category.
3. **Watch other videos to learn what makes them engaging, interesting, or bad.**
4. **Write a script - don't wing it.**
A good script contains the narrative and a description of what is happening on the screen during the narrative. Following a script helps eliminate unwanted um's and ah's in the audio.
5. **Create a storyboard of your video.**
A storyboard is a way to sketch your video. You should show where transitions, callouts, zooms, and other effects will go.
6. **Decide and plan what you will record ahead of time.**
What applications will you use? Do you need forms or fields filled out? Do you use graphics that should be created ahead of time?
7. **It will take you longer than you think.**
So, don't wait until the last minute to start your video project.

Brush Up on Your Public Speaking Skills

8. **Be familiar with your video topic.**
You should speak as though you are the expert on your subject.
9. **Speak slowly and clearly, and follow the script.**
Don't ramble on or feel like you have to speak constantly.
10. **Be yourself.**
Let your personality shine through – use a bit of humor if the situation fits.
11. **Talk naturally.**
12. **Practice saying your script out loud.**
13. **Listen to your recorded voice and become comfortable hearing yourself.**

Filmography

14. **Get familiar with the terminology and concepts of screen recording.**
Read up a bit on video dimensions, video file formats, screencasting, etc.
15. **Record big and produce small.**
Camtasia Recorder automatically records SmartFocus zoom keyframes. When you share to a smaller destination, like an iPod, zoom keyframes are automatically added to keep the action in your video focused.
16. **Tell a story.**
What are you recording and why is it important?
17. **Open with an introduction and close with a summary.**
Do an introduction of what you will be demonstrating and give a closing summary.
18. **Let the video do the talking.**
You don't need to talk about every detail or step. Instead, show the steps and talk about the importance of the process or workflow that you're demonstrating.
19. **Keep the video moving along.**
Don't linger in one place for too long. This can cause your viewers to lose interest.

Learn the Basics

20. **Watch the tutorial videos.**
[TechSmith's Learning Center](#) on the web is full of instructional videos to help get you going.
21. **Read the help file.**
You'll find tutorials and instructions for using all the Camtasia Studio features.
22. **Play with the sample projects.**
Download the sample projects from [TechSmith's Learning Center](#) on the web. The sample projects teach you how to use a feature while you perform the tasks on the timeline.
23. **Practice, practice, practice.**
It takes practice and time to learn the basics and to figure out what works best for you. Make sure you get some practice time in before your first project is due.
24. **Do several dry runs to test your script and timing.**
Make changes and adjustments as needed.
25. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes.**
Go ahead – jump in and get your feet wet, you'll learn as you go along. The unlimited **Undo** and **Redo** buttons on the timeline toolbar allow you to practice your editing skills or try out a new feature.
26. **Save your work frequently.**

Projects and Teamwork

27. **Get organized before you begin.**
 - Create a unique folder for each of your video projects. Then, as you build your project, put all of your recordings, project files, produced videos, and media files in that folder.
 - If you have media files that you want to use from project to project, import them into the Library – not the Clip Bin.
28. **Export your Camtasia Project (CAMPROJ) as a zip file.**
Media files seen in Camtasia Editor's Clip Bin are only there by reference. So, if you move the files from their original location, they will be missing in your video project. Exporting a Camtasia Project as a zip file creates a backup project with all the necessary media files copied into the Clip Bin and the Library. You can also share the zipped project with a team of collaborators or use the zip file to move your project to another computer.
29. **Add clips and other assets to the Library for collaboration.**
Media in the Library is meant to be used from project to project. It's the place to store assets that have team or corporate branding such as title clips, callouts, etc. Share the Library with others to be consistent from project to project.
30. **Create an early demo of the video and send it out for feedback from teammates or other stakeholders.**
The key here is to do this early on in the process so you have time to use the feedback to make changes to your script and storyboard. While this takes time, you'll end up with a better video in the end.

Get Great Audio

31. **Use the best microphone you can afford.**
Sound is critical to screen recording videos. Quite often, if the sound is bad, people will not watch the video.
32. **Use the Camtasia Recorder default settings for audio.**
This includes recording your system audio to a separate track (this option is not available for users of the XP Operating System).
33. **Do a test recording and make sure audio is being recorded.**
34. **Adjust the audio volume in Camtasia Editor.**
If your volume is too low or too loud, use the volume controls in Camtasia Editor to adjust the audio up or down. Add audio points to enhance certain areas of the waveform.
35. **Background music can add a nice touch if done correctly.**
If you have background music playing while you are recording narration with a microphone, the background music appears on a separate track within Camtasia Editor. Edit the background music to fit the narration using fade effects or volume adjustments.

36. **Record the audio and video separately.**
After you become familiar with using Camtasia Studio, try recording the screen without the audio. Within Camtasia Editor, do all of your video editing. When the video editing is complete, add the audio using the Voice Narration option. This is the preferred process for people who routinely create screen recordings.
37. **Stop and listen to the sound in your recording area.**
Record your screen with audio but don't speak. Then, listen to the recording. You'll be surprised how much noise is in a room. Is your chair squeaky or creaky? Is your phone ringer on? Is your keyboard loud when you type? Are there pets or kids in the background? Do you have a heating or cooling vent overhead that can be heard? Is your mic picking up the humming from your computer and other devices?
38. **Record in a quiet location.**
Try not to record your audio in a public location. Use an office or conference room away from high traffic areas. Place a note on the door letting others know that you are recording.
39. **Use features in Camtasia Editor's Audio tab to enhance the audio.**
Reduce noise, even out volume level, and eliminate white noise, um's, and ah's.

Recording the Screen

40. **Clean up a cluttered or busy desktop.**
It's best to record a desktop that has a plain background and is free from lots of desktop icons and gadgets
41. **Turn off all reminders and pop-ups.**
Turn off all meeting reminders, email notifications, and other pop-up screens.
42. **Look over your Internet browser window.**
Do you have unnecessary toolbars showing? If so, turn them off or hide them. Do your bookmarks and recent history reveal too much information about you?
43. **Open the applications you'll be recording and close the ones you won't.**
Some applications take time to get up and going and there's nothing worse than watching a video that records applications starting up. If it isn't critical to show how to launch an application, have all your applications ready to go and use <ALT + TAB> on the keyboard to cycle through the applications. Also, close all applications that you don't need such as emails, browser windows, etc.
44. **Resize windows and applications to fit recording area.**
Camtasia Recorder only records your primary monitor. So, make sure when you switch to an application it displays in your selected recording area.
45. **Record full screen using Camtasia Recorder's default settings.**
The default settings found in Recorder gives you a high resolution, master recording file that includes SmartFocus zoom and pan keyframes. These keyframes automatically optimize the viewing experience when producing to a smaller dimension such as iPod.
46. **Control your mouse movements by using slow movements across the screen.**
Eliminate jerking or circling with the mouse to bring attention to an area on the screen as this can be very distracting and irritating to viewers. Instead, use Camtasia Editor to enhance the cursor after you record. Add highlights, animation, and more.
47. **You don't need to start over if you make a mistake.**
If you make a mistake by clicking the wrong button or you stumble over a word – don't stop and start over. Just quit speaking for 3 - 5 seconds and then begin where you left off. Then, use Camtasia Editor to cut out the section where the mistake occurred. The silence on the timeline lets you know where the mistakes are.
48. **If you're showing text onscreen, make sure the font is readable.**
Use a font size that is larger than you think you'll need. This is especially true when recording a PowerPoint presentation.
49. **Make several short recordings instead of one long recording.**
If your video is longer than 5 minutes, break it up into separate videos.

The Use of Special Effects

50. Use effects sparingly.

Just because you can add lots of bells and whistles doesn't mean you should. A polished, professional video uses effects only when necessary to compliment or enhance the video.

51. Only use one kind of transition per video.

Using different transitions can be distracting to viewers. A transition that is well placed and rightly timed should not be noticed.

52. Use similar callout styles, colors, sizes, etc.

Using a lot of different callouts in various colors can be distracting to viewers and may cause your video to appear unprofessional.

53. Cut out long quiet moments where you type, fill out forms, or wait for applications to start up.

Instead, use a transition in Camtasia Editor to show the passage of time: Cut out the section where no action takes place leaving the beginning and end where the action happens. Then, make a split on the timeline between the beginning and end and insert a **Fade to Black** or **Cube rotate** transition.

Editing

54. Practice using the Getting Started sample video project in Camtasia Editor.

Camtasia Editor comes with a sample project. Use this to practice making basic edits like Cut, Copy, Paste, Split, Undo and Redo.

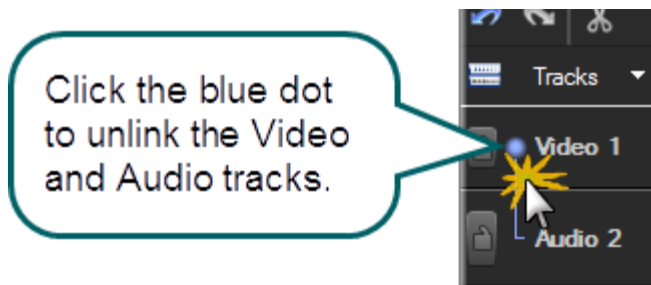
55. Learn how the playhead works.

The playhead is used to make selections on the timeline.

- ◆ Drag the **green In point** or **red Out point** to make a selection.
- ◆ Double-click the **gray** playhead to bring the points together again.

56. If you need to preserve the audio and cut the video, unlink the video and audio tracks.

If you need to make edits that involve cutting out portions of your video but you don't want to cut the audio, unlink the video and audio tracks. Then, lock the audio track. This way, you won't lose any of the narration when making the cuts.



57. Choose to edit with dimensions (called Editing Dimensions in Camtasia Editor) that correspond to the dimensions your viewers will see in the final video.

So, if your video will be shared on an iPod, choose the iPod dimensions for editing.

58. Make all your video edits then add the callouts, title clips, etc.

Share Your Video

59. You need to produce your video before you can share it.

When working on your video in Camtasia Editor, you are working in a video project (called a CAMPROJ). To create a shareable video, click the **Produce and Share** button at the top of the screen.

60. Watch your video from beginning to end before you share it.