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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

CAREERS | SEPTEMBER 12, 2011, 10:12 P.M. ET

Seeking Work? Ready Your Webcam

By [ASHLEY MILNE-TYTE](#)

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Looking for a job? You may need to brush up on your on-camera skills. In 2011, it's estimated a full 42% of first-round interviews will take place virtually over webcam. Francesca Donner explains why on Lunch Break

Companies from [Rio Tinto](#) to [Starwood Hotels](#) are using the video format to interview job candidates from entry-level to the top ranks. Two-way interviews take place in real time with both the candidate and interviewer present, while one-way interviews require candidates to respond to pre-set questions without a live person on the other side.

Video interviews cut down on costs and save time for companies, but they can also cause job candidates no end of uncomfortable moments.

Sean Beaver, recruitment manager for Kiewit Power, a services provider to the power industry in Lenexa, Kan., who uses one-way interviews to vet candidates for construction management

and engineering positions, has seen his share of hiccups caught on tape. In one interview, a cat jumped up and walked across the screen, says Mr. Beaver. In another, a candidate's wife appeared behind him with a laundry basket, asking who her husband was talking to.

Mr. Beaver says around 1% of candidates call him afterwards saying they found the video interview awkward. But he and many other talent managers contend that the one-way video format actually gives job seekers a chance to shine.

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Cody Horton, formerly Wal-Mart's director of college and diversity recruiting, explains: "I've found people who've grown up using webcams and Skype are very comfortable with this." He says as long as you explain the set-up ahead of time, candidates can excel.

This is good news for job seekers as video interviews become more prevalent.

The Aberdeen Group, a market research firm, found 10% of companies used video as part of the hiring process in 2010, but saw that number jump to 42% for senior executives, management and entry level job functions, in its 2011 talent acquisition survey, out last month.

While many employers conduct "real-time" live video interviews, others opt for one-way, recorded sessions

where software takes the place of the interviewer. Candidates click on a link and are guided through various screens, starting with a practice session. Each subsequent screen contains a different question, with about three minutes to answer each.

(The Aberdeen Group survey results show two-way interviews are a far more popular choice.)

In some cases the questions pop up as text, in others they are spoken by a hiring manager. The candidate responds into a webcam from home. (If the candidate doesn't own a webcam, the video interview vendor sends them one.) With some formats, the candidate gets one shot at the question. With others, they can play back their response and re-do it if they're not satisfied. Once complete, the interview can be viewed by multiple managers.

HireVue is a leader in the interview software space, with clients including Wal-Mart, Dow Jones and Nike. (Dow Jones owns The Wall Street Journal.)

Kevin Marasco, HireVue's chief marketing officer, says employers often prefer a one-way session for the first round of interviews, because it offers efficiency and consistency in the selection process as you "hear applicants answer the same questions back-to-back."

Indeed, candidates such as Robbie Davis, 23, actually prefer the format. Mr. Davis, first interviewed for a position with Giles & Ransome, a used machinery dealer, in a one-way interview designed by Async Interview.

Being able to do the interview at home, at any time within a two-week period, took some stress out of the equation, Mr. Davis explains. "Sometimes you're trying to make it to an interview on time, and you get stuck in traffic." After meeting in person, Mr. Davis landed the job.

Two-way interviews – which happen in real time over Skype or other services – can, despite the presence of a live interviewer, make it hard to feel connected since eye contact can be tricky. But they can still yield plenty of unexpected information.

Al Delattre, managing director of the global technology practice at executive search firm [Korn/Ferry International](#), recently interviewed a CEO candidate. As the man was speaking, Mr. Delattre spotted a woman dressed in a black maid's uniform dusting in the background. He peered into the screen and asked, "Who's that behind you over there?" It was an awkward moment, but it did not derail the interview.

"If he had yelled at her to leave the room immediately, I would have said, 'Thanks a lot, we'll be in touch,'" says Mr. Delattre. But the candidate kept his cool, politely asking the housekeeper to come back later. And he eventually landed the job.

Not so savvy was a candidate interviewing for a job with Splendid Communications, a boutique PR firm.

Perfect on paper and adored by clients, Splendid assumed that the candidate was in the bag. But when she answered an important question by apparently reading her answer from notes in the corner of her screen, it changed the firm's perception of her and she failed to get the job.

Still, goof-ups work both ways.

Joseph Pernaselli, who works in human resources for a large public accounting firm, says that managers sometimes forget they too are on camera: They might have a sloppy work space or they start checking email mid-interview.

Korn/Ferry's Mr. Delattre admits to having done something similar. He once muted a video interview to answer his cell phone, forgetting the candidate could still see him. "I apologized," he says.

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