

Online classes: a professor's perspective

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Jessie Brechin is the Marketing and Business Development Director at VeraContent, a company that helps brands reach multilingual, international audiences. She teaches Branded Content to students of the Bachelor in Communication and Digital Media.

In this blog post, she shares her insights—including the advantages and challenges—about teaching online, and where she sees **virtual classes** heading in the future.

How has IE University managed to work with the outbreak of coronavirus and the switch to online classes?

IE University was very proactive about the situation and has handled it well. Being a very tech-minded institution that already offers a lot of online courses has proven a massive advantage.

IE University was putting contingency plans in place and offering training sessions for **professors** long before most people had accepted that coronavirus was particularly serious. The training session I attended was a basic overview, as the technology was completely new to many faculty members. However, professors have been provided with a lot of content to help us with the transition and I've been able to take advantage of many different resources.



What do you think about the technological platform IE University is using for online classes?

For me the toughest week was when some students were in the physical classroom and others were in the digital classroom. That dynamic was very difficult to navigate, as online classes naturally go a bit more slowly. Now that we're fully online, I think there's a lot we can do with the platform.

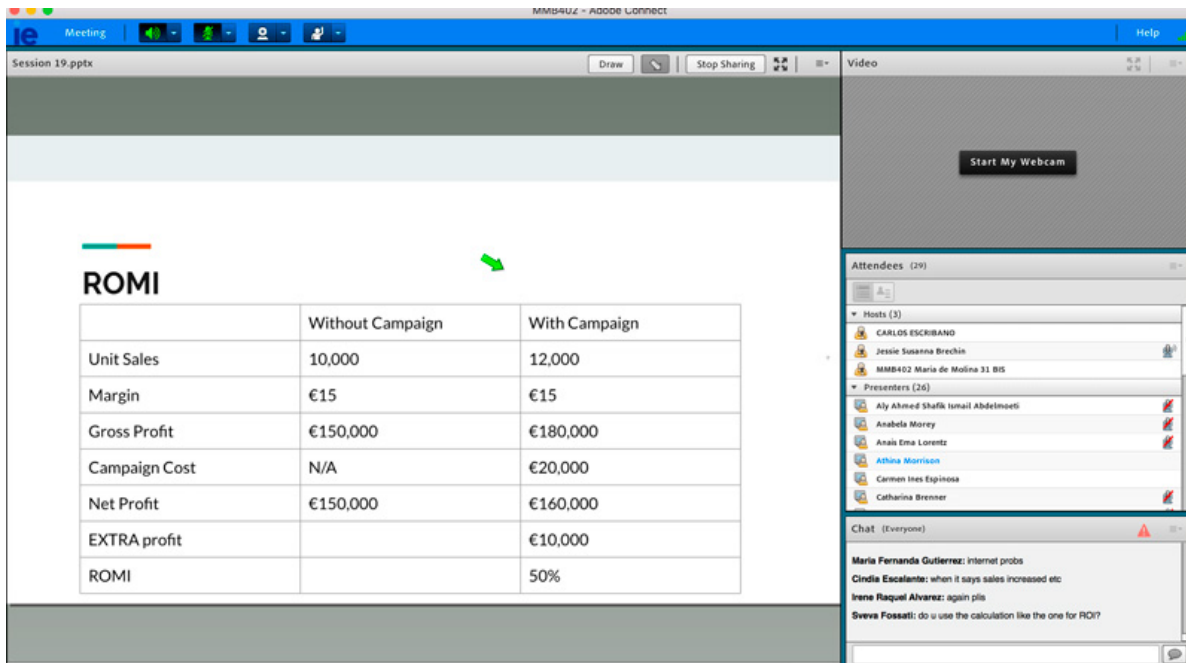
When I teach, I like to incorporate group work and give students the opportunity to put the concepts into practice during the class. In the physical classroom, I often split students into groups to work on a task and then hop between groups to facilitate before everyone comes back and presents their solutions.

If we didn't have the kind of breakout-session capability offered by **Adobe Connect**, I'm not sure how that would work, and I would certainly have had to change my teaching style even more. Coordinating between groups and managing the differing internet connections that people have is definitely tricky, but with every session, it gets smoother.

Do you feel that students are positively engaging with the online class format?

Yes and no. As someone used to teaching "live" in a room, it is difficult to know whether students are as engaged with the classes. When you're teaching and everyone else has their microphone off, it feels a little like speaking into a black hole. Thankfully my students have been great about participating in the chat and taking part when asked to. I think it was helpful to have had several weeks of class to build those relationships before moving to what might be considered a more impersonal format.

I think that the disconnect is something that many students feel as well. The temptation to log in and then walk away from the computer can be high for some, and that has a direct effect on the benefit they are able to get from the content.



The screenshot shows an Adobe Connect meeting interface. The main window displays a presentation slide titled "ROMI" with a table comparing performance "Without Campaign" and "With Campaign". A green arrow points to the "ROMI" row in the table. The right sidebar contains a "Video" section with a "Start My Webcam" button, an "Attendees (29)" list, a "Hosts (3)" list, a "Presenters (26)" list, and a "Chat (Everyone)" window with several messages.

	Without Campaign	With Campaign
Unit Sales	10,000	12,000
Margin	€15	€15
Gross Profit	€150,000	€180,000
Campaign Cost	N/A	€20,000
Net Profit	€150,000	€160,000
EXTRA profit		€10,000
ROMI		50%

On the other hand, students have noted that they feel some people participate more in **online classes** than they did in the physical classroom, so for those students I think it's actually a benefit. There is a certain security that comes from being behind a keyboard. Usually, we see the negative consequences of that in the form of trolls or online hate campaigns, so I've been pleasantly surprised to learn that it has an upside.

As with a lot of things, the level of positive engagement depends on how open people are to the current reality. Online classes are new and different for most of us, but if we consciously choose to positively engage with it, I know we can gain the same value from the experience as we would in a physical classroom.

What have you learned from this experience? Do you consider it important to foster online tools? Is the future heading to online platforms?

This has definitely been a steep learning curve. I've taught in many different circumstances over the years, from sports coaching to giving classes in a prison, but the online teaching dynamic is new to me.

In my work at **VeraContent** we have always placed an emphasis on flexibility and remote work, so video calls and online interactions are very natural to me in a work context. There's always more to learn, though. Like most of my students, I'm a digital native, so it hasn't necessarily been difficult for me to adapt to the technology, but the pace of classes and the elements you need to pay attention to are different. Initially, I wasn't excited by the change, but now I'm enjoying the challenge.



I strongly believe in the power and importance of technology. We can do great things with online education and perhaps this crisis will be the catalyst for that. Online tools and **EdTech**, in general, have the potential to exponentially increase access to education around the globe, and that's something to be excited about. I don't believe they'll necessarily replace in-person teaching and learning any time soon, but I hope we begin to fully embrace their value within the educational landscape.

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